



KRITI SEES BRIGHT SIDE
Actor Kriti Sanon speaks of the bright side of gloom in new video. 'What breaks people somewhere unites them, too'



N-DEAL TALKS
World powers hold 4th round of high-level talks aimed at bringing the US back into nuclear deal with Iran



INDIA SQUAD ANNOUNCED
Ravindra Jadeja, Hanuma Vihari return to India Test team as BCCI announces squad for WTC final, England series



IRREGULAR by MANJUL

SHORT TAKES

4-digit security code in CoWIN

New Delhi: The CoWIN system is introducing a new feature of four-digit security code from May 8 to minimise data entry errors about vaccination status that would subsequently reduce inconvenience caused to citizens, the health ministry said. It has been noticed in some instances that citizens who had booked their appointment for COVID-19 vaccination through the CoWIN portal but did not actually go for vaccination on the scheduled date have received SMS notification that a vaccine dose has been administered to them, it said.

6th grade girl shoots 3 in US

Boise: A sixth-grade girl brought a gun to her Idaho middle school, shot and wounded two students and a custodian and then was disarmed by a teacher Thursday, authorities said. The three victims were shot in their limbs and expected to survive, officials said at a news conference. Jefferson County Sheriff Steve Anderson says the girl pulled a handgun from her backpack and fired multiple rounds inside and outside Rigby Middle School in the small city of Rigby, about 95 miles (145 kilometers) southwest of Yellowstone National Park.

100 O₂ concentrators recovered in Delhi

New Delhi: Days after four men were nabbed for allegedly black-marketing oxygen concentrators, the Delhi Police Friday said they conducted raids at two upscale restaurants here and recovered 105 more such machines, used in the treatment of COVID patients. According to the police, 96 oxygen concentrators were recovered from Khan Chacha Restaurant and nine were seized from Town Hall restaurant, both situated in the Khan Market area. The recovery of over 100 oxygen concentrators comes after the arrest of four men -- Gaurav, Satish Sethi, Vikrant and Hitesh -- in Delhi Wednesday.

Don't make us go firm: SC to Centre

TOP COURT ASKS CENTRE TO KEEP SUPPLYING 700 MT OF OXYGEN TO DELHI EVERY DAY, WITHOUT FAIL

AGENCIES
New Delhi, May 7: The Supreme Court Friday made it clear to the Centre that it will have to keep supplying 700 MT of oxygen to Delhi every day till its order is modified, saying it meant "business" and non-compliance may force it to go "firm".
Two days ago, the top court had stayed the contempt proceedings initiated by Delhi High Court against central government officials for non-compliance of direction to supply 700 MT of oxygen for COVID patients to Delhi, saying "putting officers in jail" would not bring oxygen and efforts should be made to save lives.
A bench comprising Justices DY Chandrachud and MR Shah had said however that the Centre will have to ensure supply of 700 MT of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) to the national capital daily.
In the proceedings conducted via video conferencing, the bench Friday was told by senior advocate Rahul

Mehra, appearing for Delhi government that the national capital has received "86 MT today till 9 am and 16 MT is in transit".
"We want 700 MT to be supplied to Delhi on a daily basis. We mean business. Please don't force us to be in a situation where we have to be firm," the bench said, adding it cannot be that the supply is made for a day then so many caveats like "containers are not there" and there are difficulties in transportation are being put.
Justice Chandrachud, speaking for the bench, said that he has consulted Justice Shah on the issue before the hearing on Friday and the view that Delhi has to be given 700 MT LMO daily was a collective one.
"We want 700 (MT of LMO) to be supplied to Delhi and we mean business. It has to be supplied and we do not want to be coercive. Our order will take time to be uploaded by 3 pm but you proceed and arrange oxygen," the bench said.
Earlier, the top court had said that

SC REFUSES TO INTERFERE WITH THE KARNATAKA HC ORDER ASKING CENTRE TO INCREASE DAILY OXYGEN ALLOCATION TO STATE



this is an all-India pandemic situation and it will have to find ways to ensure oxygen supply to the national capital.

It will not leave Karnataka citizens in lurch as it refused to interfere with the Karnataka High Court order asking the Centre to increase the daily oxygen allocation for the state from 965 MT to 1200 MT for treating COVID-19 patients.
A bench of justices DY Chandrachud and MR Shah said the HC order of May 5 is a well calibrated, deliberated and judicious exercise of power.
It refused to accept the Centre's contention that if every high court starts passing orders for allocating oxygen, it would make the supply network of the country "unworkable".
The bench told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for Centre, that it has read the sequence of events and it can say that it is "well calibrated, deliberated and judicious exercise of power after taking into account the number of COVID-19 positive cases. We will not interfere with it".
The bench said it was looking at the wider issue and "we will not keep citizens of Karnataka in lurch".

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Fuel prices at record high after fourth straight hike

AGENCIES
New Delhi, May 7: Petrol and diesel prices in the country rose again sharply by 28 paise and 31 paise per litre respectively, Friday as oil marketing companies (OMCs) continued to cover for their losses on holding back price rise for past 18 days due to state elections. This is fourth increase in fuel prices in as many days. Across the country as well the petrol and diesel price increased Friday but its quantum varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states. Petrol prices in some states have breached the ₹100 per litre mark while premium petrol has been hovering above that level for some time now. With global crude prices at around \$69 a barrel mark, OMCs may have to revise fuel prices upwards again if there is any further firming up.

CITY FUEL PRICE	
PETROL:	₹92.02 (+0.29)
DIESEL:	₹89.09 (+0.34)

WhatsApp scraps May 15 deadline for privacy policy

AGENCIES
New Delhi, May 7: WhatsApp has scrapped its May 15 deadline for users to accept its controversial privacy policy update and said not accepting the terms will not lead to deletion of accounts.
WhatsApp had faced severe backlash over user concerns that data was being shared with parent company Facebook.
A WhatsApp spokesperson told PTI that no accounts will be deleted May 15 for not accepting the policy update.
"No accounts will be deleted May 15 because of this update and no one in India will lose functionality of WhatsApp either. We will follow up with reminders to people over the next several weeks," the spokesperson said in an emailed response to a query Friday.
The spokesperson added that while a "majority of users who have received the new terms of service have accepted them", some people have not had the chance to do so yet.

STATE SEES RECORD SURGE IN VIRUS CASES, 19 DEATHS

Test positivity rate at 24.09 pc

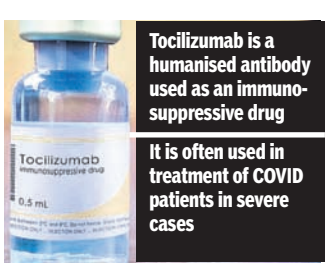


POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: Odisha Friday reported the highest ever single-day spike of 12,238 new COVID-19 cases, while 19 more people died in the state, a Health Department official said.
The new cases were found after testing 50,799 samples Thursday, which took the positivity rate to 24.09 per cent -- another grim record, the official said. There are 86,950 active cases in the state at present. Odisha has so far reported 5,12,400 COVID-19 cases, while the death toll stood at 2,140.
Of the new infections, 6,914 were reported from different quaran-

SOP for rational use of Tocilizumab

BHUBANESWAR: The state health department Friday issued new guidelines for the rational use of Tocilizumab injection in treatment of COVID patients.
Tocilizumab is a humanised antibody used as an immunosuppressive drug. This is often used in treatment of COVID patients in severe cases when the requirement of oxygen escalates and steroids also do not show any results.
The standard operating procedure (SOP) was issued by Additional Chief Secretary (Health) PK Mohapatra. In his letter to all Collectors, he said, "As such the availability of the drugs are limited. So the treating doctors should take due diligence in prescribing new drugs / off-label drugs."
Discussing the new SOP, he said, "It is observed that hospitals are submitting requisitions for provision of Tocilizumab for COVID patients at different hours of the day without adequate information on the patient's condition, investigation reports, indications, which is often making it difficult on the part of the Expert Committee to recommend its use and supply from the government source."
"So as a measure to rationalise the supply of Tocilizumab for appropriate use by needy patients and to avoid its stockpiling, the



Tocilizumab is a humanised antibody used as an immunosuppressive drug. It is often used in treatment of COVID patients in severe cases.

'Steroid in initial days can increase viral load'

BHUBANESWAR: Dr Jayant Panda, Medicine Specialist from SCB Medical College, in a state sponsored health bulletin programme Friday said intake of steroids in the initial days of COVID infection could lead to more viral load. He cautioned COVID patients never to take steroids without consultation of doctors. He said steroids are taken only if fever fails to subside in infected persons even after seven days and if there is heavy cough for more days. He also asked people to refrain from taking favipiravir drug without doctors' consultation. He said the drug should not be taken by patients having kidney and liver ailments.
hospital authority must submit their requisition for the patients along with the information in the prescribed pro forma addressed to MD, OSMCL," Mohapatra said.

BSE fixes modalities for awarding marks to matric students

POST NEWS NETWORK
Bhubaneswar, May 7: The Board of Secondary Education (BSE) has come up with modalities to award marks to matriculation students.
The High School Certificate (HSC), Madhyama and State Open School Certificate examinations which were scheduled to be held from May 3, this year, were cancelled due to rising cases of Covid-19 in the state and directions were issued to the Board to come up with an alternative method of assessment. In a notification issued Friday, the BSE said, "Such a situation has never arisen in the past and never ever has the Board prepared any alternative method of assessment to award marks."
The marks for School Regular (SR) and Quasi Regular (QR) students will be given based on their performances in half-yearly & annual examinations of Class IX and second, third and fourth practice tests of Class X. The Board will take into consideration the two highest marks in each subject from the three practice tests conducted in Class-X.
Moreover, the BSE has decided to analyse results of HSC examination of last four years (2017, 2018, 2019 & 2020) of the schools and basing on the best performance of the school in last four years, marks shall be allotted to each candidate in graded manner.
The result of School Ex-Regular (ER) and Correspondence Course Ex-Regular (CE) students will be decided basing on their performances of past exams. The candidates having no marks at all in any of the past examinations will have to appear in an offline exam when it will be held, the Board said. The regular students of State Open School Certificate Examination will have to appear for an offline test in coming days while the result of ex-regular students will be decided based on their past performances.
Madhyama Examination result will also be published analysing the performance of the students in Class IX and X exams while the same method like HSC ex-regular will be followed for the Madhyama ex-regular students.
The board has fixed different deadlines for submission and verification of the marks in prescribed formats. It has set June 30 target to publish the result of all exams.

US-Germany rift could scupper vax patent waiver

THE US-GERMANY RIFT, A BOON TO BIG PHARMA, EMERGES AS MORE THAN 3.2 MILLION PEOPLE HAVE DIED FROM COVID WORLDWIDE

AGENCIES
Berlin, May 7: A bold US bid to waive patents on much-needed coronavirus vaccines was strongly opposed by Germany Thursday, threatening to derail the proposal that requires the consensus of the World Trade Organization members to pass.
Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla meanwhile told AFP his company was "not at all" in favour of the measure, insisting intellectual property is not the main roadblock to more production and that building new plants would be counterproductive.
The problem was highlighted as India, one of the worst-hit countries, continued to register record Covid-19 cases and deaths.
WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hailed the announcement as "a monumental

moment in the fight against Covid-19."
European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who previously voiced reluctance on the issue, said Brussels was ready to discuss the proposal.
But Berlin's decision to come out strongly against the proposal has now left its fate unclear.
Bourla, whose company developed the first vaccine authorised in the West with Germany's BioNTech, told AFP that it wasn't possible for other facilities to develop vaccines based on mRNA technology.
The US-Germany rift, a boon to big pharmaceutical companies, emerges as more than 3.2 million people have died from the virus worldwide since the crisis began in late 2019. Share prices of vaccine manufacturers dropped after the EU and Russia followed the United



States in signaling they are open to the idea of patent waivers for coronavirus vaccines. Meanwhile, Switzerland Friday said it is looking at the new situa-

tion arising out of the US backing an initiative to temporarily waive patent rules for COVID vaccines.
"The US has changed its position within the WTO and we have a new situation. I am aware that the government is looking at the new situation and that means, we have to wait and see what the Swiss government will decide based on the new situation. The decision will be taken in Berne and we have to wait for that," Switzerland's Ambassador to India Ralf Heckner told PTI Friday.
He also noted that Switzerland has an independent voice and position within the WTO. Supporters of the waiver say that easing patent restrictions will spur production of low-cost generic vaccines, helping poor countries that are struggling to immunise their populations.
India has been leading the fight to allow more drugmakers to manufacture the vaccines, as it faces a surge that has seen patients die in streets outside hospitals due to bed and medical oxygen shortages.

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VAIATION
SENSEX	49206.47 ↑ 256.71
NIFTY	14823.20 ↑ 98.40
DOLLAR	74.01 ↓ ₹0.31
EURO	88.86 ↓ ₹0.02
GOLD	₹47,846 ↑ ₹251
SILVER	₹71,347 ↓ ₹334

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	39.5°C	37.0°C
MIN	27.0°C	26.0°C
Humidity	70%	81%
Rainfall	Trace	1.4mm

Forecast: Light rain very likely



HOST INSPIRED BY A PRANK: DIRECTOR ROB SAVAGE

Filmmaker Rob Savage says the idea of his new horror film *Host* came to him from a prank. Savage recalls how, while he was locked in at home due to the pandemic like the rest of the world, and everyone was catching up over video calls, the idea came to him to pull off a scary prank with his friends.

MARK WAHLBERG UPS FOOD INTAKE TO 7,000 CALORIES DAILY

Actor Mark Wahlberg's current food intake is over 7,000 calories daily, to gain weight for his role in the upcoming film *Stu*. According to his personal chef Lawrence Duran, the 49-year-old star is making a big commitment to his weight gain.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Today even if you are alone, you may not really feel lonely. You will desire to listen to your inner self, so that you can express yourself more imaginatively. Ganesh says spend the evening with your beloved who can listen to your voice in your silence also.

TAURUS
Today, you need to take hold of your emotions. Ganesh urges you to not get carried away by your feelings. Instead, you should try to maintain a practical, sensible frame of mind. Women are like to feature prominently in your life during the day.

GEMINI
You will think about the issues faced by other people as well as about increasing your social standing and elevating your social esteem. It is an extremely profitable day for those in the retail business and hence make the most of it, says Ganesh.

CANCER
There may not be many opportunities visible on the horizon today. And, chances are that you may end up getting embroiled in some complicated situations, without even a fault of yours. Relax! Given your people skills and lively spirits, you will be able to sail through.

LEO
You have to let go of your stubborn and obstinate streak. You will need to compromise according to the situation. If you do not have such an attitude, arguments and confrontations with your business partners, friends and family members are possible.

VIRGO
The artist in you will set the floor ablaze today. You have the remarkable abilities of a showman and comedian, and people will feel thrilled at your treasure of jokes in the evening, says Ganesh. However, you will do well to conserve some energy for other urgent matters and duties as well.

LIBRA
Ganesh says you will be able to show your love and appreciation for your beloved. Small issues will crop up and keep you tensed and uncomfortable today. Just remember good days and old memories and life will seem good again.

SCORPIO
You will see every colour of the kaleidoscope today — people with different temperaments and different attitudes, many of whom will surprise you with their reactions. You may be shocked at the way your colleagues or close friends react to your strategies or success.

SAGITTARIUS
You may have been experiencing hair loss in the past due to back-breaking stress, but things will begin to clean up today. As complex issues begin to fall in place, you are likely to receive some good news about a promotion or increment.

CAPRICORN
You will be overpowered with nostalgia and may long to get in touch with old pals. And as Ganesh says, chances are that you may take a liking to your ex-lover, while simultaneously strengthening your social standing. All in all, the day will be a productive one.

AQUARIUS
You may huff and puff, but today is not the day when you'll finish what you started. Don't lose heart, the future is promising. Take a break, says Ganesh, you've worked enough. The results are on the way.

PISCES
Needless rigidity only serves to imprison you within outmoded walls of faulty reasoning. Inculcating some flexibility will give you some much-needed wriggle room to manoeuvre things your way for good, says Ganesh.

Raveena donates oxygen cylinders

Mumbai: Among the celebs, who have stepped up to help amid the pandemic is Raveena Tandon. The actress has donated oxygen cylinders and is urging others to help in any way they can. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to rage across the country, a number of stars have donated time and resources to those in dire need. Raveena shared a picture on Instagram recently and revealed that she had tied up with a foundation to donate oxygen cylinders that are currently in short supply.

Other celebrities who have lent a helping hand amid the pandemic include Bhumi Pednekar, Sonu Sood, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Alia Bhatt, Katrina Kaif and Sushmita Sen among others.

In a recent interview, Raveena revealed that she never gave importance to trolls and simply removes them from her life. The actress believes in staying positive no matter what the circumstances. She also said that she likes to surround herself with positive people.

On the work front, Raveena shot for an online project last year and spent a couple of months shooting in Himachal Pradesh.

'What breaks us, unites us somewhere'

Mumbai: Kriti Sanon has spoken of the bright side of gloom in a new video. She says what breaks people somewhere unites them, too.

Kriti posted the video on Instagram, observing how people were going beyond their capacity to help those in need.

"What breaks us somewhere unites us. Today when I look around it doesn't matter what your caste is or religion is, profession is, rich or poor; which state are you from — nothing matters. At the end of it we are all just human beings who can feel and recognise each other's pain," she says in the video.

"We feel terrible when someone is in need and we are trying our best to spread the word and get that person help. We are total strangers to each other. We are donating, we are trying to figure a way to end each other's suffering and pain. Just a thought," she adds.

Kriti captioned the image: "I try and see a silver lining in everything, a ray of light in the dark, good in the bad. Ya.. I am that person.. *Main aur meri tanhaiy aksar baatein kiya karte hain..* Just felt like sharing my today's bedtime thought.. Thank you for being my 'Dear Diary' for the night.. hisTogether.."

The actress has just wrapped up shooting for the upcoming film *Bhediya*.

AGENCIES



Virushka donates ₹2 crore for COVID relief

Mumbai: Celebrity couple Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli have started a fundraiser campaign to help people deal with the Covid crises at hand.

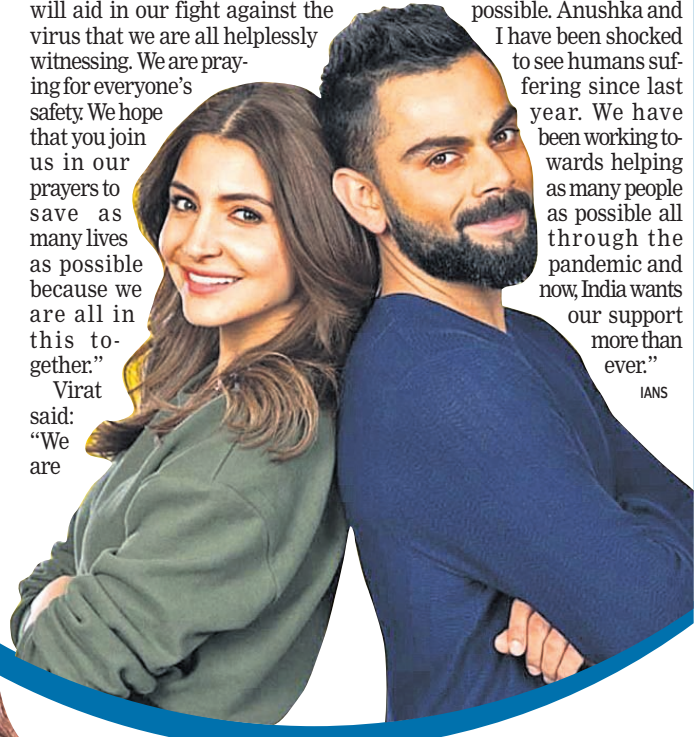
The couple has collaborated with crowd-funding platform Ketto for the campaign #InThisTogether and has donated Rs 2 crore for this initiative. They aim to raise 7 crore for Covid relief in India.

Talking about the same, Anushka said: "India is going through an extremely difficult time and the second wave of the deadly Covid-19 pandemic has pushed our country to a state of crisis. It is time for all of us to come together and do our bit for our fellow countrymen who are in serious need of support."

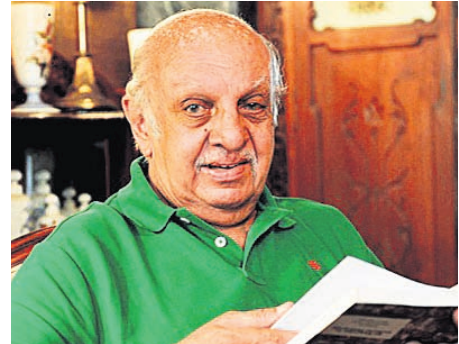
"Virat and I have been hugely pained looking at the inexplicable suffering that people are going through and we hope that this fund will aid in our fight against the virus that we are all helplessly witnessing. We are praying for everyone's safety. We hope that you join us in our prayers to save as many lives as possible because we are all in this together."

Virat said: "We are

going through an unprecedented time in the history of our country and our nation needs all of us to unite and save as many people as possible. Anushka and I have been shocked to see humans suffering since last year. We have been working towards helping as many people as possible all through the pandemic and now, India wants our support more than ever."



Composer Vanraj Bhatia passes away



Mumbai: Music director Vanraj Bhatia passed away at his residence in the city Friday. He was 93.

Bhatia rose to fame scoring music in an array of arthouse and middle-of-the-road films in the seventies and eighties, such as *Ankur*, *Manthan*, *Bhumika*, *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*, *Mohan Joshi Haazir Ho!* and *36 Chowringhee Lane*, as well as TV shows *Wagle Ki Duniya* and *Banegi Apni Baat*. He was reportedly bedridden due to age-related issues. He had not been well for a while now.

The composer won the National Award for his music in Govind Nihalani's acclaimed *Tamas* in 1988 and was a recipient of the Padma Shri in 2012.

FUN post

PEANUTS



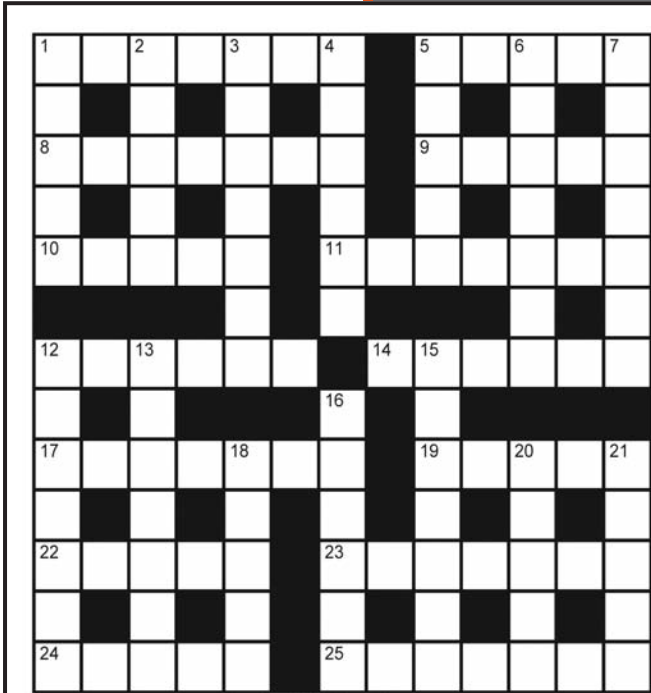
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



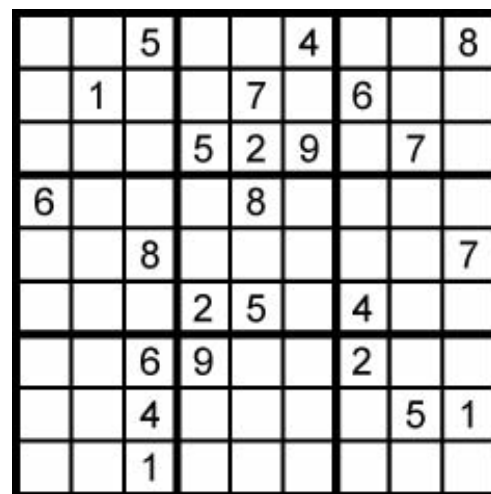
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Horrible
 - 5 Scrooge, for one
 - 8 Daydream
 - 9 Whimsical
 - 10 Latin dance
 - 11 Catch-22
 - 12 Ointments
 - 14 Blue blood
 - 17 Full
 - 19 Edge tools
 - 22 Zoo members
 - 23 Finger protector
 - 24 Rope fiber
 - 25 Beryl variety
- Down**
- 1 Wise guys
 - 2 Blacksmith's block
 - 3 Garden seating area
 - 4 Knuckles under
 - 5 Award
 - 6 Winter yard decoration
 - 7 Set free
 - 12 Extra amount
 - 13 Some computers
 - 15 Understand
 - 16 Water heater
 - 18 Canvas support
 - 20 African grazer
 - 21 Knight's need

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS



CROSSWORD

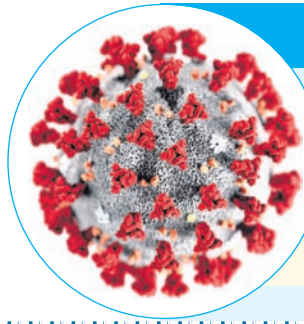
SUDOKU

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



TREE IS LIFE

Workers plant saplings on the median of Janpath in Bhubaneswar, Friday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	15,70,17,740	13,43,56,978	32,74,247
India	2,14,91,598	1,76,12,351	2,34,083
Odisha	5,12,400	4,31,658	2,140

State sets ₹9K-cr crop loan target

Collectors were asked to ensure smooth credit flow to eligible farmers including sharecroppers

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: In an aim to ensure smooth operation of agricultural activities during Covid-19 pandemic, the state government has set a target to disburse ₹9,000 crore crop loans during 2021-22 kharif season.

Cooperation secretary Vir Vikram Yadav has recently written letters to all district Collectors to this effect. The state government has been providing ₹50,000 agriculture loan to farmers at zero interest rate and upto ₹3 lakh loan at 2 per cent interest. Crop loans to the tune of ₹8,320 crore were disbursed among 18.73 lakh farmers during last year.

The Collectors were asked to ensure smooth credit flow to the needy and eligible farmers including sharecroppers. The loan would be disbursed through cooperative institutions.

"The unprecedented situation arising out of the pandemic has posed challenges like maintaining the food supply chain and management of reverse migration of labourers to the rural areas of our state. Such a situation warrants enhancement of agricultural production and productivity as well as increase in the area under cul-



PLAN FOR KHARIF 2021-22

▶The state government has been providing ₹50,000 agriculture loan to farmers at zero interest rate and upto ₹3 lakh loan at 2 per cent interest

▶Crop loans to the tune of ₹8,320 crore were disbursed among 18.73 lakh farmers during last year

▶The district Collectors were asked to obtain valid Aadhaar numbers of the beneficiary farmers so as to ensure that genuine farmers have access to the subsidised crop loans

tivation in the state, so as to provide adequate food and livelihood," Yadav said in his letter to the Collectors.

As crop loans sanctioned to farmers have a large interest subvention component which is provided by the Centre and the state government, the Collectors were asked to obtain valid Aadhaar numbers of the beneficiary farmers so as to ensure that genuine farmers have access to the subsidised crop loans.

The secretary asked to transfer the crop loans directly to the savings bank accounts of the farmers.

He said small and marginal farmers, migrants, joint liability groups and women self-help groups should be given priority. Proper planning

had been made to provide short-term credit to fisheries, animal husbandry, dairy and poultry sectors, he added.

"Any disbursement of loan in deviation of these instructions will be considered illegal and the loan sanctioning authorities shall be responsible for such illegal disbursement," he said.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Minister Arun Kumar Sahoo has directed officials to ensure availability of adequate seeds and fertilizers for the farmers in the state.

Sahoo recently chaired a high-level meeting to review the preparedness for beginning of agricultural operation in the state. Since

the state government has allowed all kinds of agriculture and allied activities during the current lockdown period, Sahoo asked field-level officers to extend all cooperation to the farmers. He also directed to prepare a database of the farmers to extend all government-sponsored benefits to them.

Kharif agricultural activities in Odisha generally start from Akshay Trutiya which falls May 14 this year. As 90 per cent farmers in Odisha take up paddy cultivation, the field-level officials have been directed to encourage the farmers for crop diversification and take up cultivation of other cash crops for better income generation.

A TALE OF TWO MARKETS



Ignoring social distancing norms, people in large numbers throng Unit-I vegetable market in Bhubaneswar to buy kitchen essentials ahead of the weekend shutdown, Friday. (Bottom) A playground at Chauhiaganj in Cuttack being used as a temporary vegetable market to check overcrowding and ensure social distancing

Naveen exempts rent of Odisha Bhawan in Mumbai

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: In a goodwill gesture, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Friday directed to exempt the rent of Odisha Bhawan at Navi Mumbai, which was being used by the civic body as a quarantine centre for doctors and health workers.

Since April 2020, the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) has been using the Odisha Bhawan as a quarantine centre for doctors and health workers engaged in Covid-19 duty.

"While the rent for using the Odisha Bhawan sums up to ₹2 crore and 16 thousand, the Chief Minister, showing humanity and goodwill towards the people of Mumbai in the face of this pan-

Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation has been using Odisha Bhawan as a quarantine centre for doctors and health workers

demic, ordered a complete waiver of the amount," the CMO said in a statement.

The state has been supplying medical oxygen to Maharashtra for the past 15 days on an urgent basis for the treatment of Covid patients. So far, 19 tankers carrying over 314 MT of liquid medical oxygen has been sent from Odisha to Maharashtra.

Raise frequency of refilling O2 cylinders: H&FW dept

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department has directed the district Collectors, municipal corporation heads, CDMOs and others to increase the frequency of refilling oxygen cylinders.

Additional Chief Secretary of H&FW department PK Mohapatra said that the requirement of oxygen for treatment of Covid-19 patients is increasing by the day as the positive cases are rising.

Although adequate arrangements have been made in all the districts for oxygen cylinders and every health institution in the districts has been tagged to one or more cylinder refilling centre, it is necessary to augment the frequency

and number of vehicles being sent for refilling oxygen cylinders in order to maintain continuity in supply. In continuation with the existing standard operating procedure (SOP) and necessary guidelines already communicated to all, some more arrangements are being made.

The number of vehicles engaged in transportation of cylinders to and from the refilling centres must be suitably increased, said the new guidelines. Further, all these vehicles must be fitted with GPS tracking system.

The number of times vehicles carrying empty cylinders and sent to refilling centres must be substantially increased so as to ensure empty cylinders are not stranded at any health institutions.

NHAI urged to waive toll on oxygen tankers

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: In order to ensure uninterrupted movement of medical oxygen carrying tankers, the state government has urged the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) for exemption of toll fees and permission for free and immediate passage of the carriers at the toll plazas.

Since many states are facing acute shortage of medical oxygen for treatment of critical Covid-19 patients, Odisha is sending out liquid medical oxygen (LMO) to the needy states every day through trucks and tankers. For free passage of LMO tankers, the police are also escorting the vehicles from plants to the Odisha border. However, the carriers are made to halt at toll gates for depositing fees, sources said.

Therefore, the state government has urged NHAI to exempt toll tax and permission for free immediate passage of the vehicles carrying medical oxygen in tankers or cylinders at toll plazas at par with ambulances.

7K tonne LMO sent to 10 states

Odisha has sent at least 383 tankers containing 7,007 tonne LMO to 10 states till Friday.

The state has been sending LMO tankers to Andhra Pradesh (113 tankers), Telangana (105), Haryana (48), Madhya Pradesh (37), Uttar Pradesh (30) Maharashtra (19), Chhattisgarh (17), Tamil Nadu (9), Delhi (4) and Punjab (1) as these states are grappling with acute shortage of the life-saving gas.



Since many states are grappling with acute shortage of medical oxygen for treatment of critical Covid-19 patients, Odisha is sending out LMO to the needy states every day through trucks and tankers

For free passage of LMO tankers, the police are also escorting the vehicles from plants to the Odisha border

However, the carriers are made to halt at toll gates for depositing fees

Works department additional secretary Hemanta Kumar Dutta has written a letter to the chief general manager (technical),

NHAI, Odisha, Friday.

"Take necessary action for exemption of charges at the toll gates under NHAI in the state to facilitate smooth transportation of the vehicles carrying medical oxygen in tankers or cylinders to the treating hospitals/ Covid Care Centres (CCCs) in view of the Covid pandemic," Dutta said in his letter.

In an aim to ensure free and smooth supply of LMO, the state government has already imposed Odisha Essential Services (Maintenance) Act, 1988 prohibiting strikes by the service providers. The Home department has recently issued an order to this effect that will remain in force for a period of six months.

City goes Mumbai way as drive-in vax prog begins

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: With a view to reducing rush at vaccination centres across the City here, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Friday launched the first drive-in vaccination programme at Esplanade Mall here for people eligible for the second dose.

Emulating the Mumbai model, the drive-in vaccination facility has been made available for 45-plus age group. The vaccination will be carried out at the exit point of the mall's parking lot. Booking of the slots for the drive-in vaccination programme began at 5pm Friday. While 400 slots have been made available for May 8, around 500 slots would be available from May 10 to 15 on a daily basis, sources said.

"Eligible citizens will have to drive into the parking lot of Esplanade Mall as per the slots booked by them. They are advised to wait inside the vehicles till their turn. The citizens should not come out of their vehicles immediately after reaching the facility. The vaccination will be carried out at the exit point. After the inoculation, one can drive out and wait outside the parking lot for 30 minutes for observation," said BMC Commissioner Prem Chandra Chaudhary.

He also said that no vehicle will be allowed inside the parking lot for vaccination without slot booking. The beneficiaries are also requested to bring their Aadhaar cards and verification slips of the first dose, he added.



BMC INITIATIVE

- ▶ Emulating the Mumbai model, the drive-in vaccination facility has been made available for 45-plus age group
- ▶ Booking of the slots for the drive-in vaccination programme began at 5pm Friday
- ▶ While 400 slots have been made available for May 8, around 500 slots would be available from May 10 to 15 on a daily basis

The civic body also stated that only two people would be allowed into the vaccination facility in case of four-wheelers while one would be allowed for two-wheelers.

"Pillion riding is strictly prohibited as it compromises the social distancing norms. Those choosing to come by car are instructed to come with their drivers or anyone who would ferry them from home to centre and vice versa. This vaccination centre has been launched on a pilot basis and we are planning to open similar centres after analysing the efficacy of the Esplanade drive-in programme," Chaudhary added. The vaccine would be provided for free.

NOBLE DEED



Social activists relocate destitute people from Rasulgargh Square in Bhubaneswar to shelter houses, Friday, in adherence to Covid-19 safety protocols

ULBs told to feed stray animals during lockdown

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: The state government, Friday, directed all the urban local bodies (ULBs) to make provision of food for stray animals in view of the hardship faced by street dogs and animals during the 14-day lockdown.

In a letter issued to all the ULBs, the Housing and Urban Development (H&UD) department has asked all the municipal commissioners of corporations, executive officers of municipalities to ensure implementation of the directive with immediate effect. The authorities have been asked to meet the expenditure out of the funds available with them from various sources including own revenue sources or from Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) or Chief Minister's Relief



Civics employees feed stray cattle at Laxmisagar in Bhubaneswar, Friday

Fund (CMRF) sources. "Due to resurgence of Covid-19 which has resulted in lockdown in state from May 5 to May 19, thousands of stray animals will have a hard time for finding food leading

to starvation and other consequential issues. Therefore, it has been decided to make necessary provision of food for such animals during the lockdown," the letter read. As per the details of the admissibility of the

expenditure, the government has fixed ₹20,000 as per day cost for the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation and ₹10,000 each for the four municipal corporations of Rourkela, Sambalpur, Cuttack and Berhampur. Similarly, the government has allowed all the municipalities to spend ₹5,000 unit cost per day while Notified Area Councils (NACs) can spend ₹2,000 per day.

The letter also mentioned that the ULBs may co-opt or partner with voluntary organisations for animal welfare. In case of non-availability of such organisations, ULBs can proceed with the welfare work with in-house resources or Mission Shakti Groups or federations. The authorities have also been asked to involve local level officers of the Fisheries and Animal Resources department.

Fake nCoV testing centre sealed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, May 7: An unauthorised Covid-19 testing centre-laboratory was sealed in Puri district Friday and a laboratory technician was arrested for allegedly running the fake unit, police said.

Some rapid antigen test (RAT) kits were seized from the laboratory in Kakatpur area following the arrest of the accused, Prakash Dash, 36, who did his diploma in lab management, a police officer said. The technician used to provide fake Covid-19 negative certificates to people who wanted to visit other places, he said.

Some rapid antigen test kits were seized from the laboratory in Kakatpur area following the arrest of the accused

The incident came to light after a government doctor at a community health centre (CHC) complained to the police that several Covid-19 test reports bore his name as the consultant without his consent. "The doctor suspected the reports to be forged and immediately alerted police," SP (Puri) Kanwar Vishal Singh told reporters Friday.

The police found that the laboratory technician was cheating people by forging prescriptions, the SP said. Another person working at the centre has been detained for questioning, police said.

The involvement of others in the racket and the source of the RAT kits are being investigated, said the Puri SP.

Eminent pala singer Balabhadra Panda passes away

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: Eminent pala artiste Balabhadra Panda, 75, breathed his last at his daughter's residence at Gandarpur on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar Thursday night, family sources said. His last rites were performed at his native village Surangpalli near Pipli in Puri district with strict adherence to Covid guidelines, sources added.

Panda had been decorated with 'Bhagawat Bhusan' title for his remarkable performance as a pala singer. Office bearers of Sri Neelachal Nikhila Utkal Pala Gayak Parishad, an outfit of pala singers, condoled the death of Panda. Several popular pala artistes including Laxmidhar Rout, Prahlad Sahu, Surendranath Chhotray, Chakradhar Barik and Madan Mohan Jena have expressed their grief over Panda's demise.

According to them, Panda was a trend setter and he was instrumental in introducing spiritualism and social messages in pala, a unique form of balladry in Odisha. He also played a key role to popularise Pala among intellectuals, they said.

Sudhir Sahoo posted as Mancheswar IIC

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: In a minor reshuffle, senior police officer Sudhir Kumar Sahoo has been appointed as the new inspector in-charge (IIC) of Mancheswar police station.

The post has been lying vacant for the last couple of months after former IIC Jitendra Kumar Sethi's removal following departmental proceedings against him over some allegations of misconduct in 2020. Sahoo, who was earlier the IIC of traffic police station at Puri, formally took the charge Friday.

Meanwhile, the IIC posts at several other police stations in the city including that of the Infocity are lying vacant.

12,238 new cases take Covid tally to 5,12,400

PNN/AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, May 7: Odisha Friday reported the highest ever single-day spike of 12,238 cases of Covid-19, while the disease claimed 19 more lives in the coastal state, also the highest in a day so far, a senior Health department official said.

The new cases were found after testing 50,799 samples Thursday, which took the positivity rate to 24.09 per cent, another grim record, the official said.

Odisha has so far reported 5,12,400 Covid-19 cases, while the death toll touched 2,140. At present, there are 78,549 active cases in the state.

Of the fresh infections, 6,914 were reported from different quarantine centres and the remaining 5,324 were local cases, said the official.

Sundargarh district reported the highest 2,073 new positive cases, followed by Khurda (1,828), Cuttack (916), Kalahandi (580), Sambalpur (544), Angul (480) and Bargarh (475). Only four of the state's 30 districts reported new cases in double digits. Sundargarh and Khurda accounted for 32 per cent of the new cases.

Of the 19 fresh fatalities, four each were reported from Khurda and Sundargarh districts, while Ganjam and Puri reported two casualties each. One patient each died in Angul, Bolangir, Cuttack, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, Gajapati and Kalahandi.

So far, 4,31,658 patients have recovered in the state.

Meanwhile, Director General of Police (DGP) Abhay said that due to the lockdown and shutdown imposed by the state government, the Odisha Police has come up with a



Naveen lauds healthcare workers

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Friday appreciated the efforts of healthcare workers in effectively administering Covid-19 vaccines and ensuring zero wastage.

Taking to Twitter, Patnaik said that the number of people vaccinated is more than that of the doses allocated by the Centre as the extra dose in each vial has been used prudently.

Patnaik wrote, "#Odisha has vaccinated more people than the number of doses allocated by GoI,

by prudently using the extra dose available in each vial as wastage. Appreciate the healthcare professionals & nurses for their efficiency in administering vaccine to save precious lives (sic)."

As on May 6, the number of doses for the population of above 45 years allocated by the Centre to Odisha was 61,44,140. The total doses administered were higher than the allocated doses with wastage of -2.20%, the Chief Minister pointed out.

new initiative of a telephone-based grievance redressal system.

He said that under the new initiative, people would not visit the police station or the SP office to lodge a complaint. Instead, the police would come to their doorstep to collect the same and take suitable action thereon.

NHRC seeks ATR from Cuttack SP on minor's rape

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has directed the Cuttack Superintendent of Police (SP) to submit an action-taken report (ATR) in connection with the alleged sexual abuse of a minor girl.

The SP has been instructed to submit the ATR within six weeks of the receipt of the order of the apex rights panel. The NHRC gave the direction while hearing a complaint filed by activist Himanshu Sekhar Nayak on the basis of a news report published in Odia daily Dharitri.

According to the report, the family members of a high school student lodged a complaint with Mahanga police alleging that a distance relative of the victim who used to visit their house had sexually abused the girl repeatedly for over a month in Mahanga area of Cuttack.

However, the local police did not register a case nor did it take any action on their complaint.

The elder sister of the girl has recently warned of committing suicide near the police station over the alleged apathy of Mahanga police.



Family members of a schoolgirl lodged a complaint with Mahanga police alleging that a distant relative had raped the minor repeatedly

Pradhan flags off 100-bed ICU facility in Bargarh



POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, May 7: Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Dharmendra Pradhan Friday inaugurated a 100-bed ICU ventilator facility at Vikash Multi-Specialty Hospital in Bargarh district on virtual mode for treatment of critical Covid-19 patients.

The Union minister said, "The facility has been augmented by Indian Oil Corporation Limited in association with Dasari Veer Raju and Gunnam Ram Chandra Rao Memorial Trust at a total cost of Rs 11.5 crore."

"Under this project, 70 ICU ventilators, 50 monitors and 200 syringe pumps are being provided by Indian Oil for establishing the facility aimed at treating critical Covid-19 patients in Western Odisha," Pradhan said. Notably, 30 ICU beds were already installed at the hospital but were awaiting upgradation.

The minister thanked IOCL for providing ICU ventilator facilities for Covid-19 patients in Vikash Multi-Specialty Hospital at Bargarh. He said these ICU beds will definitely be very helpful for patients. "Corporate sector is working earnestly to meet the nation's liq-

uid medical oxygen requirements in this hour of need. PSUs of Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas are stepping up efforts to serve the national priority of providing such medical equipment and facilities to increase testing, ventilators, availability of oxygen, beds with ICU facility. I

am happy to know that Bargarh district has been included in vaccination process by the help of corporate bodies," Pradhan said.

As the second wave of Covid-19 sweeps through the country, Pradhan said that western Odisha too is entering the explosive phase

with ICU facility. I am happy to know that Bargarh district has been included in vaccination process by the help of corporate bodies," Pradhan said.

As the second wave of Covid-19 sweeps through the country, Pradhan said that western Odisha too is entering the explosive phase with ICU facility. I am happy to know that Bargarh district has been included in vaccination process by the help of corporate bodies," Pradhan said.

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Thunderstorm to continue for another 3 days: IMD

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: India Meteorological Department (IMD) Friday said light to moderate rain with thunderstorm and lightning will continue to occur in places across

the state for another three days.

As per IMD's forecast, thunderstorm with lightning and gusty surface wind speed reaching 40-50 kmph is likely to occur at one or two places of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Jajpur, Angul, Dhenkanal, Deogarh, Cuttack, Bhadrak, Balasore, Nayagarh, Kandhamal, Ganjam, Gajapati, Rayagada and Koraput districts Saturday.

Hailstorm is also likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Jajpur, it said.

A few places of Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Boudh, Sonepur,

Angul, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj are likely to experience thunderstorm, Sunday. Hailstorm would occur at one or two places of Kandhamal, Boudh, Sonepur and Angul districts on that day.

Similar weather condition may prevail in Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Gajapati, Nabarangpur, Ganjam, Kandhamal, Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Jajpur and Bhadrak districts, Monday.

Rainfall and thunderstorm are being witnessed at many places of the state during past few days. Friday, highest of 25 mm rainfall recorded at Bolangir; followed by Angul (20 mm), Balasore (8 mm), Phulbani (6.4 mm), Nayagarh & Jharsuguda (5 mm each), Bhawanipatna (4.8 mm) and Koraput (3 mm). Bhubaneswar and Cuttack too witnessed drizzle Friday.

Keeping this in view, the Special Relief Commissioner's (SRC's) office has issued an advisory to the district Collectors to take steps to circulate the warning message among the public.

BEACH SANS TOURISTS



Puri beach wears a deserted look Friday, the third day of the two-week lockdown imposed to curb spread of Covid-19

Lingaraj's Chandan Yatra to be held sans devotees

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 7: In view of the pandemic situation in the City here, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Friday issued an order for the organisation of this year's Chandan Yatra at Lingaraj temple without the pres-

ence of devotees.

The 22-day summer festival is scheduled to begin May 15. The civic body has issued the order after discussing the issue with the authorities of Lingaraj temple, sources said.

"The devotees will not be allowed to participate in the Chandan Yatra.

Only 15 servitors will be allowed to conduct the rituals. The list of the servitors will be shared by the temple authorities with the BMC prior to the festival. The servitors should have RT-PCR negative reports obtained within 48 hours. The servitors will follow covid norms during the ritual," the order read.

The order further said that no water pouches will be allowed during the event. Besides, no cultural event would be allowed during the conduct of the rituals.

"The guidelines are to be strictly followed. Violation of norms will result in revocation of the permission," said the order.

2nd wave jolt to thalassemia treatment, say experts

MANISH KUMAR, OP

Bhubaneswar, May 7: Treatment of thalassemia patients and their access to the healthcare facilities have been severely compromised amidst the huge surge in Covid-19 cases in the state during the second wave of the pandemic, experts working in the sector said.

According to doctors and officials at blood banks, routine follow-up with doctors and blood donations have received severe jolt amidst the surge in Covid-19 cases in the state.

Head of Transfusion Medicine at VIMSAR, Dr CR Prasad, who is treating thalassemia patients,

claimed that the Covid surge has hugely impacted the overall treatment and care of the patients.

"Although there is no shortage of blood supply at VIMSAR for the patients, in many areas the pandemic gave a body blow to the overall treatment and care of the patients. There are less blood donations in the state unlike earlier. There are many patients who need blood transfusion twice or thrice in a month," he said.

Prasad also said that although more treatment options are available now, there is a need to train many physicians living in rural as well as urban areas who can

World Thalassaemia Day 8 May. According to doctors and officials at blood banks, routine follow-up with doctors and blood donations have received severe jolt amidst the surge in Covid-19 cases in the state

about the availability of treatment for them which needed to be addressed.

Meanwhile, some blood bank operators claimed that Covid-19 has enormously hit the overall blood donation drives. However, with the regular blood donors the overall care of thalassemics is being ensured.

"In pre-Covid days, we used to see a collection of around 150 units of blood at our centre but during Covid times we are seeing only around 30 units of donations per day. We can collect more units of blood by arranging blood donation camps," said Dr Chandrika Das, Director,

Central Red Cross Society in Cuttack.

Das said that the institution is in contact with regular blood donors to boost the collection of blood. With the help of regular blood donors, the care of thalassemia patients is being ensured.

Das said that mostly the patients are young children and have to go for blood transfusion in every 10-15 days.

Thalassemia is an inherited blood disorder where the oxygen carrying capacity of patients is compromised due to less hemoglobin content in blood. The patients need regular blood transfusion for survival.

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Admin revives plan to work on VIMSAR O2 plant

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, May 7: Amid an unprecedented surge in Covid-19 cases, the demand of oxygen has gone up many folds in the state as well as in the country to save the lives of patients.

An oxygen plant proposed by the government on the premises of VIMSAR in Sambalpur in 2017 has been pushed under red tape. Now a plan was taken forward to hasten the process to set up the plant so that the growing demand for oxygen at hospitals will be met, a report said.

According to the report, when the state government had proposed the plant in 2017, the district administration and the VIMSAR authorities had immediately initiated the process and apprised the state government of the ground work status. However, the plan was shelved for three years.

Meanwhile, the government has directed the district administration to set up an oxygen plant in the district to meet oxygen requirement as the second wave of Covid-19 has been sweeping the state, playing havoc in different parts. Now, the district administration has revived the plan of the oxygen plant earlier proposed on the VIMSAR premises. Collector Subham Saxena visited the VIMSAR and held talks with VIMSAR Director Lalit Meher in this regard.

The VIMSAR has necessary infrastructure for an oxygen plant. The authorities have proposed to the district administration to start



An oxygen refilling plant is already functional in Sambalpur while two others are in Jharsuguda. The three plants together can refill 2400 mega cylinders per day. They cater to the needs of patients in Sambalpur, Bargarh, Deogarh, Bolangir, Jharsuguda, Sonepur, Boudh and Nuapada

Boudh and Nuapada. As per a rough estimate, VIMSAR alone requires 800 mega oxygen cylinders per day. However, the daily requirement of the cylinders will go up in coming day after the third Covid hospital is set up in Sambalpur.

Besides, the Covid Hospital functioning at the district headquarters hospital requires 400 to 500 oxygen cylinders every day.

These three refilling plants also cater to the needs of several private hospitals in western Odisha.

It is said that the rate at which Covid-19 has been surging in western Odisha, execution of the plant in VIMSAR assumes importance. In coming days, the demand for oxygen is likely to mount several times.

The VIMSAR Director said all necessary facilities are on VIMSAR premises. "The Collector has been apprised of the need for the plant. It can take a call on the matter," he added.

working on the oxygen plant. The district administration and the VIMSAR authorities expect that the oxygen plant will be ready in four to six months. The oxygen plant is expected to come handy for patients facing problems in oxygen availability in emergency.

The report said, an oxygen refilling plant is already functional in Sambalpur while two others are in Jharsuguda. The three plants can together refill 2400 mega cylinders per day. The three refilling plants cater to the needs of people in Sambalpur, Bargarh, Deogarh, Bolangir, Jharsuguda, Sonepur,

Man held for possessing pangolin in Mayurbhanj

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, May 7: Police arrested a person for possessing a pangolin in Bangiriposi area of Mayurbhanj district Thursday night. The pangolin was also rescued. The accused has been identified as Singu Baske.

Acting on a tip-off, a special squad of the Mayurbhanj district police conducted a raid at a place under Bangiriposi police limits Thursday night. The cops arrested Baske red-handed while he was striking a deal to sell the endangered scaly animal weighing 8 kilogram to wildlife smugglers.



After being rescued, the animal was handed over to the forest department, it was learnt. In this connection, a case has been registered at Bangiriposi police station and a probe is underway.

Notably, Odisha happens to be one of the top six states known for pangolin smuggling. According to Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), Assam reported 21 pangolin related crimes, followed by Madhya Pradesh (18), Maharashtra (17), Sikkim (17), Uttarakhand (10), Odisha and Mizoram (eight).

VIGIL ON BORDERS



Officials after sealing a border route in Gunpur area of Rayagada district abutting Andhra Pradesh stand guard to check intrusion of migrant workers, Friday

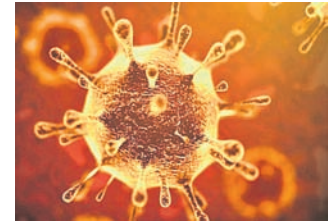
Upward Covid-19 trend in Sundargarh worries admin

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sundargarh, May 7: The Covid-19 situation in Sundargarh district is turning grimmer by the day. The district reported over 1,000 new cases May 5 and 1,186 May 6. However, the cases jumped manifold with the district reporting 2,073 fresh infections Friday and along with it four fatalities.

With the new infections, the district's caseload has gone up to 35,728. Among them 25,914 have recovered from the disease and the number of active cases stands at 9,605. So far the district has registered 205 deaths.

The rapid increase in the Covid-19 cases has been a matter of great concern for the administration.



The residents of the district are failing to understand the spike in spite of the ongoing lockdown.

District Collector Nikhil Pavan Kalyan in a tweet Friday urged the people to follow Covid-19 guidelines strictly which will help in breaking the chain.

In an earlier tweet, he had shared the bed position in the district and said there is no shortage still.

Suicide bid by Covid patient thwarted

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, May 7: Amid increasing cases of Covid-19 in Mayurbhanj district, a Covid patient attempted suicide at KIMS Covid Hospital at Bankishola Friday, but luckily he was saved by firefighters in time.

According to some firefighters, Bhabatosh Nayak(62) was under treatment at the hospital. The elderly patient was on ventilator. All of a sudden, he removed his ventilator and climbed the terrace to jump down. A six-member firefighter team was on duty 24X7 at the hospital. They swung into action and managed to capture the patient from the terrace. It was learnt that the elderly patient was upset over increasing fatalities due to Covid at the hospital.

Sans Basudha, tribals feed on creek water

POST NEWS NETWORK

Naktideula, May 7: With the onset of summer, drinking water crisis has affected many tribal-dominated pockets under Naktideula block in Sambalpur district.

As people fail to get adequate quantities of water from tube wells, they are compelled to meet their water requirements from pits in a creek, a report said.

Under the Basudha Yojana, drinking water is provided to rural people. Many villages in the block are deprived of this drinking water scheme.

A case in point is Ambapal, a tribal dominated village in the Maoist-affected Panimura panchayat under Naktideula block.

About 25 tribal families used to reside at Raibania village inside a reserve forest. The administration dislocated them at Ambapal a few



years ago. The administration has provided them various facilities like housing and solar lights, but they are deprived of safe drinking water.

People said that shortage of water has now become a major problem in summer. They have demanded

deep tube wells in the area to alleviate the situation.

Social activists observed that the government executes the Basudha Yojana to ensure safe drinking water to people in rural pockets. A project under this scheme should be taken up to deliver safe water to

the tribal people, who have been struggling with water shortage throughout the year, they suggested.

Villagers say, "We don't have tube wells or open wells in the locality. In this situation, we have no other way, but are bound to feed on water from Ghodanala, a creek, that flows on the outskirts of the village. In summer, the creek also dries up. We dig pits in the riverbed and collect water."

In monsoon, they also use the creek water. "Though we have drawn attention of the sarpanch, no step is being taken to sort out the potable water problem," they rued.

When contacted, BDO Vivekananda Sahu said people of Ambapala have apprised the block administration about the water problem. An engineer of the RWSS has been told to make provision for drinking water for the village as soon as possible," he assured.

Man provides whiff of life to those gasping for breath

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, May 7: The pandemic has brought many Good Samaritans to the fore. Ashok Sharma, nicknamed as Muna, a resident of Keonjhar town, has also emerged as a messiah for many patients.

The 47-year-old goes out of his way to supply oxygen to serious Covid-19 patients undergoing treatment at the Keonjhar district headquarters hospital. He has 23 cylinders including three small ones and six regulators.

Sharma narrated how it all started. "One night, I was returning home during shutdown restrictions. I was detained by some policemen and one of them wryly asked if I was carrying oxygen. That day, I realised the importance of oxygen in fighting Covid-19 and decided to help the needy ones," a visibly satisfied Muna answered.



Muna launched the oxygen service in the name of his father late Vishwanath Sharma. Initially, he would serve people known to him and later extended support to other patients. "As I am associated with Covid-19 care, spending sleepless nights frequently is normal. But then I feel satisfied helping people in need," Muna said.

"There were 23 cylinders lying unused at our home. I polished them and gave them a fresh coat of colour. To fill up the cylinders, I go to the MSP plant, travelling about 40 kilometres both ways. They charge Rs 100 for filling up small cylinders and Rs 300 for bigger ones. I could buy only six regulators and masks because my budget is limited," informed Muna.

"If the district administration or any generous person can donate the required number of regulators and masks, all the cylinders may be used effectively," he added.

This aside, Muna has set up five drinking water kiosks at different locations in Keonjhar town. He thanked his family members for their support.

Keonjhar District Collector Ashish Thakare said the administration will extend all possible help to Muna.

Nursing school flouts nCov curbs in Kalahandi

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhawanipatna, May 7: A nursing school in Kalahandi district faced flak for organising a welcome ceremony for new students on its premises. A video of the programme has gone viral in which students are seen dancing wildly without maintaining social distancing norms and wearing masks.

According to sources, a feast was also organised in which 180 students and management of the

school participated. More importantly, no prior permission was obtained from the district administration to conduct the event. In-charge of the nursing school, Anita Das denied the allegations. She said the welcome ceremony was observed following Covid-19 guidelines.

Kalahandi CDMO, Dr Pratap Chandra Behera said the allegations and action would be taken accordingly.

Ex-Dharitri scribe dies of Covid-19

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, May 7: Covid-19 claimed the life of another young journalist here in Berhampur Friday.

Pradeep Kishore Sahu, who earlier worked with Odia daily Dharitri, was the district correspondent of Odia daily Sambad. Sahu was undergoing treatment for past 15 days at Ashwini Covid Hospital at Berhampur.

However, he lost the battle to Covid, according to his family sources. The 43-year-old journalist is survived by wife and two sons. Notably, several journalists have died of Covid-19 in the state over past one month.

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FOCUS COVID VACCINE

FOR A PEOPLE'S VACCINE



While the rapid development of Covid-19 vaccines was a truly impressive achievement, it has been tarnished by constraints on global vaccine supply and the related inequities in distribution. As of May 4, less than 8% of the world's population had received even one dose of any Covid-19 vaccine, while just ten rich countries accounted for 80% of all vaccinations

(and paid for) from other companies, which could in turn sue any other producer using the same technology.

The TRIPS waiver would eliminate this possibility allowing production to be scaled up rapidly. With Moderna now indicating that it will produce three billion doses in 2022 alone, the mRNA vaccines are apparently quite amenable to expanded production. They are also said to be easily adapted to account for new variants.

The case for public production of such vaccines is clear: "For less than the US government spends on the Covid-19 response daily," notes the health advocacy organization PrEP4All, "it can build a facility to produce enough mRNA vaccine manufacturing capacity to vaccinate the entire world in one year, with each dose costing only \$2."

The case for public production becomes even stronger when one considers that private vaccine producers have little financial incentive to meet current global needs. Once the pandemic is contained, the demand for vaccines is likely to revert to much lower "normal" levels. To win the race against the virus, we must build and deploy public manufacturing capacities in the US and other countries. And when Covid-19 is brought to heel, these facilities should be maintained for future pandemics.

The world desperately needs the TRIPS waiver and stronger measures to ensure the transfer of knowledge and technology to produce Covid-19 vaccines. But we also need to start preparing for equally exceptional circumstances in the future. The knowledge on which our health and prosperity depend must be both publicly funded and publicly disseminated.

Jayati Ghosh, Executive Secretary of International Development Economics Associates, is Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a member of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation.

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The Biden administration's decision to stop opposing a proposed Covid-19 waiver of certain intellectual property rights under World Trade Organization rules is a welcome move. The US Trade Representative acknowledges that "the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic call for extraordinary measures." While affirming that it "believes strongly in intellectual property protections," the Biden administration said, "In service of ending this pandemic, supports the waiver of those protections for Covid-19 vaccines." Already, the US decision may be persuading other rich-country holdouts in Europe and elsewhere to follow suit.

While the rapid development of Covid-19 vaccines was a truly impressive achievement, it has been tarnished by constraints on global vaccine supply and the related inequities in distribution. As of May 4, less than 8% of the world's population had received even one dose of any Covid-19 vaccine, while just ten rich countries accounted for 80% of all vaccinations. The reason is not just that rich countries have been buying up all available doses; it is also that there simply have not been enough doses to go around.

But this scarcity itself is largely artificial. Vaccine production has been limited by pharmaceutical companies' refusal to share knowledge and technology. Though the companies producing the approved vaccines have benefited from public subsidies and publicly funded research, they nonetheless have taken advantage of patent protections to maintain a monopoly, limiting production to their own factories and a select few other companies to whom they have granted licenses.

Temporarily waiving IP rights is essential, but it is only the first step. A waiver agreement would address the previously insurmountable legal side of the problem. But much more will need to be done to make a "People's Vaccine" universally available as soon as possible. The next step is to push for concrete measures to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and technology. From Canada to

Bangladesh, many potential vaccine producers with the required facilities have so far been denied the licenses and technical know-how to proceed. Not a single pharmaceutical company has joined the World Health Organization's voluntary facility for sharing technology, the Covid-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP).

Governments in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, having given large subsidies to develop the approved vaccines, can and should pressure the companies to share the knowledge that public money helped provide. We know this can be done, because the Biden administration has already persuaded Johnson & Johnson to share its technology with Merck to boost domestic production of its single-dose vaccine. Surely the other companies that have benefited from public support could be pressured to do the same with producers around the world.

In the meantime, the TRIPS waiver could increase vaccine production in other ways as well. Moderna, which relied almost completely on US government funding, has already declared that it will not enforce its patent. But its mRNA vaccine uses some knowledge that it has licensed

that led a majority of WTO members to propose a temporary waiver for Covid-19 drugs, vaccines, diagnostics, and other technologies needed to fight the pandemic. And yet, even this minor step has been blocked in the WTO TRIPS Council, because (mostly) rich countries have been prioritizing big pharmaceutical companies' interests over global health.

A waiver has become all the more urgent with the coronavirus on the rampage across South America and India, where a near-complete breakdown of overstretched health services is resulting in a catastrophic loss of life. Worse, the rapid spread of the virus has already given rise to dangerous new variants. We absolutely must vaccinate as many people as possible before vaccine-resistant variants emerge.

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THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S DECISION TO STOP OPPOSING A PROPOSED COVID-19 WAIVER OF CERTAIN INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS UNDER WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION RULES IS A WELCOME MOVE



Jayati Ghosh

This is faithfulness, to admit and to manifest no other movements but only the movements prompted and guided by the Divine.

THE MOTHER



Tripura DM under scanner amid protests

While the administration has been widely rebuked for complacency in the face of the Covid-19 epidemic, a district magistrate in Tripura is in trouble for being overly enthusiastic in enforcing night curfew rules during a marriage in the state capital Agartala. A video that recorded the incident went viral on social media and political parties are gunning for him.

West Tripura District Magistrate Shailesh Kumar Yadav is in the dock for his purportedly arrogant behaviour with a bride and groom in the middle of a wedding ceremony. Angry citizens and politicians have written to Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb seeking strict action against Yadav. Some have even demanded an FIR against the official and sought his removal from service.

In the viral video, Yadav was seen shoving attendees and arrested everyone for flouting Covid-19 norms and tearing up a permission certificate for the wedding that he himself had signed! Sources say that the CM has formed a committee of two IAS officers to probe the incident and submit a report to Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar for further action. Watch this space for updates.

Ad hocism rules the roost in J&K administration

If the change of status of Jammu and Kashmir was meant to have a positive impact on governance in the Union Territory, those hopes have been belied, many believe. Ad hocism has become an integral part of governance in Jammu and Kashmir as seen from the list of top bureaucrats and officials who are holding more than one post. To give just two examples, Shaleen Kabra, Principal Secretary Home, is also discharging responsibilities as Principal Secretary, Revenue Department and Financial Commissioner, Revenue. Similarly, Dheeraj Gupta, Principal Secretary, Housing & Urban Development Department, is also holding additional assignment as Principal Resident Commissioner, J&K, New Delhi.



BABUDOM BYTES

Dilip Cherian

Sources say that as many as 10 IAS officers in the UT are holding additional charge of different departments and institutions due to a shortage of manpower in the higher echelons of the administration.

J&K has a stipulated strength of 137 IAS officers but only 58 are serving in the cadre, of which at least nine officers are on Central deputation. The Centre is apparently aware of the situation, and it recently moved to depute IAS and Group A service officers to the newly carved out Union Territory. But this seems to have done little to solve the problem which has afflicted governance for decades in J&K.

Ex-IAS officer to probe complaints against Haryana cops

Former Haryana Home Secretary and now retired IAS officer Navraj Sandhu has been appointed as Chairperson of the Haryana State Police Complaint Authority (PCA). In addition, retired IPS officer Kamleshwar Kumar Mishra and retired IAS officer Ramesh Chand Verma have been named as members of the authority.

Haryana is one among 17 states that set up the PCA to protect the citizens against abuse of police powers. It adjudicates allegations of improper or shoddy investigations, refusal to register FIRs, allegations of custodial torture and police high-handedness. However, it should be noted that the recommendation of the PCA are not binding on the state government - which makes the PCA merely a paper tiger.

For as long as five years, the government did not appoint a chairman even as the complaints piled up. Apparently, until 2019, the authority received 681 complaints, but it is not known how many were investigated and forwarded to the government for action. Hopefully, Sandhu's appointment will make up for the last time.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

WISDOM CORNER

When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left and could say, I used everything you gave me. **ERMA BOMBEC**

Look at the sparrows; they do not know what they will do in the next moment. Let us literally live from moment to moment. **MAHATMA GANDHI**

Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others. **WINSTON CHURCHILL**

WORDSWORTH

Cabal

This term for a semi-secret political clique is sometimes said to be an acronym, from the initials of five leading members of Charles II's government of 1667-73 that covered the period of the third Anglo-Dutch war. The five members were Sir Thomas Clifford, Henry Bennet (Lord Arlington), George Villiers (the Duke of Buckingham), Anthony Ashley Cooper (Earl of Shaftesbury) and John Maitland (Earl of Lauderdale). Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley and Lauderdale - CABAL. Even without detailed knowledge of world history this should cause your mental eyebrows to rise in skepticism. The earliest known acronyms date from around the time of the First World War (the military slang AWOL, "Absent Without Leave", is among the earliest, which newspaper reports around 1918 demonstrate was being said as a pronounceable word) and yet the source of cabal is dated on this theory to an acronymic origin some 250 years earlier. The word was indeed applied to the five ministers (in a pamphlet issued in 1673), but it was no more than a scurrilous joke based on the accident of their initials. Unfortunately, it's a joke that has long since gone sour on etymologists, who have to keep explaining the facts, a problem compounded by historians, who continue to refer to the Cabal Ministry as a convenient shorthand.

LOL

Pope and shark fishing

One day, the Pope was in from Italy and after a rough week of meeting archbishops and other religious figures, he decided to go see the Galveston shore in Texas. When he arrives in his Pope mobile, he sees a man struggling for his life against a shark. Upon a closer look he notices that it is John Kerry. Horrified, he starts to call for help when a speedboat pulls up alongside Mr. Kerry, with George W. Bush and Dick Cheney on board. Dick Cheney leans over and pulls him out. Then George W. Bush and Dick Cheney begin to beat the shark to death with baseball bats. The two men notice the Pope



and land the boat on the beach. The Pope says to the men, "I know that there has been a lot of attention and a lot of strife in this election, but I can see that you two men respect each other and would help each other in their house of need. You have my blessings." The Pope packs off and drives out of site. Bush asks, "Who was that?" "That was the Pope Mr. President, he is all knowing and in touch with God. Leader of the Catholic Church," says Cheney. Bush says, "Well that's all neat and fine, but he doesn't know anything about shark fishing. How's the bait holding up?"

SPECTRUM UNITED STATES

America First, Biden-Style



Melvyn B. Krauss

IF AMERICA'S ALLIES WERE CONCERNED BY PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN'S REMARKS ON FOREIGN POLICY IN HIS ADDRESS TO CONGRESS ON APRIL 28, THEY HAD EVERY RIGHT TO BE

If America's allies were concerned by President Joe Biden's remarks on foreign policy in his address to Congress on April 28, they had every right to be. Although Biden's domestic economic agenda could not have been less Trumpian - higher taxes on the wealthy and a substantial expansion of the social safety net - the foreign policy he outlined was not all that different from his roccoco predecessor's "America First" credo.

As Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, recently noted, "There is more foreign-policy continuity between Biden and Trump than first meets the eye ... Trumpism still looms large." So, Biden's speech was a strange brew: Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal mixed with powerful hints of Trumpian nationalism.

When Biden turned to foreign policy, his emphasis was on China and the United States, as if Europe did not exist, and the US could win this competition without the active participation of Europeans. To European ears, of course, that sounds a little bit too close to Trumpian contempt. The US could not have won the Cold War without its

European allies, and it will not out-compete China without European cooperation. In her softly, softly way, German Chancellor Angela Merkel drove that message home just before Biden took office by pushing the European Union into fast-tracking the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment.

Biden has been following a form of "America First" policy even in response to the coronavirus pandemic. His refusal to send Covid-19 vaccines to important European countries in dire need and facing important elections has made his claim that "America is back" sound very doubtful in many European capitals.

For example, to date, the Biden administration has sent no vaccines to France, despite the fact that one of America's most reliable allies, President Emmanuel Macron, faces a tight race against his main challenger, Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Rally, in next year's presidential election. Biden clearly understands that a Le Pen victory would be a disaster for the EU and the transatlantic alliance, with the only winner being Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Biden administration clearly

wants to contain Putin's revanchism in the ex-Communist world and block the Kremlin's efforts to weaken, divide, and ultimately destroy the EU. But its refusal to help Macron by shipping some of America's excess vaccine supplies (some of which it is now rightly sending to hard-hit India) is a gift to Putin, who has long encouraged Russian banks to offer financial backing to Le Pen and her party.

Biden also has a serious problem when it comes to Germany and Putin. The Nord Stream 2 pipeline project to import Russian gas via the Baltic Sea, circumventing Poland and Ukraine, is a potential strategic victory for Putin and threatens to incite suspicion of Germany among its eastern neighbours.

Apparently in thrall to protectionist thinking, Biden seems unable to envisage the type of trade deal that would encourage the Germans to back away from Nord Stream 2. One ray of hope is that the project is now understood to pose serious environmental threats, which is one reason Germany's Green party, the likely kingmaker following this autumn's Bundestag election, strongly opposes it. As one observer

recently concluded, "the Greens are more closely aligned on the controversial issue of the pipeline with the US and Germany's eastern neighbors, such as the Baltic states and Poland, than with [Merkel's Christian Democratic Union]."

There are other worrying signs of Trumpism's long half-life in US foreign policy. Biden has not lifted his predecessor's tariffs on imports of EU steel and aluminum, originally imposed on dubious national security grounds. And there has been no reconsideration of Trump's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Although it is clear that the revised TPP, now led by Japan, could be a formidable weapon for putting pressure on China, Biden seems too frightened of Trump's shadow to buck protectionist sentiments in any way.

It is time for US trade and foreign policies to become compatible with Biden's promise that "America is back." As it stands, there is too much continuity between Trump and Biden in both areas.

The writer is Professor Emeritus of Economics at New York University.

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Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

OrissaPOST
B-15, Russagarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Quota beyond 50% unacceptable

Sir, Reservation beyond 50 per cent is unacceptable. Tamil Nadu is already having 69 per cent reservation defying the nine-judge bench Supreme Court directive in 1992. The Supreme Court has delivered a landmark judgment showing the Rule Book to Maharashtra government by quashing the Maharashtra law granting quota to the Maratha community in public jobs and educational institutions exceeding the present 50 per cent of total reservation. The Supreme Court is right in observing that the reservation for the Maratha community is in violation of Articles 14 (Right to Equality) and 15 (Prohibition on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth) of the Constitution. The blatant violation of the Supreme Court directive by the state governments to subvert the political interest of the parties ignores the interest of the unreserved category. At one point of time the Supreme Court was inclined to ask for how many generations would the reservation continue. The court has also ruled in June 2020 that reservation is not a fundamental right and has wondered if no backward caste has moved forward. The Apex Court ruling against law on Maratha quota will go a long way in check-mating any other state having in its mind to enact reservation laws exceeding 50 per cent.

KV Seetharamaiah, HASSAN

Gates' divorce

Sir, Apropos "Bill, Melinda Gates divorcing, after 27 years of marriage", Orissa POST, May 5. Divorce is always sad and stressful for most people who go through it. The Gates are hyper-wealthy, but that doesn't make them less human. One hopes they are able to walk the difficult path forward as amicably and gently as possible. And, one of the greatest outcomes of their partnership is their foundation - not only endures, but continues to move forward with Melinda's influence. The Gates Foundation has spent more than \$50 billion, mostly on essential global health and development initiatives. Vaccinations, education and campaigns against HIV/AIDS and malaria have long been on the foundation's agenda, but over the years, Melinda's voice was heard pushing for an increased focus on family planning efforts - envisaging that family planning makes families healthier, wealthier and happier. As the Gates' transition into the next phase of their lives, we should respect their wish for personal privacy. The future of their highly influential foundation, though, is more public than personal. It would be a shame to see it fractured.

N Sathasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

War rooms, field hospitals helped Mumbai tackle Covid 2nd wave

AS MUCH OF THE COUNTRY IS REELING UNDER AN UNPRECEDENTED SURGE IN CASES, THE "MUMBAI MODEL" HAS DRAWN APPRECIATION EVEN FROM THE SUPREME COURT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, May 7: A system of ward-level 'war rooms' where hospital beds are allocated by civic officials and the decision not to dismantle field hospitals were key to Mumbai's success in tackling the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic, officials believe.

As much of the country is reeling under an unprecedented surge in cases, the "Mumbai model" has drawn appreciation even from the Supreme Court.

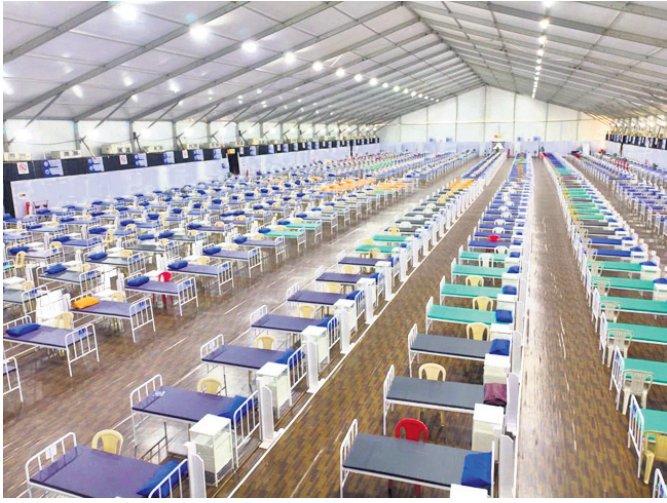
Since May 1, Mumbai is reporting less than 4,000 cases every day, a significant fall from over 8,500 cases a day in the first week of April. On April 4, the city logged 11,163 cases, the highest so far. On May 6, it recorded 3,056 cases.

To be sure, the financial capital of the country is still reporting more cases daily than the peak of 2,848 cases recorded on October 7 during the first wave last year.

But there is no shortage of hospital beds and oxygen for patients, civic officials claimed.

On Wednesday, the Supreme Court lauded the efforts of authorities to ensure adequate oxygen supply in Mumbai.

"Bombay Municipal Corporation is doing some great work, with no disrespect to Delhi. What they are doing, how they are managing, we can learn from here. I also understand that Maharashtra also produces oxygen which Delhi cannot



A field hospital for treating Covid-19 patients in Mumbai

do," said a bench headed by Justice DY Chandrachud, hearing pleas on the dire situation in Delhi.

As the second wave began, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation focused on testing, contact tracing and treatment besides ensuring that people followed guidelines. But the decision not to take down the infrastructure put in place during the first wave proved to be more crucial. "There would have been chaos if we hadn't kept jumbo COVID centres (field hospitals), oxygen beds, ICU beds ready before the start of second wave," said Mayor Kishori Pednekar.

Additional Municipal Commissioner Suresh Kakani, who insisted that jumbo centres should not be dismantled till March 31, said the BMC was ready for a new surge. "The whole system - oxygen, catering, house-keeping, doctors and nurses - was in place at jumbo centres," he said.

The civic body continued to augment availability of oxygen and ICU beds and medicine stocks, he said. "This is why the BMC had sufficient stock of Remdesivir when everywhere there was a shortage," Kakani said. The number of beds was doubled from around 12,000 to 24,000 within a month when cases began to rise in February. At present, Mumbai has 31,695 Covid-19 beds, including 12,754 oxygen beds and 2,929 ICU ones.

There is no shortage of medical oxygen in the city now, but there were some scary moments when on the night of April 16-17 the BMC had to shift 168 Covid-19 patients from six civic hospitals as oxygen supply ran out.

Learning a lesson, it started monitoring the movement of oxygen cylinders from plants to hospitals in real time. "We have now deputed six officers at control rooms to ensure seamless supply of oxygen. There is also a monitoring committee headed by a deputy commissioner," Kakani added. During the first wave, the BMC set up a 'war room' in each of the 24 wards to guide patients. Thanks to this system, people are not needed to run from one hospital to another in search of beds, as allocation of beds is done by war room officials.

Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal said during a recent interview that war rooms, dashboards for bed management, prohibition of release of test report directly to patients and the decision not to dismantle jumbo Covid facilities proved useful.

The system is on "auto pilot" now, he said. "When I joined, we did not have a dashboard, our control room operators used to check with individual hospitals if a bed is available," he said.

After the April 17 incident when oxygen in six hospitals ran out, the BMC sought a protocol for oxygen consumption from the Maharashtra government's Covid-19 task force.

It was decided that oxygen saturation level need not be maintained beyond 94 per cent, high-flow nasal oxygen should not be used indiscriminately, and there should be an oxygen consumption audit, Chahal said. The protocol was conveyed to all 176 hospitals in the city.

Mayor Pednekar said the BMC also focused on setting up oxygen plants. "We didn't rely only on oxygen cylinders, but we set up liquid oxygen plants. Because of this, not a single person died due to lack of oxygen," she said.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's decision to enforce fresh lockdown also helped, she noted. The civic body has already started preparing for the possible third wave of the pandemic, she said.

The number of jumbo Covid facilities will be increased from nine to 15, including dedicated facilities for children and the disabled, Pednekar said.

"Jumbo centres, dashboard, oxygen supply and all other things worked effectively. Their effectiveness was visible in last three-four weeks. This infrastructure needs to be maintained because one cannot predict if Covid-19 has run its course or not," said Dr Om Shrivastava, an infectious diseases expert who is a member of the state task force.

Maha, Delhi among states seeing plateau in Covid cases: Centre



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 7: Some of the states that first saw a steady rise in Covid-19 cases at the start of the deadly second wave of the pandemic are now seeing a plateau of fresh infections, a top official of the Health Ministry said Friday.

Maharashtra, Delhi and Gujarat were among the states hit hardest when the second wave of the pandemic exploded. In no time hospitals started sending out SOS for medical oxygen needed for critical Covid patients and beds started filling up fast, plunging these states into big difficulties.

"Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Jharkhand are the states where cases were increasing earlier, but are now plateauing gradually," Additional Secretary (Health) Arti Ahuja said.

However, some states are still seeing a daily rise in Covid cases.

These are Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Odisha, Health Ministry officials told reporters Friday.

Twelve states have over one lakh active Covid cases, and seven states have between 50,000 and one lakh active cases, the Health Ministry said today. The positivity rate is above 15 per cent in 24 states and in the range of 5-15 per cent in nine, it said. The Health Ministry asked the states to prioritise beneficiaries waiting for their second dose of vaccine.

The second wave of the pandemic has hit the country hard, with hospitals across states running out of beds and medical oxygen. The economic toll of the pandemic is also seen to be unprecedented.

Some 230 million Indians fell into poverty due to the pandemic last year with young people and women the hardest hit, and the current second wave threatens to make matters even worse, a new study has said.

100 O2 concentrators recovered from restaurants

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 7: The Delhi Police conducted raids at two restaurants in the national capital and recovered over 100 oxygen concentrators, used for treatment of Covid-19 patients, officials said Friday.

According to the police, 96 oxygen concentrators were recovered from Khan Chacha Restaurant and nine were seized from Town Hall restaurant, both situated in the Khan Market area.

The recovery of over 100 oxygen concentrators comes after the arrest of four men - Gaurav, Satish Sethi, Vikrant and Hitesh from south Delhi's Lodhi Colony area Wednesday for allegedly indulging in black marketing of oxygen concentrators. After the arrest of the four men, the police had recovered 419 oxygen concentrators that were meant to be sold in black market.



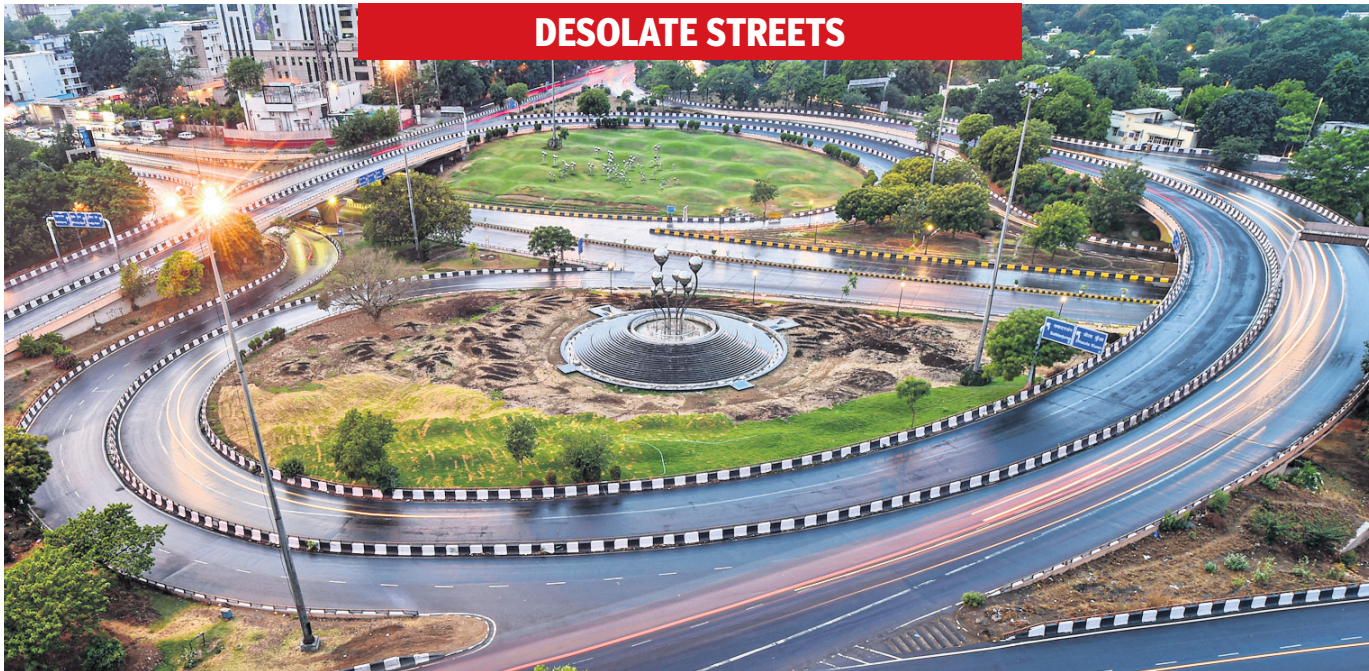
Police said during interrogation, Hitesh disclosed that they were hoarding oxygen concentrators in these restaurants following which raids were conducted at the joints at the Khan Market area and the equipments were recovered.

The owner of these two restaurants is a man named Navneet Kalra, police said. Kalra also owns another restaurant where police had conducted raids and recovered oxygen concentrators on Wednesday. Earlier, the police had said that

Nege Ju Restaurant and Bar in central market Lodhi Colony was found open Wednesday. A man was found working on a laptop at the restaurant who was later found taking online orders for oxygen concentrators, police had said earlier.

Police had searched the restaurant premises and recovered 32 boxes of oxygen concentrators, one box of thermal scanner and one box containing N 95 masks, the officer had said.

"A case was registered and four accused persons were arrested," Deputy Commissioner of Police (south) Atul Kumar Thakur had said. During interrogation, the accused disclosed about their warehouse in Chhatarpur, following which a search was conducted and 387 more units of oxygen concentrators were recovered which were being sold at exorbitant prices in black market, the DCP had said.



A long exposure photograph shows light trails due to passing of vehicles at the AIIMS flyover during Covid-induced lockdown in New Delhi

PTI PHOTO

BMC hospital turns Covid-hit moms' cradle for safe delivery

The civic-run BYL Nair Charitable Hospital has just completed its 1,025th safe delivery for a woman infected by Covid-19 - and may walk into record books

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, May 7: Marking a significant achievement, the civic-run BYL Nair Charitable Hospital has just completed its 1,025th safe delivery for a woman infected by Covid-19 - and may walk into record books, excited officials said.

The first such delivery of an infant by a Covid-19 positive mother took place April 14, 2020 at the height of the pandemic at the hospital run by Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). "Of around 1,025 safe deliveries so far, there was one set of triplets, 19 twins and the remaining 984 were single bundles of joy whose first cries brought cheers to the lives of their anxious parents," the hospital Dean & Director Dr Ramesh Bharmal told this news agency. The achievement comes hand-in-hand with the Supreme Court's observations this week patting the BMC's handling of the Covid-19 situation and asking other states like Delhi to follow the 'Mumbai model'.

The BMC attributes the success of Nair Hospital to the sheer dedication of the medical, para-medical and support teams at the hospital under the guidance of BMC Commissioner IS Chahal, Additional Municipal Commissioner Suresh Kakani, Dr Ramesh Bharmal, and other top officers. "They slogged 6 hours consecu-



tively without even drinking water as they wore PPE kits, did all their duties tirelessly practically 24x7, spending days in hospital without going home, and dedicated themselves without complaints to the care of the Covid-19 positive pregnant women and their special needs," said Dr Bharmal.

"Covid infection is not congenital. Even if the mother is infected, the unborn baby is not infected but can become positive after coming in contact with the mom after birth," explained Dr Sushma Malik, head of the departments of neonatal and pediatrics care.

As per protocols, all newborns of Covid-infected women are also tested and though some infants born here during the year were found positive, they were asymptomatic and later discharged after they tested negative, she added.

Dr Bharmal said that while a majority or over 60 per cent of the deliveries were 'normal', the rest were through the Caesarian Section.

AMBULANCE CHARGES ₹1.2 LAKH FOR CARRYING PATIENT 350 KM

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 7: Delhi Police Friday arrested one person after a patient's family was charged ₹1.20 lakh for an ambulance to transport her from Gurgaon to a hospital in Ludhiana.

Satinder Kaur, 62, was transported from DLF Phase 1, Gurgaon to Hi-Care Hospital, Ludhiana, about 350 km away, May 5.

This comes at a time when a sharp surge in Covid cases in the country is making people scramble for medical equipment and hospital beds. Several instances of overcharging patients' families

for oxygen cylinders, medicines and ambulance service have come to the fore in the past few weeks.

A Delhi Police release said 29-year-old Mimohi Kumar Bundwal, an MBBS doctor, had been in the ambulance business for two years now. Over the last one month, he had been overcharging patients' families, the release said. He was arrested from Inderpuri in Delhi.

Speaking to the media, Amanjyot, son-in-law of the patient, said they were desperately looking for beds after her condition deteriorated when they got information that a bed was available in Ludhiana.

He got the number of the ambulance service from the leads circulating on social media and they asked for ₹1.20 lakh, said Amanjyot. Desperate, the family agreed.

According to the Delhi Police release, the accused has now refunded the amount. The ambulance has been seized and further investigation is on, said police.

Taking note of multiple instances of patients' families being overcharged, the Delhi government has capped the charge private ambulance services can levy and warned of strict action against violators.

50L Covishield doses meant for export to be used in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 7: Fifty lakh doses of 'Covishield' vaccine earmarked by the Serum Institute for export to the United Kingdom have now been made available for the inoculation of 18-44 age group in 21 states/UTs in India, amid a surge in COVID-19 cases, official sources said.

The Centre's decision to allocate these doses to 21 states and Union territories (UTs) came after Prakash Kumar Singh, director, Government and Regulatory Affairs at Pune-based Serum Institute of India, recently wrote to the Union health ministry seeking permission for the same.

The Serum Institute had March 23 sought permission from the min-

istry to supply 50 lakh doses of Covishield to the UK, citing an agreement with AstraZeneca in this regard, while assuring India that its own anti-coronavirus vaccination programme will not be disturbed due to this supply.

"The stock of 50 lakh doses of Covishield vaccine is now available for inoculation of 18-44 age group people in 21 states and UTs," an official source said.

The ministry has asked the states to contact the company and initiate procurement activity promptly.

While some states have been allocated 3,50,000 doses each, others got 1,00,000 doses each and two others have been assigned 50,000 doses each based on the COVID-19 caseload, official sources said.

Delhi's autorickshaws become Covid-19 ambulances

THE DELHI GOVERNMENT HAS KITTED OUT MORE THAN A DOZEN AUTORICKSHAWS WITH HAND SANITISERS AND FACE MASKS, WHILE OXYGEN CYLINDERS ARE PROVIDED ON A NEED BASIS

REUTERS

New Delhi, May 7: It's not the most conventional way to get to hospital, but with Delhi running



Drivers stand near auto rickshaw ambulances, prepared to transfer people suffering from the COVID-19 and their relatives for free in New Delhi

short of ambulances, authorities have turned some of the city's ubiquitous three-wheeled autorickshaws into makeshift ambulances to ferry

Covid-19 patients.

Actual ambulances are hard to come by as a devastating surge in cases overwhelms the healthcare system. Families have had to make their own arrangements including paying exorbitant amounts to private ambulance operators to take the sick to hospital.

The Delhi government, in association with a non-profit organisation, has kitted out more than a dozen autorickshaws with hand sanitisers and face masks, while oxygen cylinders are provided on a need basis. The service, which began officially Tuesday, is free.

Autorickshaw driver Raj Kumar has taken patients to the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital, Delhi's largest facility, which is overflowing with Covid-19 patients.

"We must all help each other out at this time of need to get out of this situation," said Kumar, who wears a PPE suit. There is a plastic partition between him and the passengers at the back.

"If everyone stays home because they are scared, then who is going to help those in need?"

Mohit Raj, founder and executive director of the Turn Your Concern Into Action foundation, said the response so far had shown the scheme needed more vehicles.

"Now we are getting calls not just of Covid patients but from front-line workers who are unable to find patient conveyance, as well as from people with other ailments," he said.

Raj added he has received requests from other parts of the country to start services there.

national

of the day quote

The way in which incidents of political violence, arson and other criminal acts are happening in Uttar Pradesh after panchayat polls is a matter of serious concern

MAYAWATI | BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY SUPREMO

As far as Kashmir is concerned, it is no secret that hundreds, or may be thousands of detainees and political prisoners arrested since August 2019 continue to languish in jails both in and outside J-K

MEHBOOBA MUFTI | PDP PRESIDENT

In Delhi 1.84 lakh youth have got the 1st dose of vaccine, in first 4 days of 18-45 yrs age group opening. In total 38.88 lakh people have got the vaccine in all age groups till yesterday evening

MANISH SISODIA | DELHI DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Lawyer on EC's panel resigns

New Delhi: A lawyer, who has been representing the Election Commission (EC) before the Supreme Court, has resigned from the panel of advocates of the EC, saying his values were not in consonance with the present functioning of the poll body. Advocate Mohit D Ram was a panel counsel for the EC in the Supreme Court since 2013. "I have found that my values are not in consonance with the current functioning of the EC; and hence I withdraw myself from the responsibilities of its panel counsel before the Supreme Court," he said in the resignation letter.

Journalist Shesh Narayan dies

Noida (UP): Veteran journalist Shesh Narayan Singh passed away Friday while undergoing treatment for COVID-19 at a government hospital in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida, officials said. The 70-year-old journalist was admitted to the Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS) after being diagnosed positive for the coronavirus, a hospital official said. President Ram Nath Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a host of politicians besides media groups paid their tributes to Singh, a veteran journalist, columnist and political commentator.

Lion tests Covid +ve

Bareilly (UP): A lion at the Etawah Safari Park has tested positive for COVID-19 and another was suspected to have caught the infection, three days after eight Asiatic lions in Hyderabad were found infected with the virus. "Sixteen samples of 14 Asiatic lions at the Etawah Safari Park had been sent to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) for RT-PCR tests for COVID-19. On Thursday, one lion tested positive for the virus, while another was considered as a suspected case. The remaining 12 lions have tested negative," IVRI Joint Director Dr KP Singh said.

3 injured in militant attack

Srinagar: Three security personnel and a civilian were injured in a grenade attack by militants here Friday, police said. About 4.45 pm, militants hurled a grenade towards security forces' deployment at Nawa Bazar area of the city, a police official said.



Central Vista is criminal wastage. Put people's lives at the centre -- not your blind arrogance to get a new house

RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

SITARIST PRATEEK CHAUDHURI DIES AT 49

Renowned sitarist Prateek Chaudhuri has passed away after Covid-related issues. The death comes within a week of his father Pandit Debu Chaudhuri breathing his last May 1, after being infected with Covid-19. Prateek Chaudhuri's demise was confirmed Friday evening on the official Twitter account of Ministry of Culture, government of India



Modi govt has failed people of India: Sonia

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 7: Amid rising COVID-19 cases, Congress president Sonia Gandhi Friday said it is not the system but the Modi government that has failed the people by not being able to channelise resources, and demanded an all-party meeting be convened immediately.

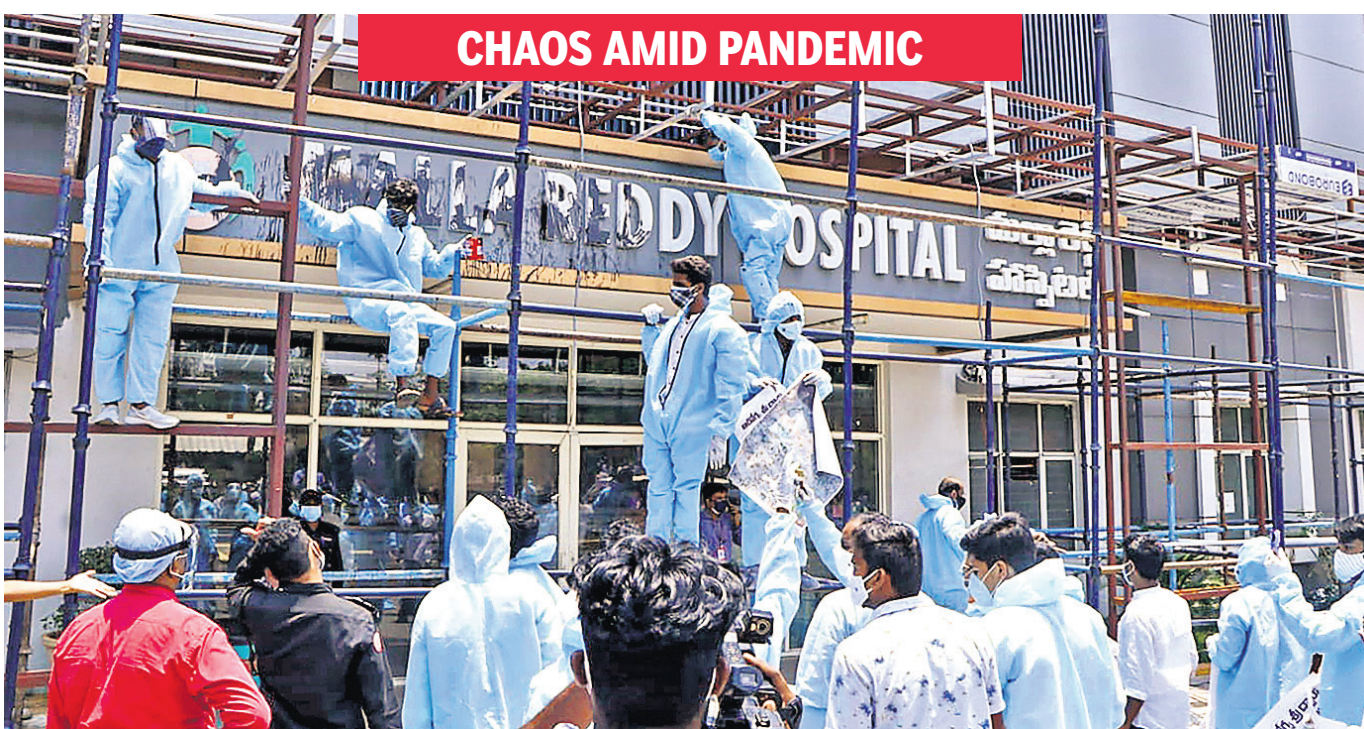
Addressing the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) meeting virtually, she also said the party's performance in the just-concluded assembly elections was very disappointing and MPs must draw "appropriate lessons from this setback in the spirit of humility and honesty".

The meeting was attended by the Congress' members in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, including Rahul Gandhi. Senior party leader and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh could not attend the meet. "Let us be absolutely clear -- the system hasn't failed. The Modi government has been unable to constructively channelise India's many strengths and resources. I say this categorically --

Rahul writes to PM

Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi Friday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying his government's lack of a clear and coherent Covid and vaccination strategy, as well as its hubris in declaring premature victory as the virus was exponentially spreading, has placed India in a highly dangerous position. He also said that government's failures have made another national lockdown almost inevitable, and to prevent a repeat of the manifold suffering caused by last year's lockdown, the government must act with compassion and provide critical financial and food support to "our most vulnerable people".

India is crippled by a political leadership today that has no empathy for the people. The Modi government has failed the people of our country," the Congress president told the MPs. She said the Congress firmly believes that fighting the pandemic is not a "Government versus Us" battle but a "Us versus Corona" battle.



CHAOS AMID PANDEMIC

Members of the NSUI Telangana unit during a protest outside Malla Reddy Hospital in Hyderabad

PTI PHOTO

SC asks Delhi HC for speedy hearing

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 7: Citing that the Delhi High Court is already seized of the matter, the Supreme Court Friday declined to interfere with the Central Vista redevelopment project.

A bench comprising Justices Vineet Saran and Dinesh Maheshwari granted the petitioner liberty to mention the matter before the Chief Justice of Delhi High Court for early hearing.

The bench also asked the high court to preferably consider the plea for an early hearing. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, submitted that the high court has kept the matter for hearing May 17.

Senior advocate Sidharth Luthra, representing the petitioners, argued: "We are facing a humanitarian health crisis. If this project is

CENTRAL VISTA CONSTRUCTION



deferred by four to six weeks nothing will happen." He added that the IPL has already been suspended and we are facing an unprecedented Covid-19 crisis.

Mehta submitted that the petitioner coming to court by way of a PIL and filing a Special Leave Petition (SLP) against an adjourn-

ment order of the high court raises serious doubt. Mehta said that an appeal against an adjournment would set a wrong precedent.

Luthra contended before the bench that when human life is concerned, government has to protect. He added that from April to May, the positivity rate of Covid-19 in

Delhi has increased and number of deaths due to Covid-19, have gone up. "This matter needs consideration. Before High Court, we submitted that we are concerned with the 3.5-4km stretch... We're at a stage where the health system has broken down, people are dying", submitted Luthra. The bench responded that it is aware of the situation, but the court cannot make comments about the deaths, as it may be taken otherwise.

Luthra said there are 8 sites which are undergoing construction, we're not concerned with all, rather we are only concerned with Rajpath, Central Vista stretch and the gardens. Luthra said: "How can construction be an essential activity? In a health emergency, we can't risk life of workers and their families and put more pressure on healthcare system."

'3rd wave of Covid-19 may not happen if strong steps taken'

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 7: Two days after warning that the third wave of Covid is inevitable, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government, K VijayRaghavan Friday stepped back, saying that it may not happen if strong steps and measures are taken.

Addressing the Union Health Ministry press briefing, he said: "If we take strong steps and measures, the third wave may not happen in all the places or indeed anywhere at all."

"It all depends on how much the guidelines are effectively implemented at local level." Asked about reports of mucormycosis among Covid-19 patients, NITI Aayog's Member, Health, Prof VK Paul said: "Mucormycosis (Black Fungus) is detected mostly in diabetic patients. We want to reassure that there is no major outbreak and we are doing proper surveillance of the situation."



He pointed out that there are three factors triggering this fungal infection: uncontrolled diabetes, immunosuppression because of steroids or any other disease and exposure to a wet surface.

"Mucormycosis is absolutely preventable and if one's diabetes is under control, there is no reason to worry," Paul said. Meanwhile, Additional Secretary, Health, Arti Ahuja said: "States and UTs, including Delhi, Chhattisgarh,

Gujarat, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, are showing early signs of plateauing or decrease in daily new Covid cases."

About vaccine coverage, she said: "So far, a total 16.50 crore doses have been administered across all eligible categories. Over 12.66 crore people above 45 years have administered vaccines. 1.59 health care workers, 2.13 crore frontline workers and 11.81 lakh people aged between 18 to 44 years have been administered vaccines."

As per government data, there are 24 states where the positivity rate is more than 15 per cent, nine states have a positivity rate between five to 15 per cent and three states have a positivity rate less than five per cent. The country is reporting daily new cases growth rate of one per cent in the last seven days.

Twelve states/UTs have more than one lakh active cases, seven states and UTs have 50,000 to one lakh active cases, and 17 have less than 50,000 active cases.

'COVID-19 CAN ALSO CAUSE DANGEROUS BLOOD CLOTS'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 7: There is increasing evidence to suggest that COVID-19 is not just a disease of the lungs as initially thought but can also cause dangerous blood clots which need to be immediately retrieved to save limbs in some cases, say experts.

Global studies have shown that the prevalence of blood clot formation known as deep vein thrombosis (DVT) in hospitalised COVID-19 patients is 14-28 per cent and is a lower 2-5 per cent for arterial thrombosis.

The India experience is similar, said experts, stressing that the infection is about the blood vessels as much as about the lungs. "We are dealing with five-six such cases per week on average.

This week it has been one day of such complications," said Dr Ambarish Satwik, vascular and endovascular surgeon at Delhi's Sir Ganga Ram Hospital. The prevalence of blood clot formation in COVID-19 is high in patients who have conditions such as type-2 Diabetes Mellitus, although the exact incidence remains unknown, added Dr Amrisha Kumar, consultant, cardio-thoracic vascular department, Aakash Healthcare in southwest Delhi's Dwarka locality.

Satwik drew attention to the Covid-clot connection in a tweet earlier this week in which he posted a picture of a blood clot cast retrieved from the lower limb arteries of a COVID-19 patient.



Karnataka govt extends lockdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, May 7: Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa Friday announced lockdown like restrictions with more stringent curbs from May 10 to May 24 in view of alarming rise in COVID cases.

There was already a curfew in place in the state from April 27, which was to end May 12. "The second wave of COVID-19 is creating havoc across the state as the Corona curfew imposed in the state has not yielded the expected result in reducing the infection and death rate," the Chief Minister said. "Therefore, the government has decided to impose a stringent measure to check the spread of the disease and death. Restriction will be imposed in the entire state from 6 am of May 10 to 6 am of May 24," he said. "All shops and commercial establishments, hotels, pubs and bars will remain closed during this period, Yediyurappa said. "Essential goods and services like food, medicine, milk, fruits and vegetables, etc will be available from 6 am to 10 am, he added.

After Bengal defeat, BJP's woes rise in Northeast

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, May 7: The electoral defeat in West Bengal has suddenly opened a can of worms for the BJP in the Northeast.

In Assam, the BJP failed to gain a majority on its own, winning 60 of the 126 seats. Its allies AGP won 9 and BPF 4 seats, but the competition for the post of chief minister is getting bitter.

Himanta Biswa Sarma, BJP's lead strategist in Northeast as the convener of the pro-saffron Northeast Democratic Alliance (NEDA), seems determined not to loose out on his lifetime ambition for the top job. "He accepted Sarbananda Sonowal as Chief Minister for the BJP's first term in Assam, but having delivered successfully in meeting all the challenges, it is only natural that the party rewards him with the top job," said a senior BJP MLA close to Sarma. He claimed that 43 of the 60 BJP MLAs are firmly behind Sarma and are keen that their leader



is made the CM to consolidate the party's gains. The 9 AGP and 4 BPF MLAs are also firmly behind Sarma, he claimed.

The Congress and its ally AUDF with 29 and 16 seats between themselves, respectively, may not be unwilling to draw Sarma out of the saffron fold if he manages 20-odd BJP MLAs who are originally Congress turncoats like him.

Congress sources in Assam say

the party, smarting from nationwide reverses, is waiting for the BJP to make a leadership choice and not take a premature jump into the fray. But if Sarma is not considered for the CM's post, and he revolts, many possibilities will open up. One, he could form a regional party with 30 plus MLAs and form a government with the support of Congress, AUDF, AGP and BPF. He has resources to do that, his loyal-

ists say. Two, he could return to the Congress with 20 to 30 MLAs, be elected the CM and then move to draw in the AGP and BPF to form a broad-based coalition government in Assam. Three, he pushes the party high command to accept a compromise candidate from the ranks of his loyalists and emerges defacto CM by pushing out the incumbent Sonowal and a possible third candidate Dilip Saikia, Mangaldoi MP and BJP national secretary. Sarma began his career as a leader of the All Assam Students Union, and was inducted into the Congress by late CM Hiteswar Saikia. He moved to the BJP after Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister.

Despite his turncoat past and his being implicated in many scams, Sarma is a go-getter, first rate electoral strategist, fund raiser and brilliant at making and breaking coalitions. He is seen as Delhi's Man Friday whenever the BJP has had problems with its allies or in forming governments anywhere

in the Northeast. In neighbouring Tripura, BJP CM Biplab Deb has faced fierce dis-sidence with rebel legislators camping in Delhi on scores of occasions seeking his ouster.

The dissident camp is led by former health minister Sudip Roy Barman, a military school cadet and engineering graduate, who like Sarma is originally from the Congress. Barman is the son of former Congress CM Samir Ranjan Barman and nephew of High Court Justice Sujit Barman.

Since most BJP MLAs are originally Congress turncoats who moved to the saffron camp resenting the Congress-Left alliances, Sudip Roy Barman had to be kept at bay only by the high command's determination to retain an RSS pracharak at the top.

Roy Barman claims the support of 25 of the 36 BJP MLAs and could well follow Sarma's lead in Assam if he revolts. Roy Barman could return to Trinamool Congress where he parked himself with his

supporters briefly after leaving the Congress and before joining the BJP. He could also team up with royal scion Pradyot Kishore Manikya whose TIPRA party has swept the state's tribal autonomous district council polls and its merger with two other tribal parties leaves the BJP quite vulnerable in a state where 20 of the 60 seats in the Assembly are reserved for Scheduled Tribes.

"If Himanta Biswa Sarma is not given the top job and he revolts, he could make things very difficult for the BJP top brass in the entire Northeast beginning with Assam and Tripura," said Samir Das, an author on Assam politics. "It is best they take Sonowal to Delhi where he was Union Sports Minister before becoming Assam CM. Or else one could brace for cascading effects," he added.

The BJP top brass is already facing fierce criticism in West Bengal where former state president Pathagata Ray has hauled up the party's poll managers for 'wasting the chance of a lifetime'.

of the day quote

The BJP government in the state has failed in COVID management. I appeal to all my party workers, office-bearers and newly elected panchayat representatives to help people in all possible way by keeping themselves safe



AKHILESH YADAV | SAMAJWADI PARTY CHIEF

The state government is continuously making efforts to distribute oxygen as per requirement in all hospitals of the state. With the assistance of the Central government, 60 oxygen plants will be set up in government hospitals with a capacity of 30, 50, 100 and 200 beds in the state



ANIL VUJ | HARYANA HOME MINISTER

When we say 700 MT, it means (the amount of medical oxygen to be supplied) every day to Delhi. Please do not drive us to a situation to take coercive steps. We are clarifying that it will be 700 MT every day



ARVIND KEJRIWAL | DELHI CHIEF MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Boy rescued from borewell

Jodhpur (Raj): A four-year-old boy was rescued from a nearly 90-foot-deep open borewell in a village in Rajasthan's Jalore district Friday, around 16 hours after he fell into it while playing, police said. The child, identified as Anil Dewasi, had fallen into the freshly dug borewell in Lachhri village Thursday afternoon, they said. He was rescued around 4.30 am Friday, police said. "The administration had roped in a local man, Madharam Suthar from Bhinmal, who used a special loop type tool devised by him to rescue the boy," an official said.

Four killed in lightning strike

Korba: Four members of a family were killed, while two others injured after being struck by lightning in Chhattisgarh's Korea district, police said Friday. The incident took place Thursday evening, when the victims, including three sisters, were at their paddy field near Bichhli village under Kelhari police station area, an official said.

Lion found dead

Ahmedabad: A lion was found dead on the outskirts of a village located close to Gujarat's Gir forest, a forest official said Friday. The carcass of a lion, aged between five to nine years, was found by a patrolling party near Navabandar village of Gir-Somnath district Thursday afternoon, the official said.

Hospitals need their own O₂ plants

According to reports, India so far only has 1,224 tankers with a capacity of 16,732 MT to carry medical oxygen and the Central government is in the process of manufacturing more cryogenic tankers

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 7: As Covid-19 pandemic moves from the urban centres to the hinterlands ravaging the over-burdened healthcare system, the medical fraternity urged the government to install oxygen plants in all hospital premises as oxygen cylinders and concentrators are unable to meet the surge in demand for the life-saving gas.

The fact is that oxygen concentrators/cylinders cannot reach every nook and corner of the country and hospitals with their own oxygen-generating infrastructure can only supply oxygen to critical patients in this dire situation.

In a life-saving measure, an oxygen generator donated by the French government was installed in record 18 hours at Narayana Super Speciality Hospital in East Delhi, which is helping the hospital fill



48 cylinders weighing 40 litres to 60 litres each in 24 hours.

According to Dr V Ramana Prasad, Senior pulmonologist, KIMS

hospital Hyderabad, installing oxygen plants is the need of the hour and the "government must ensure that it is implemented to avoid oxygen deprivation to the needy patients in smaller cities and towns where the pandemic is surging".

The demand for oxygen has soared "seven-fold" in India amid the rising daily Covid-19 cases. According to the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry, the demand for life-saving gas spread from 12 states April 15 to as many as 22 states April 24.

In nine days, the demand for medical oxygen increased 67 per cent. The problem is that liquid medical oxygen is flammable and, in most cases, can't be flown and has to be moved via road, rail or sea, which takes longer time to reach the hospitals.

An oxygen plant within the premises can quickly deliver the live-

saving gas to patients.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Thursday said that they will set up 48 oxygen plants, including 21 that are being imported from France, across the capital. "Medical collage hospital and large corporate hospitals can have permanent plants, but this is not possible for small hospitals/nursing homes," Dr Sumant Mantri, Senior Consultant, Pulmonologist at Apollo Hospital, Bangalore told IANS. Dr Pratibha Dogra, Senior pulmonologist from W Pratiksha Hospital Gurgaon said that the hospitals in the country urgently need their own oxygen plants.

"We have to act urgently to increase oxygen production to meet the anticipated amount of oxygen requirement by covid patients given that we are still on the rising curve of the second wave," Dogra said in a statement.

Stalin sworn in as TN CM



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, May 7: Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin, the DMK president who led his party to a huge victory in the Assembly polls was sworn in as the 8th Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Friday.

Governor Banwarilal Purohit administered the oath of office and secrecy to the 68-year old Stalin, for whom this would be the first stint as CM, in a simple ceremony at the Raj Bhavan here.

A total of 33 ministers were also sworn in following Stalin, of whom 15 are first-time ministers. All the 34, including Stalin took the oath as per their conscience and in Tamil, in sync with the decades old tradition of the DMK.

Earlier, Stalin, clad in a white shirt and dhoti introduced his Cabinet to Purohit. DMK veteran and general secretary Duraimurugan, who had held portfolios like Public Works during the previous DMK rule (2006-11) was administered oath after Stalin and is designated as Water Resources Minister in charge of irrigation projects and has portfolios of mines and minerals.

Home and other portfolios including public, general administration, all India services, district revenue officers, special programme implementation and welfare of differently able persons are with Chief Minister Stalin.

Palanivel Thiagarajan, a former

investment banker, is Minister for Finance and Human Resources Management. Veteran KKSSR Ramachandran is the Minister for Revenue and Disaster Management. Noted party leader from here and former Chennai Mayor, Ma Subramanian is Minister for Health, Family Welfare. K Ponnudi is Minister for Higher Education, Thangam Thnmaarasu Minister for Industries and P K Sekarababu is Minister for Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department.

V Senthil Balaji, who was transport minister between 2011 and 2015 during the previous AIADMK government headed by J Jayalalitha and who joined the DMK in 2018, is Minister for electricity.

Certain departments including agriculture and environment have been renamed. Accordingly, agriculture department is now Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and Environment is Department of Environment and Climate Change.

Stalin's family members including his wife Durga and son Udhayanidhi Stalin, who won from Triplicane-Chepauk constituency here, took part in the event. When Stalin took the oath, beginning with words "I Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin," his wife's eyes welled up in joy. The DMK chief's elder brother, M K Alagiri's son Dayanidhi and former union minister Dayanidhi Maran were present.

STRICT VIGIL



Security forces on alert amid lockdown in valley

UNI PHOTO

Rlys delivered 2,960 MT LMO to different states

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 7: Ramping up the delivery of medical oxygen across the country, the Indian Railways said Friday that it has delivered more than 2,960 MT Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) in 185 tankers through its Oxygen Express trains to different states.

A Railway Ministry spokesperson said that the national teansporter is continuing with its journey to provide relief to the people by delivering liquid medical oxygen to various states across the country.

"So far, the Railways has delivered more than 2,960 MT LMO in 185 tankers to various states across the country," the spokesperson said.

He said that 47 Oxygen Express trains have already completed their journey. Giving the break-up, the official said that 174 MT LMO has been offloaded in Maharashtra, 729 MT in Uttar Pradesh, 249 MT in Madhya Pradesh, 305 MT in Haryana, 123 MT in Telangana and 1,334 MT in Delhi.



He added that presently 18 tankers are on the run with more than 260 tonnes of LMO which are expected to reach Maharashtra, Haryana and Delhi.

More loaded Oxygen Express trains are expected to begin their journey later Friday night, he added.

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 7: The Centre has provided more than 17.35 crore vaccine doses to the states and the union territories free of cost, and more than 90 lakh doses are still available with them, the Health Ministry said, adding over 10 lakh doses will be received by the states and UTs in the next three days.

In a statement, the Union Health Ministry said that so far, more than 17.35 crore vaccine doses (17,35,07,770) have been provided to states and UTs free of cost of this, and the total consumption including wastage is 16,44,77,100 doses.

"More than 90 lakh Covid Vaccine doses (90,30,670) are still available with the States and UTs to be administered. States with negative balance are showing more consumption (including wastage) than vaccine supplied as they have not



reconciled the vaccine they have supplied to Armed Forces, Furthermore, more than 10 lakh (10,25,000) vaccine doses will be received in addition by the States/UTs within the next three days," the Ministry said. So far, Odisha received 2.75 lakh doses followed by West Bengal (2,00,000), Uttar Pradesh

(1,50,000), Maharashtra (1,50,000), Goa (one lakh) Assam (one lakh), Dadar and Nagar Haveli (25,000) and Daman and Diu (25,000).

As per the government data, Uttar Pradesh (9,63,994) has highest balance available doses followed by Tamil Nadu (6,13,622), Haryana (6,10,839), Madhya Pradesh (5,79,069)

Gujarat (5,76,058), Jharkhand (5,00,795), Maharashtra (4,84,287), Bihar (4,55,316), Delhi (4,37,182) and Telangana (3,84,337).

The Ministry said that the Government is leading the fight against the Covid pandemic in collaboration with the States and UT through a "Whole of Government" approach. Vaccination forms an integral component of the five point strategy of the Government in the containment and management of the pandemic (including Test, Track, Treat and Covid Appropriate Behaviour).

The Ministry pointed out that implementation of the Liberalized and Accelerated Phase 3 Strategy of Covid-19 Vaccination has started from May 1 and potential beneficiaries can either register directly on the CoWIN portal (cowin.gov.in) or through the Aarogya Setu app.

Rangasamy sworn in as Pondy CM



AGENCIES

Pondicherry, May 7: AINRC leader N Rangasamy was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Pondicherry at a brief ceremony held at the Raj Nivas here Friday and will lead a coalition government of BJP members in his cabinet.

While Karnataka is the lone southern state with the BJP in the ruling saddle, its induction in the UT cabinet allows the saffron party expand its footprint, vis-a-vis power in the region.

Incidentally, it fared well in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, where it won four assembly seats in the Dravidian heartland in the April 6 polls.

Union Minister of State for Home and BJP leader Kishan Reddy, who attended the swearing-in ceremony today, told reporters that BJP and AINRC would have three ministers each and they would be sworn in over the next few days. BJP's A Namassivayam, who was elected unanimously as the leader of the BJP legislature wing, is tipped to be deputy Chief Minister. On Friday afternoon, Lt Governor Tamilsai Soundararajan administered the oath of office and secrecy to Rangasamy, giving him his fourth stint in office of CM. Rangasamy, the only legislator to be sworn-in today, took the oath in Tamil and in the name of God.

Combating stress and anxiety with natural herbs

Economic fluctuations, unemployment, increased competition, and unattainable high expectations contribute to a rise in psychological and psychosomatic disorders such as frustration, anxiety, depression, phobias, and personality changes

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 7: The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has struck both people's mental health and physical health, with necessary protocols like social distancing and restricted mobility making the average Indian feel alienated and low-spirited.

In a country which already grappled with silent mental health issues pre-pandemic, the current Covid-19 situation has further exacerbated stress and anxiety at an unprecedented scale, reaching all strata and ages.

Ayurvedic expert and founder of Vedas Cure, Vikas Chawla, shares that people may experience a wide variety of psychological effects as



a result of infectious outbreaks.

He says: "Individually, new psychological symptoms in people without mental illness may precipitate or intensify the condition of someone with pre-existing mental illness, causing anxiety to their care-

givers. Regardless of their exposure to the virus, one can constantly feel fear, anxiety and helplessness about being sick, which may lead to mental breakdowns and poor mental health."

"The pandemic has severely af-

ected the economy of our country. Many industries such as hospitality, tourism, education and entertainment are close to or have shut down. Due to this many people have either lost their jobs or their remuneration has been cut down by as much as 50 per cent. Such kinds of loss of jobs and/or income has also put people under a lot of stress and mental pressure," says Chawla.

According to him, Ayurveda has effective ways of helping an individual to deal with stress and anxiety. Hundreds of medicinal plants with immune modulator, anti-oxidant, and memory-enhancing properties are available in Ayurveda. Brahmi, ashwa-

gandha, bhringraj, tulsi, ghee,

and natural herbs can help relax the mind and address most of these disorders, he opines.

"It is important to resolve and handle certain concerns naturally in order to live a happier life. A well-known memory-booster, Brahmi is an angel in disguise for your mental well-being, overall. It has a relaxing, anti-stress effect on the central nervous system. Its frequent intake will help you combat anxiety by calming you down."

He further adds, "Bhringraj can detoxify your body, encourage oxygen supply to your brain, and make your brain healthier and stronger, helping it to fend off stress and handle its effects better when ingested orally in the form of

Bhringraj herbal teas and powder dissolved in water. Ashwagandha has a long list of health benefits, including improved endurance, immunity, decreased inflammation, and defense against cognitive and neurological disorders. It can also assist you in managing and reducing anxiety. This herb's extract has soothing properties and encourages anti-stress adaptogenic activity in the brain."

Due to the existence of anti-oxidants that can help reduce oxidative stress and free radicals generated in the body due to stress and anxiety, Ayurveda also recommends consuming tulsi as a preventive measure and a remedy to combat stress and anxiety.



The original decision to put in place that biosecurity order until May 15 has proved very effective and it will run its full course until that time without any change

MOUNT SINABUNG ERUPTS AGAIN Mount Sinabung in Indonesia's North Sumatra province has erupted again, spewing a thick ash column up 2,000 metres above its peak, said the country's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Centre



of the day quote

As we understand the rocket has adopted some technical designing. Most of the part of the rocket will be burnt during its re-entry into the atmosphere. It is highly unlikely to cause any danger and harm to the aero activities or the Earth

The fight against this despotic regime is the fight against oppression and the fight against terrorism. And this is a public duty to fight against this regime

At present, India is experiencing acute and severe shortages of the Covid-19 vaccines. AstraZeneca is releasing 60 million vaccines after due FDA approval this month. We urge the US government to release at least 30 million doses of the vaccine to India

Efforts to bring back US to Iran N-deal

THE US PULLED OUT OF THE LANDMARK 2015 DEAL IN 2018 AFTER THEN-PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP SAID THE PACT NEEDED TO BE RENEGOTIATED

Vienna, May 7: World powers held a fourth round of high-level talks Friday in Austria aimed at bringing the United States back into the nuclear deal with Iran, with both sides signalling a willingness to work out the major obstacles.



The talks began in early April and Russian delegate Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted following Friday's meeting that "the participants agreed on the need to intensify the process."

more advanced centrifuges in an attempt to pressure the world powers remaining in the deal—Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China—for economic relief.

ance would look like. Delegates to the Vienna talks concede, for example, that Iranian nuclear scientists cannot forget the knowledge they acquired in the last three years, but it is not clear whether Iran's new centrifuges would need to be destroyed, mothballed and locked away, or simply taken offline.

The US pulled out of the landmark 2015 deal in 2018 after then-President Donald Trump said the pact needed to be renegotiated. The deal had promised Iran economic incentives in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program, and the Trump administration reimposed heavy sanctions on the Islamic republic in an unsuccessful attempt to bring Tehran into new talks.

US President Joe Biden says he wants to rejoin the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, but that Iran needs to return to compliance.

Between the high-level meetings, expert groups have been meeting to try to come up with solutions to the outstanding issues.

Iran reacted by steadily increasing its violations of the deal, which is intended to prevent the country from obtaining nuclear weapons. Iran began enriching uranium to a greater purity, stockpiling more than allowed and beginning to use

Iran, which insists it does not want to produce a nuclear bomb, has said it is prepared to reverse all of its violations but that Washington must remove all sanctions imposed under Trump.

Iran's delegate to the talks, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, told his country's state-run IRNA news agency late Thursday that his team was trying to reach an agreement as soon as possible but would not act in haste and would act in Iran's national interests.

EU leaders attend 1st in person summit

Their talks hope to repair some of the damage the coronavirus has caused in the bloc, in such areas as welfare and employment



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lisbon, May 7: European Union leaders and their large following of diplomats and advisers are meeting in Portugal Friday for two days of talks, sending a signal that they see the threat from Covid-19 on their continent as warning, amid a quickening vaccine rollout.

cal talks to move online over the past year in Europe. This is the 27-nation bloc's first face-to-face summit in five months, after an exceptional meeting in Brussels last December to discuss post-pandemic spending. Another in-person summit, in Brussels, is planned for later this month.

The leaders will also discuss Thursday's US proposal to share the technology behind Covid-19 vaccines to help speed the end of the pandemic. The leaders will also take part in an unprecedented meeting, via video conference, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose country needs more help with a devastating virus surge—and who can smooth the path to an elusive bilateral trade deal.

EU leaders appear keen to "try and convey a sense of normalcy, of slowly returning to normal," says Antonio Barroso, a political analyst at Teneo, a global advisory firm. That is a key consideration for southern EU countries like Portugal, Spain and Greece, where tourism is an economic mainstay.

SHORT TAKES

Bomb attack on Male ex-Prez

Male: A probe is underway into the explosion in the Maldivian capital of Male during which former President and Parliament Speaker Mohamed Nasheed sustained injuries, incumbent President Ibrahim Solih announced. Taking to Twitter late Thursday night, Solih said: "Speaker of Parliament President Mohamed Nasheed is currently receiving treatment at ADK Hospital in Male for injuries sustained following an explosion outside his residence tonight."

Japan to extend Covid emergency

Tokyo: Japan will extend the Covid-19 state of emergency currently in effect in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Hyogo prefectures until the end of the month, the Minister in charge of the government's coronavirus response said Friday. He told in a meeting that a state of emergency being declared in Aichi and Fukuoka prefectures will allow their respective governors and authorities to implement stricter measures in a bid to prevent the further spread of Covid-19.

Top Hefazat militant arrested

Dhaka: Police in Bangladesh said Friday that it has arrested Gaji Yaqub Osmani, Hefazat-e-Islam's central assistant publicity secretary, for his involvement in the violent carnage carried out by the militant outfit in Brahmanbaria district and across the country in March. Osmani was arrested Thursday by a special team of Brahmanbaria district police, officials told IANS.

Deadliest gun battle in 16 yrs

Rio de Janeiro: A bloody and long gun battle in Rio de Janeiro slum echoed Friday, with authorities saying the police mission successfully eliminated two dozen criminals while residents and activists claimed human rights abuses. It was just after sunrise Thursday when dozens of officers from Rio de Janeiro state's civil police stormed Jacarezinho, a favela in the city's northern zone. When the fighting stopped, there were 25 dead — one police officer and 24 people described by the police as "criminals."

British officials warn over Indian coronavirus variant

AGENCIES

London, May 7: British officials declare one of the new coronavirus strains first found in India a "variant of concern", due to evidence that it spreads more quickly than the original version of the virus.

October; but Public Health England (PHE) has categorised three different subtypes, all with slightly different mutations.

While B.1.617.2 seems to be as transmissible as the Kent variant, which fuelled much of Britain's second Covid-19 wave, there is no evidence it is resistant to current vaccines.

Other variants of concern include variants first identified in Kent, south-east England, as well as South Africa and Brazil.

Public Health England (PHE) said that weekly variant data, which had been due Thursday, was delayed due to a "processing issue."

PM JOHNSON'S PARTY SWEEPS ASIDE LABOUR

Conservative Jill Mortimer beat Labour's candidate by 15,529 votes to 8,589, a once unthinkable victory under a Conservative leader

AGENCIES

London, May 7: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative Party won a new seat in parliament Friday, ousting the Labour Party in the northern English town of Hartlepool with a sweeping victory that tightens his grip on traditional opposition-voting areas.



disaster. "There's no hiding from the fact this is a shattering result for Labour; absolutely shattering," said Labour lawmaker Steve Reed, a member of Starmer's top team.

Conservative Jill Mortimer beat Labour's candidate by 15,529 votes to 8,589, a once unthinkable victory under a Conservative leader who has proved, so far, to be largely immune to accusations of cronyism and criticism over his handling of

The Conservatives described it as an historic day. The by-election, which takes place outside the normal parliamentary election cycle, was triggered by the resignation of a Labour lawmaker in March, and is one of dozens of votes which took place Thursday.

COLOMBIA CLASHES



A police armored vehicle is pictured during a protest against poverty and police violence in Bogota, Colombia REUTERS

Ukraine, US discuss security concern along Russian border

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kiev, May 7: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky discussed the ongoing security situation in the country's borders along Russia with visiting US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Kiev, according to an official statement.



have eased after the partial withdrawal of Russian troops. During the conversation, Zelensky voiced his government's commitment to bring sustainable peace to Ukraine. "The issue of ending the war for Ukraine is a priority, and a priority for each of us," Zelensky was quoted as saying by his press service.

Zelensky informed Blinken that currently Ukraine's conflict-hit region of Donbas is witnessing a decrease in sniper fire and the number of casualties, while the tensions on the Ukrainian-Russian borders

For his part, Blinken said that Washington supports Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence and stands ready to continue its assistance for Kiev.

Covid outbreak threatens Mt Everest climbing comeback plans

NEPAL'S TOURISM INDUSTRY SUFFERED A DEVASTATING BLOW LAST YEAR WHEN THE PANDEMIC PROMPTED A COMPLETE SHUTDOWN OF ITS SUMMITS, COSTING MILLIONS IN LOST REVENUE



AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

Everest Base Camp, May 7: More than 30 sick climbers have been evacuated from the foot of Mount

Everest, raising fears that coronavirus may scupper a hoped-for bumper season on the world's highest mountain.

back foreign adventurers and have issued climbing permits to more than 400 people, a new record. An Everest permit alone costs \$11,000 and climbers pay upward of \$40,000 for an expedition.

But the warmer weather that ushers in safer conditions for scaling Nepal's dangerous, snow-capped peaks has coincided with a deadly second wave of Covid-19 infections, with active cases in the country rising six-fold in the last two weeks.

over fears the disease was spreading around base camp.

tent city at the foot of Everest, including foreign climbers and the teams of Nepali guides that escort them to the peak.

Norwegian climber Erlend Ness spent two nights sleeping in his tent at base camp last month, unsure of what was making him ill.

"I was evacuated to Kathmandu and was tested. My result was positive for Covid," he told AFP, becoming the first climber with an Everest permit to confirm his infection. "I think I'm not the only one... Every team at the base camp knows the risk of Covid is there and they have to be careful, they should be careful," he said.

"We are taking all precautions possible to make sure that there are no infections," said Tashi Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks, the largest climbing agency at Everest.

Officials at a health clinic catering to the climbers say more than 30 people have been flown off the camp in recent weeks.

At least two have tested positive after returning to the capital Kathmandu.

"We are not visiting other tents, and even groups within the camps are not mixing."

More than a thousand people are typically camped at the bustling

Others are being evacuated and others are being tested, the head of their expedition said.

More than a thousand people are typically camped at the bustling tent city at the foot of Everest, including foreign climbers and the teams of Nepali guides that escort them to the peak.

business



“We are looking for a pretty good figure, reflecting the ongoing reopening we have seen. With cash in people’s pockets, economic activity is looking good and that should lead to more hiring right across the country”
JAMES KNIGHTLEY | CHIEF INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIST, ING (NEW YORK)

SONOVA ACQUIRES CONSUMER BIZ

Swiss hearing care solutions provider Sonova has acquired the consumer electronics business of German audio brand Sennheiser for an undisclosed sum, the companies announced Friday. Subject to regulatory approval, the plan is to complete the transfer of the business to Sonova by 2021 end



of the day quote

Given the strong demand, export rebate cuts and stricter production curbs imposed in the Tangshan region (which accounted for about 14% of China’s crude steel production in CY2020), China may not have excess steel volumes to divert to export markets



JAYANTA ROY | SENIOR VP & GROUP HEAD, CORPORATE SECTOR RATINGS, ICRA

SBI does not have immediate plans to raise capital as a reasonable profit of the last fiscal would be ploughed back to take care of foreseeable business growth. We had raised Tier I and Tier II bonds earlier. Considering the growth we had seen last year, we are having a comfortable capital adequacy ratio



DINESH KUMAR KHARA | CHAIRMAN, SBI

During H1 FY2021, the individual loan segment witnessed a slower growth. There was an extremely strong recovery in H2 which was significantly faster and greater than what we had envisaged at the start of the year



KEEKI MISTRY | VICE CHAIRMAN & CEO, HDFC

SHORT TAKES

Tata Motors to hike PV prices
New Delhi: Tata Motors Friday said it will increase prices of its passenger vehicles (PV) by an average of 1.8% depending upon the model and variant from May 8, in order to partially offset the rise in input costs. The auto major noted that it would offer protection from the price increase to customers who have booked vehicles on or before May 7. With effect from May 8, the company will increase prices of its PV, averaging 1.8%, depending on the variant and model, Tata Motors said.

Twitter tests new feature
New Delhi: Twitter is testing a new Tip Jar feature globally including in India where iOS and Android users can send money directly to their favourite accounts with substantial followers. At the moment, only a small group of people including non-profits, journalists and creators around the world who use Twitter in English will be able to add Tip Jar to their profile and receive tips. The company is also working to bring Indian payment providers to Tip Jar.

TVS Motor lines up ₹40 cr support
New Delhi: TVS Motor Company Friday said it along with Sundaram Clayton and its group companies have pledged ₹40 crore to support the nationwide efforts to curb the spread of Covid-19. The funds will be utilised to provide lifesaving supplies such as oxygen concentrators, PPE Kits, medicines and medical equipment across the country.

NFRA prepares database of cos
New Delhi: The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) has prepared a provisional database of companies and auditors that come under its regulatory ambit. NFRA has the mandate to oversee compliance with accounting and auditing standards by certain class of companies, described as Public Interest Entities. In this regard, a verified and accurate database of companies and auditors is being prepared.

‘India to breach fiscal deficit target in FY22’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 7: India is likely to breach its fiscal deficit target in the financial year to March 2022 mainly due to revenue shortfall, Fitch Solutions said Friday. The government is targeting a deficit between revenue it earns and what it spends at 6.8% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in FY22 (April 2021 to March 2022).
“We at Fitch Solutions forecast the Indian central government deficit to come in at 8.3% of GDP in FY22,” it said.
“Revenue shortfall remains the main driver of our wider deficit view, as we expect the government to maintain its spending targets.” Fitch Solutions had previously projected a fiscal deficit of 8%.



“The main driver of our deficit forecast revision is a downward revision to our outlook for revenues, given that the flare-up in Covid-19 cases in India and containment measures in place will hamper India’s economic recovery, which will have a negative impact on fiscal revenues,” it said.

Central government expenditure is likely to be around the projected ₹34.8L cr as it looks to maintain its high pandemic-period spending so as to bolster pace of economic recovery

Central government expenditure is likely to be around the projected ₹34.8 lakh crore as it looks to maintain its high pandemic-period spending so as to bolster pace of economic recovery. Against this, revenue are likely to come in at ₹16.5 lakh crore, down from government estimate of ₹17.8

were infrastructure (transport, urban development, and power), healthcare, agriculture, and rural development.
“However, given the flare-up in Covid-19 infections in India, which has since overwhelmed the Indian healthcare system, we expect there to be reallocation of spending in favour of healthcare spending this fiscal year,” Fitch Solutions said adding healthcare spending is projected to be ₹74,600 crore, 2.1% of total planned FY22 expenditures, and this will likely come in higher than projected.
Another area expected to see increased spending is on the rural employment scheme - Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREG) scheme.

‘Fin markets heading for biggest inflation scare since early 1980s’

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 7: It is interesting that FAANG stocks still look like they have peaked out against the S&P500 despite the fantastic quarterly earnings reported by these companies last week, according to “Greed and Fear”.



Jefferies analyst Christopher Wood, in his stock market commentary “Greed and Fear” said in a funny kind of way, the better the numbers these companies report, the more it is a sign of their control of the marketplace from an anti-trust and other regulatory standpoints. FAANG refers to leading tech stocks Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Alphabet (formerly known as Google).

“Action on the anti-trust front is surely coming sooner or later, just as it has now arrived in China. On top of this, there is the obvious risk of the law of large numbers as regards maintaining such growth rates. Meanwhile Greed & Fear continues to prefer cyclical stocks with the obvious trade, in the run up to the inflation scare, that of being long energy and short tech,” Wood said.
“For now, Greed & Fear’s conviction remains that the financial markets are heading for the biggest inflation scare since the early 1980s, which is why equity fund managers need to remain razor focused on inflation expectations which are likely to be the lead indicator of the timing of any potential tapering scare,” Wood said.

2nd wave’s impact on economic growth to remain muted: FinMin



AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 7: The impact of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic on the economy is likely to remain muted as compared to the first wave, the finance ministry said in its monthly economic report.
Admitting that the second wave of the pandemic has posed a downside risk to economic activity in the first quarter of FY2021-22, the report said “there are reasons to expect a muted economic impact as compared to the first wave. Learning to ‘operate with Covid-19’, as borne by international experience, provides a silver lining of economic resilience amidst the second wave.”

The fiscal position of the central government, it said, has witnessed an improvement in the recent months with a revival in the economic activities during the second half of FY2020-21.
As per provisional figures, net direct tax collections for 2020-21 are 4.5% higher than Revised Estimates (RE) and 5% higher than collections in 2019-20 – the significant growth compared to 2019-20 provides an indication of economic recovery since the first wave.
GST mop-up registered a good growth and collections exceeded ₹1 lakh crore in each of the last six months owing to economic recovery, it said, adding, GST revenue registered another record high of ₹1.41 lakh crore in April, indicative of continued economic recovery.
However, the report noted that the second wave of the pandemic hit the market sentiment as Nifty 50 and the S&P BSE Sensex recorded

STAYING OPTIMISTIC
The fiscal position of the central government has witnessed an improvement in recent months with a revival in economic activities during H2 FY21
GST mop-up registered a good growth and collections exceeded ₹1L cr in each of the last six months owing to economic recovery

losses of 0.4% and 1.5%, respectively in April, and the rupee depreciated by 2.3% to reach 74.51 INR/USD in April. This was mirrored by net FPI outflows of \$1.18 billion in April.
Domestic financial conditions, nevertheless, continue to remain comfortable with RBI’s support to liquidity, with open market operations worth ₹3.17 lakh crore carried out in 2020-21, it said.
Launch of G-SAP 1.0 towards stable and orderly management of the yield curve is a significant tool for forward guidance.
While overall financial conditions remained accommodative, the report said, credit growth continued to be muted at 5.3% as on April 9, 2021.
Sectorally, the report said, agriculture, medium industry and trade services led the credit off-take in March, while credit to small and large industry and NBFC services remained subdued. Easy financing conditions enabled the corporate sector to raise substantial funds from financial markets, it added.

RBI’s liquidity window can boost healthcare infra: Crisil

AGENCIES

Mumbai, May 7: The ₹50,000 crore liquidity window offered by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to banks under priority-sector lending to augment Covid-19 healthcare infrastructure will help raise treatment capacity, and availability of medicines and medical equipment, in India, Crisil said Friday.
Hospitals could be among the biggest beneficiaries as the incremental funding can potentially increase bed capacity in the country by 15-20%, the ratings agency said.
Loans under the scheme, for tenures up to 3 years, are available to banks at the repo rate till March 31, 2022. Such loans would also be classified under priority sector. Consequently, banks are expected to extend these loans below current interest rates for companies engaged in health care activities.



These include makers and suppliers of vaccines and drugs; hospitals; pathology labs; suppliers of oxygen; makers of emergency medical equipment; logistics firms; and Covid-19 patients.
As many as 354 CRISIL-rated companies with aggregate bank exposure of ₹40,000 crore will be eligible for such loans. Though pharmaceutical firms account for 68 per cent of rated bank exposure, hospitals (24% of rated exposure) are likely to avail majority of the funding available.

COAI raises concern over rumours regarding 5G tech

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 7: Telecom industry body COAI Friday expressed concern over rumours related to 5G technology with the spread of Covid-19. The Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), whose members include Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, said it has come across multiple messages on social media platforms as well as reports in a few regional media mentioning 5G spectrum trials as the probable cause for rising Covid-19 cases.
“We would like to clarify that these rumours are absolutely false. We urge people not to fall for such baseless misinformation. Several countries in the world have already rolled out 5G networks, and people are using these services safely.”
“Even the World Health Organization (WHO) has clarified that there is no correlation between 5G technology and Covid-19,” COAI Director General SP Kochhar said.
He added that the industry body has shared concerns with the



Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and has apprised it of the situation.
“I appeal fellow citizens to beware of these fake messages. Together, we can fight this menace of misinformation,” Kochhar said.
People have been sharing voice recordings where individuals in the conversation are heard blaming 5G trials for the rise in casualties in India.
COAI said there are no 5G trials going on in the country and no 5G towers have been installed as yet. “Telecom services are a lifeline for the nation, especially in the current times,” it said.

BIZ BUZZ

Sovereign rating to remain at current level for 2 years: S&P

New Delhi: S&P Global Ratings Friday said India’s credit rating would be retained at the current level for the next two years, and the country will see a slightly faster pace of growth in the next couple of years that will support its sovereign rating. S&P, which had in March seen the Indian economy growing by 11% in the fiscal year to March 2022, saw GDP growth rate dropping to 9.8% under the “moderate” scenario, where infections peak in May, and falling to as low as 8.2% in “severe” scenario under which caseload would peak only in late June.



₹50,000 cr liquidity will ease access to emergency services, says PNB MD

Bhubaneswar: RBI has come out with a timely and proactive set of announcements for all stakeholders, including individuals, small businesses, and MSMEs, to mitigate the incipient challenges and support growth impulses at the ground level, writes SS Mallikarjuna Rao, MD and CEO, Punjab National Bank (PNB). Simultaneously, measures have been announced for the lending institutions as well as the State governments to ensure ample liquidity & credit flow support. The on-tap liquidity of ₹50,000 crore for Covid related healthcare sector along with the incentives for banks like priority sector classification and higher interest on surplus liquidity window will ease access to emergency health services and reaffirms the immediate objective of preserving life and livelihood. Similarly, SLTRO of ₹10,000 crore will facilitate last-mile credit delivery to MFIs adversely impacted by the current wave of the pandemic.



SS MALLIKARJUNA RAO

SBI, EIB to invest €100mn in SMEs focussed on ‘climate change’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, May 7: The European Investment Bank (EIB) and the country’s largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) Friday entered into a pact to jointly pump 100 million in equity financing into Indian small businesses focussed on climate change and sustainability.
An agreement got signed on the margins of the European Union-India leaders meeting in Portugal, where both the financial institutions agreed to back the initiative, as per a statement.
SBI already invests in a vehicle called Neev Funds for its impact investing objectives, and the two entities have created ‘Neev Fund II’ for taking ahead this partnership. This is one of the EIB’s first private equity investments in India.
“Neev Fund II will provide equity to SMEs focusing on miti-

gating climate risks, promoting social development, job creation, and gender equality at scale,” SBI chairman Dinesh Khara said.
He added that the cooperation with EIB, one of the world’s largest providers of climate finance, will further strengthen and deepen the bond between India and the European Union.
The EIB and SBI will together support the new Neev Fund II investment fund that will unlock climate action and sustainability investment by businesses across India through new equity financing.
Under the management of SBI Cap Ventures, an SBI group company, Neev Fund II will invest up to Euro 100 million in Indian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and provide growth and expansion capital to companies offering solutions for clean en-



ergy, electric vehicles, efficient use of raw materials, and water and circular economy projects in the country, the statement said.
The fund will enable Indian innovative and emerging companies to fund their growth through eq-

uity or quasi-equity instruments, it added.
“Innovative solutions often require innovative forms of financing, such as private equity funds. Our partnership with the State Bank of India will create a much-

Innovative solutions often require innovative forms of financing like private equity funds. Our partnership with SBI will create a much-needed source of equity financing for climate action and environmental sustainability solutions offered by innovative SMEs
CHRISTIAN KETTEL THOMSEN | HEAD OF OPERATIONS (INDIA), EIB

SBI Ventures’ managing director and chief executive Suresh Kozhikote said the Neev Fund generates commercially attractive returns while making a significant positive contribution to society.
Neev Fund II will provide equity and quasi-equity to SMEs (Small and medium-sized enterprises), targeting sectors that support the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly aiming to limit climate change through energy, agricultural, water, and waste management technologies.
“This could include businesses offering solutions for the development of new technology for climate change, environmental protection, electric vehicles, and any other innovative products and services that could benefit climate action across the world, the statement said.

RED DEVILS IN YELLOW SUBMARINES' RADAR

Cavani scores brace as Manchester United finally reach a major final under Solskjaer with 8-5 aggregate triumph over Roma in Europa League

Villarreal wall too strong to breach for Gunners as Arsenal held goalless resulting a 1-2 loss in the semifinals

Rome, May 7: Manchester United have finally reached a major final under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. Not that he was in the mood for celebrating Thursday.

An inspired goalkeeping performance by David de Gea ensured United were only beaten 2-3 by Roma in a wild second leg of the Europa League semifinals, allowing the English team to complete an 8-5 victory on aggregate.

It ended a run of four losses in the semifinals of major tournaments in the last 18 months for Solskjaer, who is under pressure to win United's first trophy since 2017. That came in the Europa League, when Jose Mourinho was manager.

Yet Solskjaer was critical of his team for giving Roma so many chances at the Stadio Olimpico to turn around a semifinal that looked over after United scored five second-half goals to win the first leg 6-2 last week.

"We played one very good half at Old Trafford that got us through," he said. "The second half today was disappointing. Very, very poor."

Villarreal will be United's opponent in the May 26 final in the Polish city of Gdansk after beating Arsenal 2-1 on aggregate in the other semifinal. The second leg finished 0-0, Thursday.

Roma created enough clear-cut opportunities to pull off what would have been another remarkable comeback, three years ago after it recovered from 4-1 down against Barcelona in the Champions League quarterfinals, winning the second leg 3-0 at the Olimpico to advance.

Goals by Edin Dzeko and Bryan Cristante, in the 57th and 60th



IMPRESSIVE SHOW: Manchester United goalie David de Gea denies Roma a scoring opportunity with a spectacular save, Thursday

minute, briefly put Roma 2-1 ahead and that was the least the Italian team deserved after regularly breaching United's defense. The visitors were thankful for a slew of saves by De Gea in both halves, ensuring Nicola Zalewski's deflected 83rd-minute winner on the 19-year-old's debut proved only a consolation for Roma.

"It was always going to be one of those games that was going to be open," Solskjaer said. "It could easily have been 6-6. A strange game of football."

"Luckily we have one of the best goalkeepers in the world in nets," he added about De Gea, who has fallen behind Dean Henderson in United's pecking

London, May 7: Unai Emery is heading back to the Europa League final — at the expense of the club that fired him last season.

Emery's Villarreal held Arsenal to a 0-0 draw in the second leg of their semifinal Thursday, which was enough to secure a 2-1 aggregate win and set up a final against Manchester United May 26 in Poland.

Emery will be looking for his fourth Europa League title after winning three straight with Sevilla and then taking Arsenal to the final two years ago.

On his first return to the Emirates since being fired in November 2019, Emery calmly walked out of the tunnel so late that he nearly missed the kickoff. He quickly shook his replacement Mikel Arteta's hand and then watched as his new team held a toothless Arsenal at bay without ever looking seriously threatened.

For Arsenal, the failure to overturn the deficit means the team is facing the likelihood of being shut

out of European competition for the first time in 25 years.

Villarreal controlled the first half, nearly scoring an early goal when Samu Chukwueze fired a curling shot in the fifth minute. But Arsenal goalkeeper Bernd Leno was alert and palmed the ball out for a corner.

The visitors were nearly gifted a goal in the 14th, when Arsenal midfielder Thomas Partey's wild back-pass from long range nearly fooled Leno, who had to backpedal quickly to get the ball under control.

Arsenal lacked spark in the first half, but nearly went ahead in the 26th when captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's shot hit the outside of the post.

The forward nearly scored again in the 39th through a goalkeeping error when his shot was spilled by Geronimo Rulli and the ball squeezed between his legs. But the keeper was able to claim it before the ball could trickle over the line.

Aubameyang hit the post again in the second half, this time on the inside. And Arsenal defender Rob

Holding had two headers that went close, but Villarreal's defense saw the match out.

Emery is already the most successful coach in the history of the Europa League, winning it three times in a row with Sevilla from 2014-2016. But he failed on his fourth attempt in 2019, when Arsenal lost 1-4 to Chelsea in the final.

Emery pumped his fists and screamed in joy at the final whistle before going to shake Arteta's hand. Villarreal players were ecstatic, celebrating on the field by unfurling and holding a big banner in Spanish that said 'Nos vemos en Polonia', or 'We'll see you in Poland'.

Arsenal's elimination will anger fans further as the team sits mid-table in the Premier League and has little chance of qualifying for even the Europa League next season.

It's a situation Arsenal hasn't been in since the 1995-96 season — a year that fell between the illustrious managerial eras of George Graham and Arsene Wenger.



EL MATADOR'S NIGHT OUT: Edinson Cavani reacts with his trademark celebration after one of his goals against Roma



EXPRESSIONS SAY IT ALL: Villarreal players (in yellow) begin celebrations after the final whistle, while Arsenal players look dejected in London, Thursday

WTC FINAL & ENGLAND SERIES

Jadeja, Vihari back in India Test squad



New Delhi, May 7: The fit-again duo of all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja and batsman Hanuma Vihari returned to a 20-man strong Indian squad announced Friday for next month's World Test Championship (WTC) final against New Zealand and a five-match series against England.

The selectors also picked four standby players — Abhimanyu Easwaran, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan, and Arzan Nagwaswalla, the BCCI stated in a press release.

KL Rahul, who underwent a surgery after being diagnosed with appendicitis, and Wriddhiman Saha, infected with COVID-19 during the recently-suspended IPL, have been included subject to their fitness.

Both Jadeja and Vihari had endured injuries during the away series against Australia earlier this year. Out-of-form spinner Kuldeep Yadav and pacer Navdeep Saini have been left out of the squad, which is expected to depart for England for the twin assignments in the third week of this month.

THE SQUAD

Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli (C), Ajinkya Rahane (VC), Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (WK), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Shardul Thakur, Umesh Yadav, KL Rahul (subject to fitness clearance), Wriddhiman Saha (Wk; subject to fitness clearance); **Standby players:** Abhimanyu Easwaran, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan, Arzan Nagwaswalla.

The WTC final against the Black Caps will be held from June 18 in Southampton followed by the Tests against England from August 4.

The Test series against England will start in Nottingham, followed by matches at the Lord's (August 12 to 16), Leeds (August 25 to 29), The Oval (September 2 to 6) and Manchester (September 10 to 14).

Rowers Arjun, Arvind qualify for Tokyo

New Delhi, May 7: Indian rowers Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh qualified for the Olympics in men's lightweight double sculls event after finishing second in the final race of the Asia/Oceania Continental Qualifying Regatta in Tokyo Friday.

Another Indian, Jakar Khan finished fourth in the men's singles sculls final which offers five Olympic quotas but he missed out as a country gets only one qualifying spot from this regatta. The top three qualify for Olympics in men's lightweight double sculls event.

"A country can qualify in only one boat from this regatta and since



Arjun Lal Jat (L) & Arvind Singh

Singh were better placed as they were second," she added.

Arjun Lal and Arvind will be the only Indian rowers in Tokyo Games which open July 23 as the country will not participate in other Olympic qualifiers due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"There is another Olympic qualifier in Italy but we are not sending anybody due to the COVID-19 situation. So, this will be our only participation in the Olympics," Deo said referring to the deadly second wave in the country which has led to several countries imposing bans on flights from India.

A 14-member Indian team participated in the event held at the Sea Forest Waterway on Tokyo Bay.

Zverev beats Rafa in last 8

Madrid, May 7: Alexander Zverev ended his winless streak on clay against Rafa Nadal Friday, keeping the Spaniard from winning a sixth Madrid Open.

Zverev beat Nadal 6-4, 6-4 in the quarterfinals, picking up his third consecutive win over the 20-time grand slam champion — but first on clay. His previous two wins over Nadal were on indoor hard courts.

The sixth-ranked German broke second-ranked Nadal's serve twice in the first set, rallying from 4-2 down, and once in the second. He conceded only two break opportunities.

Nadal, who is preparing to play for a 14th title at the French Open, had been improving after a slow start to his clay season. He lost to Andrey Rublev in the Monte Carlo quarterfinals then beat Stefanos Tsitsipas in the Barcelona Open final.

Zverev will next face Dominic Thiem in a rematch of the 2018 final. Thiem, who lost to Zverev in straight sets in the Spanish capital three years ago, defeated John Isner 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Seema in line for Tokyo berth

Sofia (Bulgaria), May 7: Indian wrestler Seema Bisla kept herself in line for Tokyo Games qualification by reaching the semifinals of the World Olympic Qualifiers but Nisha and Pooja were ousted from the competition here, Friday.

Competing in the 50kg category, Seema lost only two points en route the semifinals, where she will clash with Poland's Anna Lukasiak for a place in the Tokyo Games.

Seema, who won a bronze at the recent Asian Championship in Almaty, was solid in her defence



against Belarus' Anastasiya Yanotava and logged four points in each of the periods to win 8-0.

The Indian was more dominant against Sweden's Emma Jonna Denise Malmgren whom she pinned with 43 seconds to spare to win the bout. Seema used her power better and stayed aggressive. She was leading 10-2 when she found a way to pin her rival.

Nisha (68kg) though found the immensely powerful Bulgarian Mimi Hristova in her quarterfinal which she lost by technical superiority.

The Bulgarian pulled off a breathtaking four-point throw after which Nisha could not find a way to break her rival's defence. Nisha had won her opening bout by fall against Poland's Natalia Iwona Strzalka.

Meanwhile, Pooja, the third Indian in the competition, fizzled out in the 76kg opening bout, losing 3-4 to Lithuania's Kamile Gaucaite.

Three Indian women wrestlers have so far qualified for the Tokyo Olympics — Vinesh Phogat (53kg), Anshu Malik (57kg) and Sonam Malik (62kg).

Suarez to face friend Messi in Spanish league



Barcelona, May 7: Luis Suarez and Lionel Messi often spent time hanging out together at their neighboring homes on the Mediterranean coast when taking a break from scoring goals for Barcelona.

It will be less relaxing Saturday when Suarez returns to Camp Nou with Atletico Madrid, aiming to inflict a major blow on his former team's title hopes in the Spanish league.

Facing mounting debts and desperate to reduce its payroll, Barcelona sold the 34-year-old Suarez to Atletico on the cheap at the start of the season.

The deal, which could reach 6 million euros (USD7 million), proved to be a steal for Atletico. While not as mobile as he once was, Suarez's world-class finishing touch gave Atletico coach Diego Simeone the scorer he had failed to find since Antoine Griezmann swapped clubs for Barcelona.

Suarez missed the first meeting of the teams in November due to the coronavirus. Yannick Carrasco's goal — and its smothering defense — gave Atletico a 1-0 win that helped to build a lead that it is still clinging to with four rounds left.

Atletico play third-placed Barcelona a day before second-placed Real Madrid host fourth-placed Sevilla on a weekend that promises to shake up the closest title fight in years. Atletico are two points ahead of both Madrid and Barcelona, while Sevilla is a further four points behind.