



PROMOTING NATIONALISM

Actor Urvashi Rautela says she will surely add Indian-ness in all her future international projects

LEISURE P2



SITUATION DETERIORATING

The 'war between Israel and Palestinian militants escalated with both sides pounding each other's locations

INTERNATIONAL P10



MAN CITY SEAL TITLE

Manchester United's 1-2 loss at home to Leicester helps Manchester City seal Premier League 2020-21 title

SPORTS P12

Over 22L need 2nd dose

ODISHA ASKS CENTRE TO PROVIDE 25 LAKH COVISHIELD DOSES TO SPEED UP VACCINATION

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: The Odisha government once again demanded that the Centre should provide at least 25 lakh doses of Covishield vaccine immediately. This needs to be done to speed up vaccination in Odisha and the doses will be required for people who are awaiting the second jab. Currently more than 22 lakh people in the state are still waiting for the second dose of the vaccine.

Odisha Health Minister Naba Kishore Das raised the demand before Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan during a meeting conducted over video Wednesday.

"During the meeting with the Union Health Minister, I urged him to immediately provide at least 25 lakh doses of Covishield as about 22 lakh people are waiting for the second dose. I have intimated him about letters written to the Centre regarding this," Das said after the meeting.

Odisha has also demanded 30,000 oxygen cylinders, 500 ventilators and a bulk amount of rapid antigen test kits from the Centre, Das said. It should be stated here that Odisha has been in the forefront of supplying the life-saving gas to states that have a shortage of oxygen.

Through there is no crisis of oxygen production in Odisha, the state has urged Vardhan to pro-



GETTING PROTECTION: An elderly woman gets the jab at a vaccination camp in the City

OP PHOTO

Gap between 1st-2nd shots extended

BHUBANESWAR: Following modification by the Union Health Ministry, Wednesday, the second dose of Covishield will be given only after six weeks (42 days) in Odisha. Additional Chief Secretary, Health department, Pradipta Mohapatra has asked collectors, municipal commissioners and chief district medical officers to follow this policy. Till now, the second dose of vaccination was allowed after 28 days. Necessary modification has been made in the CoWIN portal in this regard, informed Mohapatra. It is being alleged that the gap has been enhanced due to shortage of the vaccine. However, the Centre has claimed Covishield offers greater protection when the second dose is given between six to eight weeks.

vide 15,000 B-type cylinders and 15,000 D-type cylinders to ensure smooth supply of oxygen to Covid-19 hospitals.

At present the daily demand in Odisha for oxygen is about 52.9MT (metric tonne) while the state is supplying 155.51MT of oxygen

through cylinders and 375MT through LMO (liquid medical oxygen), he pointed out. Das also informed that there is sufficient stock of essential drugs like Remdesivir in Odisha.

Das has urged the Centre to start a helpline number to connect with National Task Force to provide technical assistance to the states. "At times the advice of the National Task Force varies from those provided by WHO. Hence to get over the confusion a 24x7 helpline should be functional, Das asserted. Then it will be beneficial for all states concerned, he added.

7 corpses surface in Panna district

Administration carrying out cremations promptly

AGENCIES

Bhopal/Ballia, May 12: Even as the controversy surrounding decomposed bodies found floating in the Ganges continued, it was the turn of Madhya Pradesh to come into the limelight over the same issue. Over half-a-dozen bodies were found floating Wednesday in Runj river in Panna district of Madhya Pradesh. The discovery of the corpses triggered panic among the local residents of the river, more so as hundreds of bodies were found floating in Bihar and UP in the Ganges just a day back.

Residents said corpses were floating in the river for four days, but the matter came to light Tuesday after a video of those went viral on social media. "The decomposed bodies can be seen easily in the river. We do not know whether the bodies belong to Covid-19 infected people or not, but this is the first time we have seen floating bodies in this river. We are not allowing kids to come out of houses as we are afraid of the spread of the disease in the village," said Rajesh Yadav, a Panna resident.

7 more bodies discovered in UP

BALLIA (UP): With seven more bodies seen floating in the Ganges, the total count in this Uttar Pradesh district has reached 52, an official said Wednesday. The district administration is immediately performing the last rites of the deceased as there is a possibility that they had contracted Covid-19. According to Ballia residents, at least 45 bodies were seen floating near the Ujjay, Kulhadia and Bharauli ghats in the Narahi area Tuesday evening. Early Wednesday morning, seven more bodies were found, taking the total count to 52, an official said. The corpses were seen floating under the Ballia-Buxar bridge.

Start Strong. Grow Stronger.

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Rise in fuel prices continues unabated

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 12: Petrol and diesel prices Wednesday were hiked by 25 paise per litre each, the third increase this week. The new hike propelled petrol prices past the ₹100-mark per litre mark in more cities including Bhopal and Indore. Petrol and diesel prices are now at record high across India, price notification of state-owned fuel retailers showed.

In Delhi, petrol now comes for ₹92.05 per litre and diesel is priced at ₹82.61. In seven increases, petrol price has risen by ₹1.66 per litre and diesel by ₹1.88 per litre.

Bhopal earned Wednesday the distinction of being the first state capital in India to see petrol cross the ₹100 per litre mark. Petrol in the city now costs ₹100.08 a litre.

Indore had petrol priced at ₹100.16 per litre.

Sri Ganganagar district of Rajasthan had the costliest petrol and diesel prices in India at ₹102.96 per litre and ₹95.33 a litre, respectively.

As petrol and diesel prices continued to rise,

CITY FUEL PRICE	
PETROL	₹92.81 (+0.26)
DIESEL	₹90.06 (+0.28)

the Congress took a jibe at the Centre stating 'Vikas' is back. Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala tweeted, "Vikas had to be suspended briefly due to state elections. Parivar of 'Reformists' & 'Positivists' will be pleased to note that 'Vikas' is now firmly back on track. As petrol has now crossed ₹100 in Bhopal."

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Opposition should stop misreading the public. It is govt's job.

COVID-19 HANDLING IN STATE

Odisha refutes Centre's report

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: Even though the daily new Covid-19 infections are hovering around 10,000 for last several days in Odisha, Public Health department director Dr Niranjan Mishra said Wednesday that the situation is still under control. He asserted that Odisha's situation is much better than the national average as it continues to witness less number of daily positive cases than predicted earlier.

"We are witnessing less number of positive cases against our earlier prediction. We had predicted around 1.5 lakh active cases by this time, but it is below 1,00,000. The number of daily positive cases is also under control," Mishra told reporters.



RT-PCR tests being carried out Wednesday at the parking space of a mall in the City

17 NEW FATALITIES

BHUBANESWAR: Odisha registered Wednesday 10,982 new COVID-19 cases over the last 24 hours, taking the total tally in the state to 5,65,648. There were 17 new fatalities in the state taking the toll to 2,232. Out of the new cases reported Wednesday 6,149 were from quarantine centres while 4,833 persons contracted the virus locally. Khurda district reported the highest number of cases with 1,539 persons testing positive for the disease. It was followed by Sundargarh with 964 new infections.

porters. He was reacting to the Union Health Ministry report Tuesday which had pulled up Odisha for failing to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Mishra, however, admitted that more efforts are needed to control the rate of positivity. "We will have to be more cautious to reduce the rate of positivity," he added.

In order to augment testing capacity, the government has already announced to set up more RT-PCR laboratories across Odisha. "Once that happens more cases will be detected, leading to containment," Mishra pointed out.

WHEN HUNGER PANGS BITE



Beneficiaries throw caution to the wind as they line up for breakfast without masks and proper social distancing at Bali Sahi locality in Cuttack

OP PHOTO

Oppn leaders unite on free vax

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 12: Leaders of 12 opposition parties Wednesday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking a free mass vaccination campaign against coronavirus. The signatories to the joint letter include Congress president Sonia Gandhi, former Prime Minister and JDS leader HD Deve Gowda and

NCP supremo Sharad Pawar. Others who have signed the letter are Uddhav Thackeray (Shiv Sena), Mamata Banerjee (TMC), MK Stalin (DMK), and Hemant Soren (JMM). Former Chief Ministers Farooq Abdullah (NC) and Akhilesh Yadav (SP) have also signed the letter, alongside Tejashwi Yadav (RJD), D Raja (CPI) and Sitaram Yechury (CPI-M).

"Unfortunately, your government has either ignored or refused all suggestions. This only compounded the situation to reach such an apocalyptic human tragedy. Procure vaccines centrally from all available sources - global and domestic. Immediately begin a free, universal mass vaccination campaign across India," the leaders said in the letter. **MORE P8**

Prem removed, Singh appointed new BMC chief

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 11: In a surprising move, the Odisha government Wednesday appointed 1997-batch IAS officer Sanjay Kumar Singh as the new commissioner of Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC). He will also continue to hold additional charge of vice-chairman of Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) and CEO of Bhubaneswar Smart City Limited (BSCL). The outgoing commissioner Prem Chandra Chaudhary has been transferred as the Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in General Administration and Public Grievance department.

Chaudhary was looking after Covid-19 management. So his sudden transfer during the pandemic has come as a surprise to many. Speculations are rife that higher authorities in the government were not pleased with his work and hence decided to remove him.

Hemant Sharma has been given additional charge of Skill Development and Technical Education department after Singh's transfer. Bishnupada Sethi will look after Information and Public Relations (I&PR) department.

MARKET WATCH		
INDEX		VARIATION
SENSEX	48690.80	↓ 471.01
NIFTY	14696.50	↓ 154.30
DOLLAR	73.99	↑ ₹0.09
EURO	89.27	↓ ₹0.23
GOLD	₹47,537	↓ ₹96
SILVER	₹71,372	↓ ₹557

WEATHER		
	BHUB	CTK
MAX	35.8°C	36.0°C
MIN	22.1°C	21.0°C
Humidity	62%	63%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast: Light rain very likely		

Real playboy: Bill regularly held strippers' parties

BIOGRAPHY SUGGESTS GATES AND MELINDA HAD STRAINED RELATIONS EVEN WHEN THEY DATED

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New York, May 12: Mega-billionaire couple Bill and Melinda Gates has announced that they are getting a divorce. The details of the divorce are being reportedly worked out. When Bill and Melinda announced that they were divorcing after 27 years of married life, it had come as a big surprise to the whole world. Now more skeletons are tumbling out of the closet as far as Bill is concerned. A biographer has spilled the beans about the Microsoft co-founder and described him as a womanising party-boy during his early years.



The biographer James Wallace has claimed that Gates once allegedly held naked parties with

strippers during his wild bachelor days according to the 'Daily Mail'. The alleged parties took

place at Bill's Laurelhurst, Washington home and were first detailed in Wallace's 1997 book, 'Overdrive: Bill Gates and the Race to Control Cyberspace'.

In the biography Wallace described the parties as 'wild' and said the raunchy events would often see Bill and his entourage flock to one of Seattle's all-nude nightclubs and 'hire dancers to come to his home and swim naked with his friends in his indoor pool'.

Wallace also described a young Bill as a renowned 'womaniser', with his antics reportedly placing a strain on his relationship with Melinda even while they were dat-

ing, 'The Sun' reported.

"Though Gates began dating French (Melinda's maiden name) in 1988, he continued to play the field for a while, especially when he was out of town on business. He would frequently hit on female journalists who covered Microsoft and the company industry," it further said.

"His (Bill) womanising was well known, although not well reported, because Bill and Microsoft spooned stories to industry writers for such papers as the 'New York Times', and none of them wanted the flow of information to stop," the report added.

leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
If your work has anything to do with money, today you will be busy counting your riches! If you've applied for a loan, it may get sanctioned today. Look for variety, says Ganesh, and you may find your day filled with smiles and what not.

TAURUS
You are likely to be mentally alert and watchful today, says Ganesh. Creativity will run through your veins no matter what you attempt. You may dabble in performing arts, designing, graphics or special effects.

GEMINI
Your physical appearance and personal attitude will see a marked improvement today, predicts Ganesh. A well-groomed you will climb up the popularity chart among peers, friends and members of the opposite sex.

CANCER
You will be firing all cylinders in the creativity department, says Ganesh. Even your colleagues may pitch in, and will give you new ideas to make your job better. Those looking for a new job will ace the interview and clear the selection process as easily as clearing the fog from their glasses.

LEO
Karmic balance dictates an equitable distribution of joy and sorrow, says Ganesh. So if your day seems drab and depressing today, rest assured, your evening shall be all the more refreshing and exciting.

VIRGO
Play dodge ball with prejudice today. Do not let intolerance find shelter in you today, advises Ganesh. Instead, chances are you will seek to find love, affection and goodwill among those around you.

LIBRA
Lights, camera, and action! Be prepared as the limelight is focused on you on this very motivating and inspiring day, enabling you to attract excellent public praise. Today is an encouraging day to set in motion innovative projects, especially for those who desire to be their own masters and embark upon fulfilling self-financed ideas.

SCORPIO
You are most likely to resent the dominating and overbearing nature of your partner today. Patience will probably go to the dumps in this case then. But Ganesh advises you to sit together and resolve all personality clashes and quarrels in view of the larger scheme of things.

SAGITTARIUS
The nerd in you will rise to the fore today. Religious literature will catch your fancy. Ganesh also sees you diving deep into pages of detective tomes, murder and science fiction. Au contraire, find some relief from the roller-coaster by listening to some soothing music.

CAPRICORN
The chances of you meeting financial success are few, but they are there nonetheless, says Ganesh. If you really want to improve your account balance and settle all the burgeoning debts, focus on what all needs to be done, and get it done without delay.

AQUARIUS
The day is taxing. You may find that others have dumped their share of work on you. But you are not one to admit defeat, and will deal with the challenge squarely, says Ganesh. You will outwit your opponents, and toast your success by starlight!

PISCES
While your day is unlikely to be very satisfactory, keeping your expectations low will help lessen your disappointment, says Ganesh. However, the evening is likely to be as refreshing as your day was depressing, with all the socialising in store for you.



JOLIE ADMITS BEING PICKY ABOUT DATING PARTNERS

Hollywood star Angelina Jolie quips she has been single 'for a long time' because she is too picky about partners. Jolie divorced Brad Pitt in 2019, and the former couple has six children -- Maddox (19), Pax (17), Zahara (16), Shiloh (14), and the twins Knox and Vivienne (12).

SCARLETT TO BE HONOURED AT MTV MOVIE & TV AWARDS

American actress Scarlett Johansson will receive the Generation Award at MTV Movie & TV Awards this year. Recipients of the award in the past have included the likes of Robert Downey Jr., Tom Cruise, Will Smith, Dwayne Johnson, Jim Carrey, Adam Sandler, Reese Witherspoon and Sandra Bullock.



Tamannaah shares her key to happiness

Mumbai: Actress Tamannaah Bhatia plays an ethical hacker in the upcoming series *November Story*, and she feels the project helped her explore creative nuances. She adds that her joy lies in fans resonating strongly with the characters she portrays. Tamannaah plays Anuradha, and she feels it is a character that stands out among all others she has portrayed so far. "*November Story* equipped me with the flair to explore novel creative nuances. The script, the storyline

and Ram Subramanian's direction to a great extent leveraged my on-screen depiction of Anuradha, a young ethical hacker who rises to the occasion when it comes to saving her father from being punished for murder," she said.

Tamannaah feels happy when the audience resonates with her roles. "I always find great joy when fans resonate strongly with my reel characters, which is why I pay great attention to the finer details," added the *Bahubali* actress.

A seven-episode whodunit, *November Story* also includes Pasupathy, GM Kumar, Aruldass and Vivek Prasanna among others. **IANS**



'It took 16 years to reach this place'

Mumbai: Actor Pratik Gandhi, who became a pan-India sensation last year with his portrayal of Harshad Mehta in the popular series *Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story*, says it took him over a decade to reach where he is today.

Post *Scam 1992*, Pratik, who has made a mark on the Gujarati screen and stage, is set to appear as a solo hero in Hardik Gajjar's film *Atithi Bhoot Bhava*, co-starring Jackie Shroff and Sharmin Segal.

He said, "When I came to Bombay in 2004, I had an engineering degree in my hand and some sort of theatre experience from my hometown, and I thought I will be making it big soon, but it took almost 16 years to reach this place."

Recently, though, Pratik faced the camera with a very different challenge than testing his histrionics. He was on the set of *Star Vs Food*, where, under the guidance of Chef Vedit Aren, he was seen trying his hand at whipping up cold-roasted globe artichokes and portobello mushrooms. **IANS**



Urvashi tried adding Indianness to her int'l album

Mumbai: Actress Urvashi Rautela, who has shot her debut international music album *Versace Baby* with Egyptian actor Mohamed Ramadan, says she has tried to ensure an element of Indianness in it.

"I really can't wait for all of you guys to enjoy this and I have tried to add a lot of Bollywood elements to it, as I am a proud Indian. Whatever project I am a part of, I will always make sure it has a lot of Indianness. So, yes, you are going to see a lot of Bollywood in *Versace Baby*," she said.

"It's very special and very close to my heart. My parents, family and friends are extremely overwhelmed and excited about it," she added.

"It's a huge honour for an Indian to be a part of this humungous international project, which is a music album called *Versace Baby* and that too is backed up by the world's biggest brand Versace itself," added Urvashi.

Winslet, Ronan shine in Ammonite

Kate Winslet and Saoirse Ronan play out an intense romance in Francis Lee's bleak new art house effort *Ammonite* that weaves fiction and speculation into a fabric of facts.

Lee's script is based in England of the 1800s and narrates the story of Mary Anning (Winslet), a fossil collector and palaeontologist who gained fame for her fossil findings along the English Channel. Lee borrows from an unsubstantiated slice of Mary's life to set up his narrative.

As the film begins, Mary is struggling to make ends meet. She has seen better days professionally, and when a wealthy geologist approaches Mary to entrust her with the job of looking after his ailing wife Charlotte (Ronan) while he is away on tour, she cannot afford to say no. He also purchases an ammonite that Mary found at the sea shore.

Lee's storytelling primarily re-



CAST: Kate Winslet, Saoirse Ronan, Gemma Jones, James McArdle
DIRECTION: Francis Lee

volves around the two women, and he has invested a lot of effort in drawing up emotional details.

Winslet gets to essay Mary as a weather-beaten survivor, almost battered by the ravages of time.

It is almost as if Lee finds a likeness between the character and the fossils she deals with - worn out and yet quietly bearing every storm. It is an absorbing character sketch, richly rendered by a master actress in what is definitely her most consummate performance in years.

Ronan's Charlotte, in comparison, could appear underwritten,

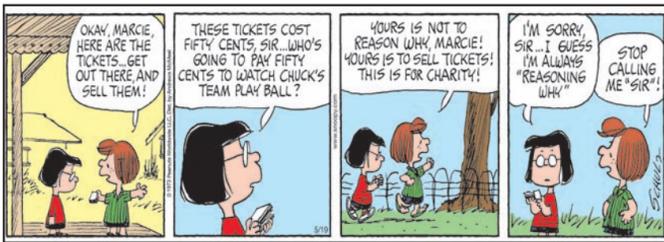
Film Review

considering the impact she will actually leave in the plot. We don't get a complete idea of who Charlotte really is. Ronan, however, makes Charlotte immensely fascinating, bringing alive every twist of her persona with understated ease.

The idea of setting up a same-sex romance between two women in 19th century England holds appeal, and Lee lets the impact soak into his audience's minds at an unhurried pace.

The aura of gloom about the film would seem deliberate, meant to quietly underline the melancholy about Mary's existence. *Ammonite* was never meant to be a happy film, and Stephane Fontaine's camerawork along with Chris Wyatt's editing brings alive that idea in the frames. **AGENCIES**

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

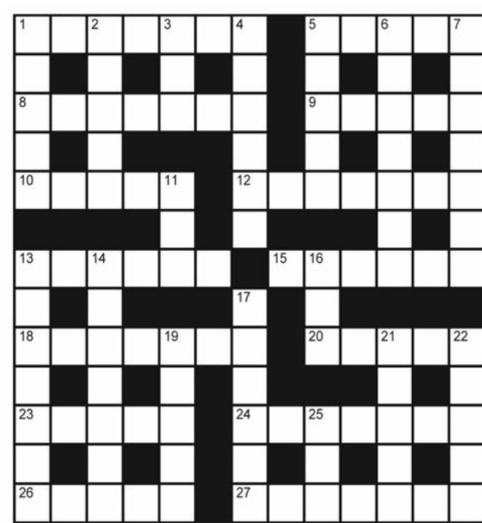


BREVITY



FUN post

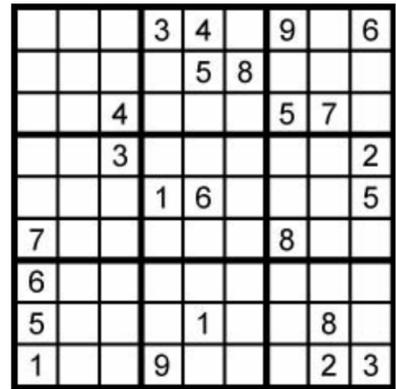
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Caused a melee
 - 5 Station
 - 8 Love or hate, e.g.
 - 9 Like the flu
 - 10 Chronic nag
 - 12 Erode (3,4)
 - 13 Computer key
 - 15 Enthusiastic (4,2)
 - 18 Unpredictable
 - 20 Roof overhangs
 - 23 Ogre
 - 24 Get better
 - 26 They go up and down (2-3)
 - 27 Chic
- Down**
- 1 Pub orders
 - 2 French romance
 - 3 Waikiki wear
 - 4 Stubborn sort
 - 5 Golfer's leftover
 - 6 Old headwear
 - 7 What a fox hates to hear (5-2)
 - 11 Humour
 - 13 Cook in oil (4-3)
 - 14 It's against the law
 - 16 Consume
 - 17 Journalist
 - 19 Ocean motions
 - 21 Quartet member
 - 22 Odour
 - 25 Bakery offering

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS



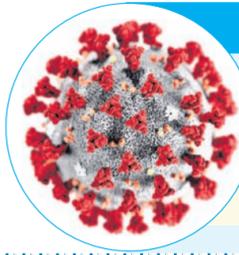
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



FIRE SAFETY

Fire brigade personnel conduct a mock drill at a hospital in Cuttack, Wednesday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	16,07,21,725	13,85,04,423	33,37,522
India	2,33,40,938	1,93,82,642	2,54,197
Odisha	5,65,648	4,73,680	2,232

Govt for revenue services on wheels

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: With a view to providing revenue services at the doorstep of citizens, the state government has directed the district Collectors to undertake measures for delivery of services through 'Rajaswa Ratha' during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Revenue and Disaster Management secretary Bishnupada Sethi has written a letter to all the Collectors (except for Ganjam) in this regard. The teshil office of Ganjam has started this innovative way of delivery of services through Rajaswa Ratha (revenue services on wheels).

Stating that it can be considered as the best practice for good governance, Sethi said the idea is meant for collecting applications and documents for mutation and certificate services and distribution of RoRs (record of rights) and various certificates at



The mutation and certificate services delivered in teshil offices have been made completely online. However, people having no internet facility at home or lacking the digital literacy are still visiting the revenue offices or Mo Seva Kendras for assistance

PANDEMIC ERA

■ Stating that it can be considered as the best practice for good governance, Sethi said the idea is meant for collecting applications and documents for mutation and certificate services and distribution of RoRs and various certificates at the doorstep of citizens

■ As part of 5T action plan, the Revenue and Disaster Management department has undertaken many citizen-centric initiatives to deliver public services to citizens in a time-bound, transparent and hassle-free manner

the doorstep of citizens. As part of 5T action plan, the Revenue and Disaster Management department has undertaken many citizen-centric initiatives to deliver public services to citizens in a time-bound, transparent and hassle-free manner, Sethi

said in his letter.

The mutation and certificate services delivered in teshil offices have been made completely online. However, people having no internet facility at home or lacking the digital literacy are still visiting the revenue offices or Mo Seva

Kendras for assistance.

Moreover, public access to revenue offices has been curtailed due to sharp rise in Covid-19 cases in the state. Therefore, this Rajaswa Ratha idea will ensure revenue services at the doorstep of citizens.

SUMMER RITUAL



Carpenters busy constructing rafts for the upcoming Chandan Yatra of Srimandir deities at Narendra pond in Puri, Wednesday

Man arrested for duping job aspirant

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, May 12: Chauhaganj police Wednesday claimed to have arrested a person on charges of duping a job aspirant of Rs 1.60 lakh.

Accused Balaram Behera, 36, of Kunarpur under Binjharpur police limits in Jajpur district was produced in a local court, police said.

Police have seized a scooter, two mobile phones and five fake identity cards of railway employees from Behera, sources said.



Victim Soumendra Sarangi had lodged a complaint against Behera with Chauhaganj police February 1, 2021, said Cuttack Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Prateek Singh.

In January last year, Sarangi had come in contact with Behera who introduced himself as a railway employee to the former. Behera had promised to arrange a job for Sarangi in the Home department in lieu of Rs 1.60 lakh, said the complainant.

Acting upon the advice of Behera, Sarangi had paid the amount through online mode. However, Behera remained incommunicado to Sarangi after receiving the money from the latter, added the complainant.

During interrogation, Behera has informed police that he had duped one Bijay Kumar Nayak of Rs 2.30 lakh by promising him a job at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar, said the DCP. Behera has been booked in three cases at Chauhaganj police station in Cuttack and Macheswar police station in Bhubaneswar, added the DCP.

Now, drive-in testing at Bhawani Mall

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: With an aim to reduce heavy footfall at the private and public testing centres here, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), Wednesday, opened the first drive-in testing facility at Bhawani Mall at Sahid Nagar.

As per sources, citizens can drive in to the entrance of the parking lot of the mall and get their samples collected at the testing point without stepping out of their vehicles. The facility collects samples for both RT-PCR and Rapid Antigen Test (RAT).

"The initiative is launched to avoid heavy congregation at testing centres. People will not have to stand in long queues any more for the test. Anyone who complains of Covid symptoms can drive straight to the place and get tested without waiting for hours," said Suwendu Sahoo, nodal officer for Covid at the BMC.

It can be mentioned that testing centres at different Urban Primary Health Centres (UPHCs) and at the



Capital Hospital here has been witnessing serpentine queues.

Private testing facilities have fixed Rs 750 per RAT or RT-PCR test. There is piling up of samples at these labs as people in large numbers flock to these facilities.

"I had informed the BMC that I wished to get tested as I had Covid symptoms. Since I am a senior citizen and cannot drive to the centres, I had requested the testing van to collect my sample from home. However, my samples have not been taken after repeated calls for the last two days," complained Prafulla Panda, a resident of Satya Nagar.

COVID MANAGEMENT

Pradhan urges CM to set up panels at local levels

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, May 12: Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Dharmendra Pradhan Wednesday requested Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to set up Covid crisis management committees at village and municipal ward levels.

Pradhan suggested that the Covid-19 crisis management committees would have representation from all political parties in the state to facilitate synergised efforts for effective management of the virus.

The Union minister said that he had conversation with Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday on the efforts taken by the Union government to further bolster Odisha's response to the current and emerging challenges of Covid.

Pradhan said that the next 15 days are crucial for the state as far as containing Covid-19 is concerned.



► The Union minister suggested involvement of members of civil societies as volunteers and watchdogs to strengthen relief measures and containment efforts at grassroots level

► Pradhan said that the next 15 days are crucial for the state as far as containing Covid-19 is concerned

He suggested involvement of members of civil societies as volunteers and watchdogs to strengthen relief measures and containment efforts at grassroots level.

On the availability of vaccines to the state, the Union minister said that he had briefed the Chief Minister about his discussion on the matter with Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and Union minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers Mansukh Mandaviya

on extending all possible support to the state, including facilitating smooth supply of Covid-19 vaccine doses, rapid testing kits, Remdesivir and other essential drugs.

"The Union government is working with a 'whole of government approach' and is doing everything possible to respond and fight back better. Working together with synergistic efforts, both Odisha and India will combat and win this fight against the pandemic," Pradhan said.

Minister reviews infra work at 3 adopted schools

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: Electronics & Information Technology, Sports & Youth Services Minister Tusharkanti Behera Wednesday reviewed the infrastructure development work of three schools he has adopted under Mo School initiative.

In the meeting with school officials, Behera instructed the officials that focus should be on improving infrastructure such as quality and smart classrooms, clean drinking water, clean bathrooms, good and better libraries, state-of-the-art science laboratories, smart computer labs and playgrounds which will help improve the physical as well as mental well-being of the students. Earlier, in response to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's call to adopt educational institutions under the state government's 'Mo School' initiative, Behera had adopted three schools.

The minister adopted Government Nodal High School in Kakatpur, Balidia Primary School in Astarang and Khaira Government High School in Balasore.

LOCKDOWN RUSH



A long queue of vehicles spotted near Ram Mandir Square in Bhubaneswar during the window period granted in morning hours of the ongoing lockdown in City, Wednesday

School admissions extended till June 30

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: Considering the pandemic situation in state, the School and Mass Education (S&ME) department Wednesday extended the dates of admission of students into elementary and secondary classes till June 30.

As per a new instruction issued by S&ME department additional secretary, Raghuram R Iyer, the dates of admission and distribution of books have been extended till June 30 due to the surge in Covid-19 cases.

The department had earlier directed all district and block education officers (DEOs and BEOs) to complete the admission of students to elementary and secondary classes by May 31.

Due to the pandemic situation, classes pertaining to elementary wing have been suspended since March 20 last year. Besides, the examination process could not be carried out due to the virus outbreak.



As per an instruction issued by S&ME department additional secretary, Raghuram R Iyer, the dates of school admissions and distribution of books have been extended till June 30 due to prevailing pandemic situation

The S&ME department had earlier directed all district and block education officers to complete the admission of students to elementary and secondary classes by May 31

Meanwhile, classroom teaching for Class IX and X students have been suspended since April 19 this year. The government has issued instructions

regarding the promotion of students of government and aided elementary and secondary schools of the state.

As per the new instruction, the admission process should be conducted between 7am and 9am on all working days. Not more than five parents should be allowed at a time to attend the admission process.

The headmasters should ensure that Covid guidelines issued by government are strictly followed by the parents, said the instruction.

These instructions will be applicable to all government, government aided and all BSE/CHSE, Odisha affiliated schools, said the S&ME department.

The department has issued a standard operating procedure (SOP) for smooth conduct of the admission process amidst the pandemic and prevailing heatwave condition in state.

As per the SOP, all admissions based on promotion within the school will not require the presence of students or their guardians. These are rolling admissions and schools will update their admission registers accordingly, said the SOP.

COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS

Stay Home. Save Lives. Help stop Coronavirus

Protect yourself and others around you by knowing the facts and taking appropriate precautions. Follow advice provided by your local health authority.

TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19:

- ☛ Clean your hands often. Use soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- ☛ Maintain a safe distance from anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- ☛ Wear a mask when physical distancing is not possible.
- ☛ Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- ☛ Cover your nose and mouth with your bent elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- ☛ Stay home if you feel unwell.
- ☛ If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention.

A WELL WISHER

Vax soon for vulnerable population sans ID proof

STATE REPORTS 10,982 FRESH COVID-19 CASES AND 17 MORE DEATHS

PNN/AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, May 12: The state government has decided to administer Covid-19 vaccines to vulnerable people who do not possess any ID proof as part of its efforts to inoculate the entire population of Odisha.

In a letter to the district authorities and municipal commissioners, Additional Chief Secretary, Health, PK Mohapatra said vulnerable groups of citizens may not possess any of the seven prescribed identity cards for registration on CoWIN.

“Such vulnerable persons may not be denied Covid-19 vaccination for absence of identity proof,” he Mohapatra.

“Such groups of people include nomads (including sadhu/saints from various religions), prison inmates, inmates in mental health Institutions, citizens in old age homes, roadside beggars, people residing in rehabilitation centers/camps and any other identified eligible persons, aged 18 years or more, and not having any of above prescribed individual photo ID cards,” he added.

Mohapatra said that the district authorities and civic bodies will undertake appropriate preparations, including the identification and enlisting of such persons to be vaccinated.

Meanwhile, the state Wednesday reported 10,982 fresh Covid-19 cases and 17 more deaths, a Health department official said.

The cases were detected after testing 49,191 samples Tuesday, taking the test positivity rate (TPR) to 22.32 per cent. The state's TPR has been above 20 per cent since Friday.



Youths queue up at a vaccination centre in Bhubaneswar's Unit-IV area (FILE)

Currently, there are 98,230 active cases in the state.

Odisha has so far reported 5,65,648 cases and 2,232 deaths, the official said.

Of the new infections, 6,149 were reported from quarantine centres while the remaining 4,833 were local contact cases, said the official. Khurda district, of which state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, reported the highest 1,539 new cases, followed by Sundargarh (964), Cuttack (885), Angul (539) and Sambalpur (454).

These five districts account for 40 per cent of the new cases reported during the day, the official added.

Only Malkangiri out of the 30 districts recorded cases less than 100.

Angul and Khurda reported three deaths each. Kalahandi, Nuapada and Sundargarh reported two deaths each and one patient each suc-

cumbed in Balasore, Boudh, Dhenkanal, Ganjam and Puri.

Meanwhile, a release from the state police headquarters said that a total of 559 tankers carrying 10,270.298 MT of medical oxygen have been dispatched under supervision of Odisha Police till Tuesday.

The oxygen tankers were mostly dispatched from Rourkela, Jajpur, Dhenkanal and Angul districts to as many as 11 states in the country facing acute shortage of oxygen in treating the Covid patients.

During last 19 days, as many as 57 tankers were dispatched from Angul with 945.302 MT of oxygen, 147 from Dhenkanal with 2,324.32 MT of the gas, 134 from Jajpur with 2,790.112 MT of medical grade oxygen and 221 tankers from Rourkela with 4,210.564 MT of the life saving gas, the sources said.

Exam result out in record 15 days, says OPSC

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: Following a requisition from the state Health and Family Welfare department for recruitment of doctors, Odisha Public Service Commission (OPSC) took it as a challenge to complete the process as soon as possible so that the newly inducted doctors would boost the efforts of the government in the battle against the pandemic.

After giving one month time for inviting applications, the commission decided to conduct computer-based examination to reduce the duration of recruitment process.

Altogether 786 doctors have been recommended by the Odisha Public Service Commission for appointment

As per OPSC sources, 1,491 candidates appeared for the examination conducted at 15 centres across the state April 28, 2021. Rules governing recruitment of medical officers stipulated written mark (weighted 70 per cent) added to career assessment (weighted 30 per cent) shall determine the overall merit list of candidates.

After assessing both the component through developed software CSMS module, result is being published Wednesday, thus completing the recruitment in 15 days time, a record for the commission.

The OPSC said that it has fulfilled its commitment by completing the process expeditiously.

Altogether 786 doctors have been recommended by the OPSC for appointment in government service. The results are available on the website of the commission - <http://opsc.gov.in>.

BID TO FIGHT PANDEMIC



Puri Collector Samarth Verma holds discussions with the officials after inaugurating a Covid Care Centre at the Government Women's College in the Holy City, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

Locals accuse CMC of fudging Covid toll data

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, May 12: With the steep rise in Covid-19 cases in Cuttack, the fatalities due to the viral disease have also gone up. However, the official data provided by the civic authorities here regarding the deaths is allegedly being fudged.

The Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC) has made arrangements for cremation of persons dying of Covid-19 at Satichaura cremation ground. It is learnt that over 10 bodies of Covid infected are being cremated at Satichaura every day. Locals, however, have alleged that the actual figures are quite more.

According to sources in Sabitri Janaseva, a helpline service which has been assigned the work of cre-

The number of bodies of Covid patients cremated at Satichaura during April was 237 while it was 345 between May 1 and 9, said locals

mation of virus victims by the CMC authorities, 582 bodies have been cremated at Satichaura between April 1 and May 9.

On the contrary, the CMC through its official Twitter page has informed that bodies of only 91 persons who died of Covid-19 have been cremated at Satichaura since April 1, 2021.

According to sources, the number of bodies of Covid-19 patients

cremated at Satichaura during the month of April was 237 while the figure was 345 between May 1 and 9. Significantly, the number has reached 139 in the last three days.

Notably, the contract period of Sabitri Janaseva will end June 10 this year.

The civic body has already started tender process for the purpose of awarding the work of cremation of Covid victims.

Provision for cremation of bodies of Covid victims at Satichaura and Kaliaboda cremation grounds have been made in the new tender floated by the CMC authorities, a reliable source said.

On the other hand, views of officials of the civic body could not be obtained despite several attempts.

CBI files chargesheet in Anjana gangrape

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) filed a 26-page chargesheet in the sensational Anjana Mishra gangrape case of 1999 with the CBI court here Wednesday.

In its supplementary chargesheet, the investigating agency has reportedly mentioned about having adequate evidence against Bibekananda Biswal alias Biban, the prime accused in the two-decade old gangrape that had once created a flutter in the state politics.

Although the CBI had already filed chargesheet against two others for their reported involvement in the gangrape, the case remained open as Biban was on the run since the incident.

The investigation, however, gained momentum a few months ago when the Commissionerate

Police got a clue about Biban's whereabouts in Maharashtra.

On February 22, more than two decades after Mishra, then 29, was sexually assaulted while on her way from Bhubaneswar to Cuttack, Biban was arrested from Lonavala, Pune, where he was living under an assumed identity.

Mishra, on the other hand, has been claiming involvement of a few conspirators in the case. According to her, the accused had sexually abused her on the directive of those conspirators. And that naming the conspirators by the CBI would only help her get justice.

Mishra was sexually assaulted at gunpoint for nearly four hours January 9, 1999, after the car she was in with a journalist friend was forcibly stopped. At that time, Miahra was fighting an attempt-to-rape case against then state advocate general Indrajit Ray.

DGP for strict enforcement of lockdown

Odisha Police collects ₹8 crore from 2,59,246 Covid norm violators

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, May 12: The Odisha Police has collected around Rs 8,07,72,630 in fines from as many as 2,59,246 violators of Covid norms across the state since April 1 this year, Director General of Police (DGP) Abhay said in a review meeting hosted virtually, Wednesday.

“As many as 136 cases have been registered and 662 persons arrested for violation of Covid norms like not wearing or improper wearing of face masks and not maintaining social distance since April 1 this fall,” the police top brass said, adding that they have also registered around 2,026 cases under the relevant sections of the Excise Act and seized around 38,266 litre of liquor in the period.

Abhay urged the superintendents of police (SPs) and deputy commissioners of police (DCPs) to intensify Covid enforcement measures like strict implementation of lock-



down, crowd control at vaccination centres and sharp vigil against hoarding as well as black marketing of Covid essential supplies.

Asking officials to ensure empathy while enforcing the Covid norms, the DGP urged the SPs to motivate eligible police personnel to come forward for plasma donation as, according to him, it would

go a long way in saving many 'critical' Covid patients.

The top cop also asked the SPs and DCPs to ensure prompt response and redressal of public grievances received through the helpline as people would find it difficult to reach the police stations in person amid the lockdown or shutdown. Among other issues,

DGP Abhay urged the SPs and DCPs to intensify Covid enforcement measures like strict implementation of lockdown, crowd control at vaccination centres and sharp vigil against hoarding as well as black marketing of Covid essential supplies

Asking officials to ensure empathy while enforcing the Covid norms, the DGP urged the SPs to motivate eligible police personnel to come forward for plasma donation as, according to him, it would go a long way in saving many 'critical' Covid patients

Abhay also reviewed the border sealing arrangements at West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh in view of the rising infections.

Many senior police officials, including SPs, DCPs, range DIGs, IGs and commissioner of police attended the review meeting.

5 more stations for 1929 call centre

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: Newly-appointed Commissioner for Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), Sanjay Kumar Singh, Wednesday, took stock of the 24X7 call centre '1929' here and directed to add five more stations to ease the increasing workload of the staffers.

The BMC Commissioner enquired about the number of work stations engaged for incoming calls, outgoing calls and consultation with the doctors. The officials informed him that there are 25 work stations currently engaged for incoming calls, outgoing calls and doctors' consultation at the call centre. However, after learning about the call load and people's increasing dependency on the 24X7 call centre 1929, Singh directed the officials to add another five work stations. He also stated that a resting facility will be developed for the doctors and call centre executives. As per his advice, there will be two rooms for ladies and gents inside the office which will be functional, Thursday.

Furthermore, sources said that the doctors' strength at the call centre will also be increased observing the rising Covid cases. While the morning and afternoon shifts which earlier had only three doctors will now have seven, the manpower for the night shift will be doubled from two to four.

HELP DESKS AT COVID HOSPS

The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) in coordination with Bhubaneswar Smart City Limited (BSCL) will set up help desks at various Covid hospitals in the city soon. These help desks would act as vital links between the critically-ill patients and their family members. As per the plan, six help desk executives will be deployed at SUM Covid Hospital, five at KIMS Covid hospital, three at Hi-Tech and one each at Aditya-Ashwini and Blue Wheel hospitals. The executives at the Covid hospital help desks will keep updating the status of the critical patients to their family members.

LENDING A HELPING HAND



Volunteers distribute cooked food among the needy near Raj Mahal Square in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

150 twin city cops nCoV positive

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: Sources at the Commissionerate Police revealed that only 150 cops in the twin city have tested positive for the novel coronavirus as against 1,000 during the first wave of the pandemic.

Involved in most of Covid enforcement activities and considered as the Front Line Warriors (FLWs), the city police in 2020 was fiercely struck by the virus rendering many police stations in Capital city short of manpower. As per sources, out of an army of 2,500 cops here, about 1,000 were tested positive while four succumbed to the virus.

“Last year, most of FLWs had tested positive which had left us with severe manpower crunch. However, learning from our mistakes we had launched intensive vaccination drive and about 90 per cent of our workforce has got their shots. As a result, only 150 have



File photo of an on-duty policeman

Out of an army of 2,500 cops here, about 1,000 were tested positive while four succumbed to the virus

tested positive till now. Since we are dealing with public every day, we are doing the best to keep the virus at bay,” said a senior official.

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Covid hits chock-a-block jails

PRISONERS IN OVERCROWDED JAILS OF THE STATE HAVE BECOME SITTING DUCKS FOR CORONAVIRUS

9 INMATES IN KEONJHAR JAIL TEST POSITIVE

KEONJHAR: Nine undertrial prisoners (UTPs) have tested positive for Covid-19 at Keonjhar District Jail Tuesday evening, an official source said.

According to jail authorities, Covid-19 symptoms had shown in one of the inmates a few days ago. Thirty others who had come in contact with him recently underwent RT-PCR test following which the prisoner was found infected with the deadly virus.

RT-PCR testing of 30 UTPs was done and nine of them were found positive after reports came in. The infected inmates have been kept at a separate barrack in isolation,



the official added.

"One of our prisoners had been admitted to Keonjhar district headquarters hospital (DHH) after he developed Covid symptoms. He had

tested positive for Covid-19. So, we conducted test of others who had come in contact with him. After the test, others came out positive," jailer Amiya Behera said.

Covid patient flees from hospital, dies

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, May 12: A Covid patient died after he escaped from the Covid hospital at Ranki in Keonjhar district Tuesday.

The deceased has been identified as Hrushikesh Sahu, 46, a native of Telkoi. He was admitted to the hospital in critical condition following a decline in his oxygen level. His health condition improved after he was administered oxygen.

The hospital staff were preparing to give him drips when he escaped from the hospital by scaling its walls. However, he felt uneasy within a few metres from the hospital and died. Sahu's walking out of the hospital and escaping the eyes of the staff and security personnel has been recorded in the CCTV installed in the hospital.



The district administration has directed a probe into the incident and asked the centre head of Utkal Hospital to dismiss the hospital manager.

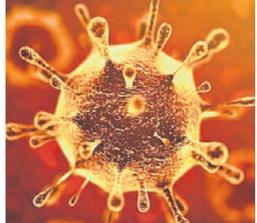
The head of the hospital has been asked to streamline the arrangements in the hospital to prevent recurrence of the incident. Collector Ashis Thakare said at a presser: The body was cremated on the basis of Covid-19 protocols.

14 inmates of Balasore jail to be sent on parole

BALASORE: Rapid spread of Covid-19 has struck panic in state's jails. Keeping this in view, the Supreme Court has directed all jails to take safety and preventive measures so that inmates are not infected with the lethal virus.

It is said, decongestion is one of the measures to ensure social distancing inside limited space in the jails.

As maintaining social distancing among inmates is a challenge in most jails facing overcrowding, the authorities of the Balasore jail



have prepared a list of 14 inmates who will be sent home on paroles in a phased manner.

However, the Director General of the Prisons will take a call on which inmates will be picked up and how long they will be permitted for parole.

It is said that the jail authorities have prepared a list of inmates who have improved their conduct over years.

Like other jails in the state, the Balasore jail is perennially overcrowded. The jail has a capacity of 480 inmates, but 585 inmates are now lodged here.

Overcrowding also throws up

challenges for the authorities on safety and management counts. On the other hand, the jail is plagued by a shortage of staff. The present staff have to work overtime.

Due to Covid circumstances, the trial process for some inmates has hampered.

"Last year, the jail authorities had sent 17 inmates on parole for 45 days while some inmates had been shifted to other jails. After their parole duration ended, they came back to the jail," said Sujit Kumar Raul, the jail superintendent.

3 critical in truck-pickup van collision

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sonepur, May 12: At least three persons' sustained grievous injuries after a speeding pickup van loaded with vegetables collided with a truck on Binika-Barpali main road under Binika police limits in Subarnapur district.

According to an eyewitness, the

van had a head-on collision with the truck while the vehicles were coming from opposite directions early Wednesday morning.

The driver and the helper of the pickup van including the helper of the truck were injured in the accident. Vehicular movement on the route was completely disrupted for a few hours following the mishap.

7 VILLAGES DECLARED CZs IN BIRMAHARAJPUR

POST NEWS NETWORK

Amarpalli, May 12: With the alarming surge of Covid-19 cases in Subarnapur district, people in Birmaharajpur blocks are spending sleepless nights. Meanwhile, the administration has declared seven villages under this block as containment zones (CZs) after several Covid-19 positive cases were reported from there.

The villages which were declared as contaminant zones include Manisapalli in Durjantaila panchayat, Badakirasira and Sahajlatha in Khandahata panchayat, Hilungur Baghasahi in Hiling panchayat, Malisahi in Champamal panchayat, Laxmi and Kamira villages in Kamira panchayat.

The administration said that the CZs will remain in force for



Admin said that the CZs would remain in force for an indefinite period as Covid-19 positive cases are soaring by the day

an indefinite period, as Covid-19 positive cases are soaring by the day.

A 22-year-old youth of Champamala village succumbed to Covid while undergoing treatment

at the Burla Covid Hospital. Similarly, a 34-year-old trader of Khandahata panchayat lost his life to the lethal virus.

A retired employee of Laxmi village, a 52-year-old social activist of Kamira village and 30-year-old woman from Khandahata panchayat also died of Covid in the last three days.

Within a week, five people have died in the block giving rise to panic among the people.

Meanwhile, reports from Kantabanji said, the administration has set up a 100-bed Covid care centre (CCC) in neighbour Bolangir. The three-storied building on the premises of the Kantabanji community health centre was converted into the CCC with necessary beds and facilities amid increasing cases of Covid-19.

LIVELIHOOD MATTERS



Fishermen catch fish from Mahanadi in Sambalpur as water level declines in the river

OP PHOTO

Covid test for pangolin after poacher tests +ve

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, May 12: A pangolin rescued from a poacher was subjected to Covid test in Mayurbhanj district. The poacher has tested positive for the virus.

The pangolin was recovered from the possession of a poacher, identified as Singu Baske in Bangiriposi area, Tuesday. The officials said that the swab sample of the accused was collected for the test and his report came out positive.

Since the pangolin was with the accused for a few days, the swab sample of the mammal was also sent for a Covid test. If found positive, the scaly animal will be kept under isolation and later released into the wild, informed the official.

Police arrested Singu on charge of smuggling the pangolin May 7. The animal is aged two years.

Crops get damaged as LI point lies defunct

POST NEWS NETWORK

Gosani, May 12: Farmers are a distressed lot at Agarkhandi panchayat under Gosani block of Gajapati district as they are unable to irrigate their farmland and raise crops. Reason: The only lift irrigation (LI) point set up at Bapujipentha has been lying defunct since it was battered by cyclone Titi.

Though the farmers have pleaded with the authorities of the Lift Irrigation Department, seeking repair of the facility, no step has been taken in this direction as yet.

Paddy, groundnut, vegetables and sugarcane have been grown in hundreds of acres of land, but the farmlands are deprived of sufficient water. The crops are being affected for lack of irrigation, alleged farmers.

The farmers lamented that the



government always claims to be working in the larger interest of the farmers and agriculture, but it is sad that a lift irrigation point is not being repaired despite repeated pleas.

Agarkhandi Samiti member Chaitanya Barad pointed out that the lift irrigation point is like a lifeline for the local farmers as their livelihood hinges on it.

If the irrigation point is made operational, people need not migrate outside the region in search of work, they added.

Irregularities mar job scheme in Nayagarh

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nayagarh/Odagaon, May 12: Implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), a Centre-sponsored poverty alleviation programme, has been mired in controversies in Nayagarh district with workdays having been given away to people from affluent background and dead persons.

A recent survey at Kural village under Odagaon block found many flaws in the implementation of the poverty alleviation scheme. Irregularities have been carried out in the names of various persons and the money has been siphoned off.

It was found that the number of registered households reported to the state government has been inflated and bogus persons were issued job cards.

As a result, the rich got richer

while the poor remained poor due to shoddy implementation of the scheme. Family members of a contractor were shown having done soil work. Likewise, a disabled person has worked for four years under the scheme.

Similarly, a person serving life imprisonment in jail was found to have sought work under the rural job scheme while a woman who was killed by his son is a job card holder. People have demanded an impartial probe into the irregularities and stringent action against the accused.

Rankanidhi Behera is serving life imprisonment since 2008 for killing his mother on a Mother's Day. However, he has a job card and his name is mentioned in the muster roll. A verification of the muster roll revealed that Rankanidhi had applied for 12 days work from May 21, 2018 to June 3, 2018 in the renovation of a crematorium pond in Kural village.

Similarly, his deceased mother Hiramani Bewa was shown as a job card holder. There is no end to the irregularities as there are two job cards in the name of two women family members of Rankanidhi.

These two women are Meena Behera and Mina Behera. However, the wage payment has been made in the name of Meena Behera.

A person with 60 per cent disability has been mentioned as a job card holder. He has worked in the renovation of a playground of Daddhibamanjew Sanskrit School from 2017 to 2018.

The records even show that he has been engaged in the road work in Bengei Sahi village from May, 2018 to June, 2018 and till January, 21 next year. His wages have been credited to his bank account. However, a close scrutiny revealed that no such person had worked under the scheme nor wages paid in his bank account.

A contractor and his family



members were also found to be job card holders. The record shows they have worked for the renovation of a high school playground and the government hospital in the village.

The wages have been paid in their bank accounts. The concerned contractor is also the proprietor of a medicine store and is a regular taxpayer to the government.

Brahmani's canal silting chokes farming

FARMERS OF PATTAMUNDAI BLOCK HAVE BEEN PRESSING FOR DREDGING OF THE SILTED CANAL

POST NEWS NETWORK

Pattamundai, May 12: Bachharanasi, one of major canals of the Brahmani river was a lifeline for thousands of farmers in Pattamundai block of Kendrapara. But the canal has become shallow with its bed getting heavily silted over years.

"The mouth of the canal is also choked with silt and weeds. We are sad to see it gradually losing its existence. During the tides, water fails to pass through the canal," local farmers lamented.

Years ago, the canal was full of water throughout the year, feeding enough water to farmlands in over 10 riparian villages. Apart from



paddy, farmers grew cash crops and vegetables in hundreds of acres of land.

"People even used its water for drinking purpose. Vegetables were grown in abundance in our localities. We earned enough from farm-

ing. Now, farmlands are left dry for lack of water in the canal. Now, agriculture is at stake, leaving little scope for us to earn," they added.

It was learnt that the canal had bolstered the agrarian economy of villages like Kasananta, Balipada,

YEARS AGO, THE CANAL WAS FULL OF WATER THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, FEEDING ENOUGH WATER TO FARMLANDS IN OVER 10 RIPARIAN VILLAGES. APART FROM PADDY, FARMERS GREW CASH CROPS AND VEGETABLES IN HUNDREDS OF ACRES OF LAND

IT WAS LEARNT THAT THE CANAL HAD BOLSTERED THE AGRARIAN ECONOMY OF VILLAGES LIKE KASANANTA, BALIPADA, TALABALIPADA, BACHHARA, MANDAPADA, BANGALIDIA, TANUPUR, NANDINIPUR, BALIPATANA AND PATTAMUNDAI

Talabalipada, Bachhara, Mandapada, Bangalidia, Tanupur, Nandinipur, Balipatana and Pattamundai.

Farmers have long been demanding dredging of the silted canal so that it would hold enough water for the farming.

Taking the farmers' demand into account, the government had undertaken the dredging a few years ago, but later it was abandoned for some reasons.

"No step has been taken to resume dredging. Various outfits have demanded its renovation as soon as possible. The project, vital for sustenance of agriculture, has been a victim of political and administrative apathy," they added.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
SONEPUR (R&B) DIVISION, SONEPUR
No. B-81
E-Procurement Notice
BID IDENTIFICATION No. EE/R&B/SNPR/04/2021-22
E-mail: eepwdsnpr@gmail.com, Phone: 06654-221081
No. 2022 Dt. 11.5.21

- The Executive Engineer, Sonepur (R&B) Division, Sonepur on behalf of Governor of Odisha, invites Percentage Rate bids in Double Cover System in Online Mode for construction of Road/Building and Electrical works as detailed in the DTCN from the eligible class of contractor.
- No. of work : 01 (One)
- Tender Cost : Rs. 10,000/- for Serial No. 1
- Class of Contractor : "B" Class & "A" Class for Serial No. 1
- Date and time available in website & receipt of Bids : From 10.00 A.M. of 18.05.2021 to 5.00 P.M. of 27.05.2021
- Date of Opening of tender : 28.05.2021 at 11.30 A.M.
- The bidders have to participate in online bidding only, further details can be seen from the website.
- Any Corrigendum/Addendum will be displayed in the website www.tendersodisha.gov.in only.

Sd./- Executive Engineer
Sonepur (R&B) Division
OIPR-34081/11/0003/2122



Be conscious first of thyself within, then think and act.

SRI AUROBINDO



Sustainable Finance

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the largest decrease in global economic activity on record. But the drop in carbon dioxide emissions has been only temporary. Although global CO2 emissions fell by 6.4 per cent overall in 2020, they had already begun to increase in the second half of the year and have now returned to pre-crisis levels.

The fact that last year's extraordinary circumstances still did not bring global emissions into line with the targets set by the 2015 Paris climate agreement is a stark reminder of the scale of the challenge we face. As the Nobel laureate economist William Nordhaus reminds us, climate change is the quintessential global externality. Its effects are spread around the world and no country has sufficient incentives or capacity to solve the problem on its own. International coordination is therefore essential.

Fortunately, a return to multilateral cooperation through the G7, the G20, and the Financial Stability Board offers a unique window of opportunity. Following US President Joe Biden's decision to rejoin the Paris agreement, the European Union's commitment to reach carbon neutrality by 2050, and China's pledge to do the same by 2060, we may now be at a turning point for global climate action.

Three priorities stand out on the international agenda. The first is the need to increase global carbon prices. Putting a higher price on carbon is the most cost-effective way to reduce emissions at the necessary scale and speed. By internalising the social cost of emissions – making emitters pay – carbon pricing leverages the power of markets to steer economic activities away from carbon-intensive activities.

Currently, carbon prices are far too low. The IMF calculates that the average global carbon price is only \$2 per tonne. And, according to the World Bank, only 5 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions are priced within the range required to achieve the Paris agreement's goals.

Here, advanced economies can lead by example and use the current policy window to commit to carbon-price paths consistent with the Paris accord. Although smaller advanced economies account for only a limited share of global emissions, their adoption of decisive decarbonisation measures could encourage developing countries to follow suit.

The second priority is to use the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to "build back better." Decisions made now will shape the climate trajectory for decades to come. Policymakers should seize this opportunity to set the global economy on a sustainable growth path. The EU recovery package – Next Generation EU – lives up to that ambition.

The third priority goes to the heart of the financial system and central banking: financing the green transition. Phasing out fossil fuels implies the need for massive investment, even if estimates of the precise figure are subject to significant uncertainty.

Looking beyond emissions reductions to the broader sustainability agenda, the United Nations estimates that implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda will require global investments of \$5-7 trillion per year. To fill this gap, it will be crucial to mobilise the resources of financial intermediaries, including banks.

Sustainable-finance products – such as green lending, green and sustainable bonds, and funds with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) characteristics – have grown dramatically in recent years. Unfortunately, the field suffers from information asymmetries and insufficient transparency.

To foster the growth of sustainable finance, many countries have started developing regulatory frameworks to combat "greenwashing," and the EU is at the forefront of these efforts. Yet in the absence of global coordination, different jurisdictions have developed different approaches, and industry-based initiatives have proliferated.

The resulting edifice of inconsistent and incomparable standards, definitions, and metrics has fragmented sustainable-finance markets, reducing their efficiency and limiting the cross-border availability of capital for green investment. As jurisdictions compete to attract finance, the risk of regulatory arbitrage and a race to the bottom has grown. If left unaddressed, this trend could result in lower standards globally, increasing the likelihood of greenwashing.

But we now have an opportunity to start devising a common global approach. Sustainable finance is a top priority for both the G20 under its Italian presidency and the G7 under its British presidency. Moreover, in a public letter shortly after her confirmation, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen called for an upgrade to the G20's sustainable-finance working group to "reflect its importance."

A key first step is to agree on minimum standards for corporate disclosures. If a company's sustainability performance is unclear or unknown, ascertaining the sustainability of the related financial assets is impossible. We must replace the current alphabet soup of reporting frameworks with a common standard. To that end, the EU's approach – including the ongoing revision of the Corporate Sustainability Financial Reporting Directive – represents an advanced benchmark toward which any international standard should aim.

For a common standard to launch a race to the top, it must not fall short of the best international practices. It should cover all ESG aspects of sustainability. And it should require companies to disclose not just issues that influence enterprise value, but also information on the company's broader environmental and social impact (known as "double materiality").

A second and even greater challenge is to ensure that countries develop consistent classifications of what counts as sustainable investment. If an activity or asset is considered sustainable in one country but unsustainable in another, there cannot be a truly global sustainable-finance market.

To ensure a global level playing field, today's leaders should aim for an agreement on common principles for well-functioning and globally coherent taxonomies. Just as governments need to be mindful of the risk of carbon leakage, they must account for the risk of carbon financing leakage.

Finally, we need to ensure that all segments of financial activity remain aligned with broader climate objectives. The enormous energy consumption and associated CO2 emissions of crypto-asset mining could undermine global sustainability efforts. Bitcoin alone is already consuming more electricity than the Netherlands. Controlling and limiting the environmental impact of crypto assets, including through regulation and taxation, should be part of the global discussion.

Climate change and sustainability are global challenges that require global solutions – and nowhere more so than in the financial sector. The current political environment offers us a rare opportunity to make substantial progress. We must not waste it.

The writer is a member of the Executive Board of the European Central Bank.
@PROJECT SYNDICATE

WISDOM CORNER

- The best way to keep one's word is not to give it.** NAPOLEON BONAPARTE
- Punctuality is the virtue of the bored.** EVELYN WAUGH
- He who angers you conquers you.** ELIZABETH KENNY

FOCUS RESERVATION

LAXMAN REKHA FOR QUOTA

There are three seminal supreme court judgements which have stood the test of time viz. Kesavananda Bharati (1973), affirming inviolability of basic structure, SR Bommai (1995) making floor test mandatory for adjudicating majority and Indra Sawhney (1992) putting a cap of 50% on reservation. The 16% reservation for Marathas based on recommendation of Gaikwad Commission had been challenged in the Supreme Court as also the 50% ceiling imposed by the Indra Sawhney case for reservation for SC/ST & OBCs. In a remarkable judgement, the court has struck down reservation for Marathas and has upheld the upper cap of 50% decided by the Indra Sawhney judgement. The court has observed that the cap on reservation was fixed "to achieve principle of equality with an object to strike a balance which cannot be said to be arbitrary and unreasonable. To change the 50% limit is to have a society which is not founded on equality but based on the caste rule." The court also said that "society changes, people change but that does not mean that something that is good and is proven in maintaining equality should be changed in the name of change alone."

It would therefore be useful to travel through the Indra Sawhney judgement of 1992 which upheld 26% reservation for OBC over and above 23.5% reservation for SC and ST. The court had observed that while equality before law was provided in Articles 15 to 18, the Directive Principles at Article 38, 39 and Articles 335 and 340 had specifically enjoined upon the state to improve the condition of backward classes and SC/ST.

Article 340 of the Constitution empowers the state to appoint a commission to look into the conditions of backward classes and make suitable recommendations. The Mandal Commission constituted in 1979 had identified eleven criteria to determine socio-economic and educational backwardness. Those communities whose literacy was 25% less than the average literacy of the state and whose value of family assets was



The state must fix other measures like free of cost quality education and skill development as a more effective way to promote socio-economic justice, rather than perpetuate the politics of caste reservation indefinitely

less than 25% of the average income of the state were considered backward. The Supreme Court had also observed that the backward class as defined by Article 16(4) is much wider in scope than socially and educationally backward class mentioned in Article 15(4). It had also observed that backward class of citizen cannot be determined by economic criteria alone. Accordingly, it struck down 10% reservation for economically backward section of the society as notified in Office Memorandum of April 25, 1991, as unconstitutional.

It may be recalled that 50% reservation cap was first put in the MR Balaji case (1962). In response to State of Mysore notification reserving 68% for educationally and socially backward classes and SC & ST, the court had said that the notification was a fraud on constitutional power. It also said that backwardness must be based on social and educational criteria and not on caste alone as caste is relevant to only Hindus but not to Christians, Jains and Muslims in a secular country like India.

One of the consistent view points of the Supreme Court has been that reservation under Article 16(4) is not proportionate reservation but adequate representation. This essentially means that though population of backward classes

would be around 80%, the reservation must be limited to a cap of 50%. The court was dismayed to find that the Maratha community had adequate and sufficient representation in public services. Based on the available data the court has observed that the Marathas hold 30% of the jobs in the public sector while they constitute only 16% of the population.

In 2014, the Supreme Court had struck down 10% reservation for the Jat community as they were economically and educationally fairly ahead of other communities. The court has wryly observed "when more people aspire for backwardness instead of forwardness, the country itself stagnates." The court has rightly observed that 50% cap by Indra Sawhney judgement is to fulfil the objective of equality as engrafted in Article 14 of which Article 15 and 16 are facets.

The present judgement is affirmation of the principle of stare decisis, which means the court stands by decided cases and upholds precedents. The court did not find any merit in the contention that the logic of 50% is fuzzy. For the Supreme Court, certainty and consistency are highly desirable features. It has been seen that the basic structure doctrine despite a divided court has been accepted by

all parties irrespective of their political ideologies. Similarly, whenever there has been allegation of horse trading in state elections, the principle of floor test has always been put into effect to reaffirm our faith in democracy and transparency. The present Supreme Court judgement therefore deserves to be complimented for its firmness and fairness to marry equity with affirmative socio-economic justice.

However, there are many troubling tangles to the issue of reservation. The government in 2019 through the 124th Constitutional Amendment has provided 10% reservation to economically weaker sections of the society on the basis of an annual income ceiling of ₹8 lakh. The Indra Sawhney judgement had considered such reservation as unconstitutional. This issue therefore, needs to be revisited. Further, in the Nagraj case (2006), the Supreme Court had approved reservation in promotion for SC/ST. In a surprising decision in Ashok Thakur case (2008), the Supreme Court had observed that the creamy layer concept will not apply to SC/ST. These judgements are presently sub-judice. The National Commission for Backward Classes has suggested that the income ceiling of backward classes should be increased to ₹15 lakh and that 27% reservation for OBCs should be divided between backward, more backward and extremely backward categories.

Quite clearly the concept of reservation is anti-merit. Caste has been a bane of Indian society and a major figleaf for electoral politics. The Constitution has super added socio-economic justice to liberty, equality and fraternity. However, equality of opportunity is the greatest craving of all human beings at all points of time. The state must fix other measures like free of cost quality education and skill development as a more effective way to promote socio-economic justice, rather than perpetuate the politics of caste reservation indefinitely.

The writer teaches Constitutional Law. Views are personal.

SPECTRUM OFFICE CULTURE

Instilling psychological safety at workplace

With the onset of Covid-19, I have observed numerous occasions where leaders or top executives have resorted to micro-managing and adopt top-down command and control measures such as finding out about routine tasks, seeking daily status updates, frequent checking ins and probing. I presume that this obsession for controls, scrutiny and peeping over the shoulder approach during these difficult times gives them the "reassurance" that everything is in order. This obviously translates to centralisation of decision making, curbing autonomy, discouraging candor and vetting each action with their seal of approval. Although the underlying intent of top managers is positive but this practice raises several questions not only on the trust levels or confidence that they have on their team members but the future growth of the enterprise. During crisis, these managers tend to signal to their team that instructions from top needs to be followed silently and obediently. Asking challenging questions, giving critical feedback or voicing a concern is treated as dissent or insubordination. This creates an environment of fear and insecurity amongst workers. This is what is called the absence of "psychological safety." This has been found out as the top safety requirement in the workplace, often at par with physical safety.

We know that the culture is set by leaders at the top and when this sort of an unsafe environment is created then one or several of the following outcomes can happen: Risk taking is minimal fearing retribution & innovation vanishes; waiting for instructions from the top resulting in delay in decision-making; more of "boss pleasers" as there is fear of rejection or ridicule; bad news is suppressed or delayed; lack of any third alternative as no contrarian opinions or divergent viewpoints are invited; a culture where people are afraid to open up; blame game increases if any lapses happen; and risk of losing high potential employees as they feel neglected and ignored.

There is so much that an organisation can lose if the issue of psychological safety is not addressed. For fear of job, embarrassment or being unpopular, employees tend to say "yes" or stay silent to the directions which in turn can hurt organisational competitiveness.

Tell your team that you don't have all the answers. Path forward is unknown and therefore there can be several right answers! Ask them what they think, see or observe which can be effectively utilised in devising the way forward. This fosters a growth mindset amongst all.

Third, respond proactively. When you have created the space for psychological safety then ideas or suggestions should be acknowledged and responded in a positive manner. Creating a culture of psychological safety in the workplace has been beautifully summed up by Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google, who said that we run the company by asking questions, not by answers! At its best, psychological safety leverages the benefits of diversity and mutual learning by encouraging employees to speak their mind which is highly essential to navigate in times of crisis and complexities. This safety gives them a sense of ownership and belonging. Without this it is likely that the organisation discovers itself as lagging behind after the crisis is over.

The writer is a senior industry leader & a Certified Life Coach. Views are personal.

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, Rasulgari Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Dr Amy Edmondson, Professor of Leadership & Management at HBS, coined this term psychological safety and defines it as the shared belief created in an organization where the employees can voice their opinions, concerns and feedback without any fear of negative ramifications. In fact, leaders need to encourage and welcome these inputs to create a culture of psychological safety.

So how to instill psychological safety at the workplace? What enabling factors can play a pivotal role in building this culture? First, appreciate the nature of work. The leaders need to empathise on the work their team does, the complex nature or the uncertainties associated with it. They need to tell them that mistakes might happen as crisis does not present a blue-print or script always. Therefore, feedback and ideas are welcome to come up with the best actions.

Second, invite participation to give more ideas to reach the bigger goal. Leaders need to set the stage by seeking contributions from their team by acknowledging their own fallibility. Ask the right questions.

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Last chance

Sir, If one accepts losing, he cannot win, and if one learns from defeat, he has not really lost. Both are catchy quotes that should apply well to many Indian political parties. But the second part of the quote, unfortunately, suits India's grand old party very well. The Congress' predicament is better left unsaid. When it badly lost in 2014, reams were written about how it could bounce back. Several possibilities were dissected. One thought the party would build on its failure. When the party lost again in 2019, it was thought it tried its best. Now, in 2021, with defeats galore in assembly elections, and having lost the principal opposition status to other parties in at least six states, it looks like a party that has been crushed within. It is not as if the Congress has failed in its attempts anymore, it is more like whether the party has really attempted to contest let alone win an election. Where are the party leaders? None, except a handful, are visible or heard. Party president Sonia Gandhi is busy issuing statements. Naturally, inquisitive glances are thrown at whom, but Rahul Gandhi. The 'young' man has been unable to capture the minds of the electorate. Not one leader of substance can be found across the spectrum slogging day in and day out for the betterment of the party. Further indecisiveness and aloofness are going to take the party to a point of no return. Prime Minister Modi has been attacked for his 'failure' in containing Covid-19. If the PM does not salvage his reputation until 2024, the BJP is in huge trouble. The idea of a federal front is being mooted by top Opposition leaders. There is some hope for the Congress if Sonia or Rahul heads the federal front. Otherwise, it is end game for the party because even if a federal front is able to dethrone the BJP-led NDA in 2024, a non-Congress PM will further push the party to its doom.
Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA (MAHARASHTRA)

Feed innocents

Sir, The decision to approve financial support for feeding stray animals in Odisha is a step in the right direction. Stray dogs and cattle are deprived of food during lockdown. The state government has sanctioned ₹60 lakh from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. The funds are available in five municipal corporations, 48 municipalities, and 61 notified area councils. The urban local bodies provide food to stray animals through various voluntary organisations. Feeding innocent animals is really a praiseworthy move towards saving their lives. Collective efforts are necessary to survive this pandemic.
Amit Singh Kushwaha, SATNA

Delhi scrambles for vax

Delhi government has flagged the dwindling stock of vaccines, saying the manufacturers were not supplying enough doses to meet the target of inoculating the city's adult population in 3 months

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 12: There will be no Covaxin doses available at any vaccination centre in the national capital as the stock has finished, prompting the state government to shut around 100 centres. The Delhi government, which raised an alarm regarding Covaxin shortage Tuesday evening, Wednesday said the last available stock of Covaxin was administered earlier in the day.

"We had just 16,900 doses of Covaxin stock for today (Wednesday) which was administered and we have no Covaxin stock left for any centre. Now, Covaxin will not be administered at any vaccination centre from tomorrow until vaccine supply is received," said AAP MLA Atishi, while giving de-



A man looks at a notice stating non-availability of vaccines, outside a vaccination centre in New Delhi, Wednesday.

tails of the Delhi government's vaccination scheme to the press Wednesday.

Delhi Wednesday received 2,67,790 doses of Covishield vaccine for people in the 18 to 44 years age group.

Amid the nationwide second wave of the Covid pandemic, the Delhi government has been struggling to provide beds, oxygen, medicines for Covid patients in the hospitals and at homes. For the last few days, the capital is also

struggling for vaccines.

The Delhi government has relentlessly flagged the dwindling stock of vaccines in the capital, saying the manufacturers were not supplying enough doses to meet the target of inoculating the city's adult population in the next three months.

This has come a week after the state administration set a target of three months to complete the vaccination of all the citizens in Delhi. Mass vaccination was kicked off for

the 18-44 years age group May 3.

Earlier in the day, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said that Covaxin maker Bharat Biotech has refused to supply doses to Delhi under instructions from the central government.

Sisodia accused the Centre of controlling the supply of Covid shots and of vaccine mismanagement. He said the Delhi government has ordered 67 lakh doses of both vaccines - Covaxin and Covishield each.

Uttarakhand to distribute Ivermectin to all residents

Uttarakhand government's announcement comes after Goa and Karnataka issued similar directions despite the WHO warning against the use of the antiparasitic drug to treat COVID-19

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dehradun, May 12: The Uttarakhand government will be distributing Ivermectin, an antiparasitic drug, among the residents of the state as a preventive medicine against the spread of COVID-19, a senior official said.

The Uttarakhand government's announcement comes after Goa and Karnataka issued similar directions. The decision was taken on the recommendation of the state-level clinical technical committee, an order issued by Chief Secretary Om Prakash to all district magistrates said. The panel has recommended the Ivermectin tablet as "mass chemoprophylaxis" to effectively control the surge of COVID-19 infection apart from the vaccination drive, the order said.

The 12 mg tablets of the drug will be distributed in a kit to all families through the health department and district magistrates, the order said. Usually, Ivermectin tablets have to be taken by adults and those above 15 years twice daily for three days after breakfast and



dinner. One person will thus need six tablets and a family of four will need 24 tablets. Hence, each kit will contain two dozen tablets, the order said. Children between 10-15 years will take only one tablet daily whereas those aged between 2 to 10 years can be administered the drug only after doctor's advice. The tablet cannot be given to children below two years, pregnant women and those suffering from liver diseases, it said. The kit will come with directions on how to consume the medicine and dosage for different age groups. Information related to the daily distribution of the kits should be sent to the state nodal officer, the order said.

Goa Health Minister Vishwajit Rane had Monday said all people

above 18 years will be given Ivermectin drug irrespective of their coronavirus status to bring down the number of deaths due to the viral disease. Medical experts, however, have questioned the efficacy of the five-day duration of the drug regimen announced by Goa government saying the treatment should not be given for a short period but ideally be continued till the pandemic is brought under control.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation has warned against the use of Ivermectin to treat COVID-19.

However, regular use of the oral antiparasitic drug may significantly reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19, according to a review of available data by researchers who claim the medicine can help end the pandemic.

The research, published in the May-June issue of the American Journal of Therapeutics, is the most comprehensive review of the available data on Ivermectin taken from clinical, in vitro, animal, and real-world studies, its authors said.

Delhi's test positivity rate at one-month low

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 12: The national capital reported 13,287 new coronavirus cases and 300 more fatalities Wednesday, while the positivity rate came down to 17 per cent, the lowest in nearly a month, according to the health department.

The 13,287 new cases came from 78,035 tests, including 63,315 RT-PCR/CBNAAT/True Nat tests, conducted Tuesday.

As many as 14,071 people recovered from the infection during the period, the health bulletin said.

Now there are 82,725 active cases, down from 83,809 the previous day and 49,974 of them are in home isolation, it said.

The number of cumulative cases stands at 13,61,986 and the death toll at 20,310. Over 12.58 lakh people have either recovered, migrated out or have been discharged, ac-

ording to the health bulletin.

Of the 23,202 hospital beds for coronavirus patients in the city, 4,469 are vacant, it said.

Delhi had reported 12,481 cases Tuesday, 12,651 cases Monday, 13,336 Sunday, 17,364 Saturday, 19,832 Friday, 19,133 Thursday, 20,960 Wednesday and 19,953 last Tuesday.

The positivity rate reported Wednesday is the lowest since April 14, when it stood at 15.9 per cent. It has remained above the 20 per cent mark since April 17. It was 17.8 percent Tuesday, 19.10 per cent Monday, 21.67 per cent Sunday and 23.34 per cent Saturday.

April 22, a positivity rate of 36.2 per cent, the highest so far, was recorded.

The national capital had 347 deaths Tuesday, 319 deaths Monday, 273 deaths Sunday and 332 deaths Saturday. The highest number of 448 deaths was reported May 3.



RESCUE ACT

Rescue and relief operations after several shops and houses were damaged because of a cloudburst at Uttarakhand's Devprayag, Wednesday. CM Tirath Singh Rawat visited affected areas along with his ministerial colleagues for an assessment of the situation. PTI PHOTO

U'khand to import 20 lakh doses of Sputnik vax

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dehradun, May 12: Uttarakhand will import 20 lakh doses of Sputnik vaccine over the next two months, officials said Wednesday.

Giving the information at a press conference here, Chief Secretary Om Prakash said a five-member committee has been constituted for the purpose and the required funds have been arranged.

The state government has also requested the country's leading vaccine manufacturing companies to supply doses of the vaccine to Uttarakhand, he said.

He said the state government is constantly in talks with the Centre also as vaccine doses received so far are not adequate. "We will get 8



lakh doses this month and 9 lakh doses next on the condition that the second dose is administered to people who have already got the first dose," he said.

The chief secretary said the state has received 80 metric tonnes of oxygen from the Centre whereas

the state's daily oxygen requirement is 60 tonnes. "We have been allotted two containers of 20 tonnes each. We have requested the Centre for more containers and by Friday we will be getting six more of them," he said. The chief secretary reiterated that stern action

Centre sends 80 MT of oxygen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DEHRADUN: Eighty metric tonnes of oxygen sent by the Centre by an Oxygen Express train was dispatched to different districts of Uttarakhand Wednesday.

Flagging off trucks carrying the life-saving gas to different places of Kumaon and Garhwal divisions from the Harrawala station here, Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Railway Minister Piyush Goyal for extending a helping hand.

Enough oxygen is being supplied by the Centre to the state in view of the difficult circumstances arising out of the surge in COVID-19 cases, he said.

Though there was never a shortage of oxygen in the state, its consumption has gone up with the rising number of oxygenated beds in hospitals and COVID care centres, Rawat said. Oxygen supply from the Centre will continue in the future too, he added.

IG Amit Sinha said 24 FIRs have lodged in connection with black marketing and overcharging of drugs and equipment.

Volunteers collect unclaimed ashes of Delhi's virus victims

REUTERS

New Delhi, May 12: Volunteer Ashish Kashyap carefully shovels the ashes of unclaimed COVID-19 dead from a large pile into sacks at Nigambodh ghat crematorium in Delhi, where the pyres have been burning round-the-clock because of a surge of deaths.

Kashyap will then take the ashes to be immersed in the Ganges river. Families of the victims are often too afraid to come and collect the ashes after cremation because they fear contracting the virus in crowded sites.

Hindus cremate their dead and the ashes are scattered over rivers considered sacred or over some other place of importance to the deceased. "During this pandemic, the relatives of these victims have abandoned them. However, our organisation collects these remains from all the crematoriums and performs the last rituals in Haridwar, so that they can achieve salvation," said Kashyap, 28. He and his team



from the Shri Deodhan Sewa Samiti volunteer group collect the ashes and bone fragments, carefully wash them in milk and water and offer prayers. They will then take the ashes to the holy city of Haridwar on the banks of the Ganges in September and perform a religious ceremony during a 15-day period considered auspicious.

Hindus believe that rituals help attain "Moksha" or salvation from the cycle of life and death.

Vijay Sharma, another member of the group, said they have been carrying out the rituals for close to two decades for people whose bodies were never claimed or others who were too poor to carry out the ceremonies.

Delhi govt can't turn blind eye to overcharging hospitals: HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 12: The Delhi High Court Wednesday said the Delhi government cannot "turn a blind eye" to overcharging of COVID-19 patients by private hospitals in the city and directed it to hold a meeting of all stakeholders to arrive at a "realistic" amount so that people are not fleeced.

"We want this taken up on top priority," a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said and also asked the Delhi government why it had not done anything till now to address this "serious" issue.

"Merely because there were no complaints, the situation on the ground cannot be ignored. We agree (with the petitioner) that you cannot turn a blind eye to it.

"We had asked you to again speak to all stakeholders. That exercise should have been done. You could have seen the condition on the



ground, spoken to all the stakeholders and then arrived at a reasonable figure so that people are not fleeced," the bench said.

The court also said that once they arrive at a figure, then it has to be enforced by all means.

It asked the Delhi government why it has not done anything till now despite the court "repeatedly" telling them to do something on this issue.

It referred to a hospital bill, placed on record by petitioner and lawyer Abhay Gupta, in which the ICU package price was ₹30,000, but the charges for Bilevel Positive

Airway Pressure (BiPAP) machine, oxygen, monitors, etc were additional and to the tune of thousands of rupees per day.

The bench said that prima facie the BiPAP machine, monitors, oxygen, etc all ought to have been part of the ICU package and therefore, the issue raised by Gupta of overcharging was "serious".

It said that the Delhi government was right to say that the private hospitals have to be taken along, during the pandemic, "but that does not mean they can be so exorbitant".

Senior advocate and amicus curiae Rajshekhar Rao told the court that according to his research, a whole bunch of private hospitals were refusing to admit patients, even if they had cashless insurance cover, unless they deposit ₹50,000.

"Some of these practices have to stop," he said.

Himalayan red fox's subspecies spotted

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pithoragarh, May 12: A subspecies of the Himalayan red fox was spotted here at a height of 3,000 metres, officials said Wednesday.

The variety, known as *Vulpes vulpes griffithi*, was seen in Bhujani and Khaliya Top areas of Munsiyari at an elevation of 3,000 metres, some 500 metres below the altitude, where its habitat is located, for the first time in recent years, said Surendra Panwar, president of Monal NGO that has been working towards the protection of upper range Himalayan animals for around 10 years.

"We have seen at least eight subspecies of the red fox at such an elevation in the Himalayan region after following it fruitlessly for two years," he said. Asked about the reasons behind the increased visibility of these otherwise shy animals at lower altitudes, Panwar said it could be due to disturbance in their natural habitats. The animals may



have started coming down closer to human settlements to survive on the Himalayan leftovers, he said.

"There are different reasons of high altitude animal habitats getting disturbed, including the entry of people to collect Kira Jari (sildenaflil) or Yarsagumba (caterpillar fungus), some climate change patterns and lessening of their prey base due to interference of human beings," Panwar said.

However, Pithoragarh DFO Vinay Bhargava attributed the spotting of rare high Himalayan animals like *Vulpes vulpes griffithi* and flocks of Monal birds to prolonged conservation efforts.

national



Stand Together India, it's time to stand together not time to criticise. After this battle is finally won, will find out who was wrong and who was right
KAPIL SIBAL | CONGRESS LEADER

GOVT TO PROCURE 'OXYCARE' SYSTEM

The government Wednesday approved the procurement of 1,50,000 units of 'Oxycare' system, developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), for Rs 322.5 crore from the PM-CARES Fund to help in the treatment of COVID-19 patients. Oxycare is an oxygen supply system based on SpO2 (oxygen saturation) level



of the day quote

Vikas had to be suspended briefly due to state elections. Parivar of 'Reformists' & 'Positivists' will be pleased to note that Vikas is now firmly back on track. As petrol has now crossed Rs 100 in Bhopal

RANDEEP SINGH SURJEWALA | CONGRESS GEN SECY



It may kindly be considered that if we could encourage the world players to open up franchise operations in our country, even the national players could be inspired to go for the franchisee mode for bulk production of vaccines

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CM



Ensure strict vigilance along length of the river within territorial jurisdiction of the district to prevent and check such future incidences of people dumping dead bodies in Ganga and its tributaries and of any other activities hazardous for river Ganga and health and hygiene of the area

RAJIV RANJAN MISHRA | NMCG DIRECTOR GENERAL



SHORT TAKES

Assam imposes more restrictions
Guwahati: The Assam government Wednesday ordered shutting down of all offices, religious places and weekly markets for 15 days in urban and semi-urban areas of the state, besides banning movement of people from 2 pm to 5 am in the wake of rising COVID-19 cases. Chief Secretary Jishnu Barua said all standalone shops and commercial establishments shall shut down at 1 pm on all days. The new restrictions will come into effect from Thursday.

2 held for plasma black marketing
Noida: As Covid cases increase, the black marketing of plasma is also on the rise. The Noida police Wednesday arrested two persons accused of black marketing of plasma, recommended by doctors for treatment of Covid patients. According to information, the police station Beta 2 of Greater Noida and the Crime Branch team jointly launched an operation and arrested two accused from Greater Noida's Alpha Commercial. Police have recovered 1 unit of plasma, 1 blood sample, Rs 35,000 cash, a car and mobile phones from the accused.

5 killed as van falls into ravine
Bharuch: Four women and a man were killed and 10 others injured when the vehicle they were travelling in plunged into a ravine after being hit by a truck in Gujarat's Bharuch district Wednesday, police said. The incident took place when a van carrying 15 factory workers was heading towards Rajpipla town from Netrang, an official said. It was hit by a speeding truck from behind, sub-inspector B K Pachani of Netrang police station said.

Appavu elected TN Assembly Speaker
Chennai: DMK lawmakers M Appavu and K Pitchandi were Wednesday sworn-in as Speaker and Deputy Speaker, respectively, of the 16th Tamil Nadu Assembly, after they were elected unopposed to the posts. Chief Minister M K Stalin proposed the name of Appavu, a four-time MLA from Radhapuram constituency in Tirunelveli, for the Speaker's post, and Works Minister Duraimurugan seconded it, at the chamber of Assembly Secretary, K Srinivasan.

'Calling B.1.617 strain as Indian variant has no basis'

New Delhi, May 12: Taking umbrage at the B.1.617 mutant of the novel coronavirus being termed an Indian variant, the Union health ministry Wednesday said the WHO has not used the word Indian for this strain in its document. The ministry dismissed as without any basis and unfounded media reports that have used the term Indian variant for the B.1.617 mutant strain, which the WHO recently said was a variant of global concern.

The WHO also said it does not identify viruses or variants with names of countries they are first reported from. We refer to them by their scientific names and request all to do the same for consistency, WHO South-East Asia said in a tweet. Several media reports have covered the news of World Health Organisation (WHO) classifying B.1.617 as variant of global concern. Some of these reports have termed the B.1.617 variant of the coronavirus as an 'Indian Variant', the ministry said in a statement.



These media reports are without any basis, and unfounded, it said. This is to clarify that the WHO has not associated the term Indian variant with the B.1.617 strain of the coronavirus in its 32 page document, it said. In fact, the word Indian has not been used in its report on the matter; the ministry added. Monday, Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, COVID-19 technical lead at the WHO, had said that the B.1.617 virus variant that was first identified in India had been classified as a variant of interest.

Rain, thunderstorm in several parts of India in next 3-4 days



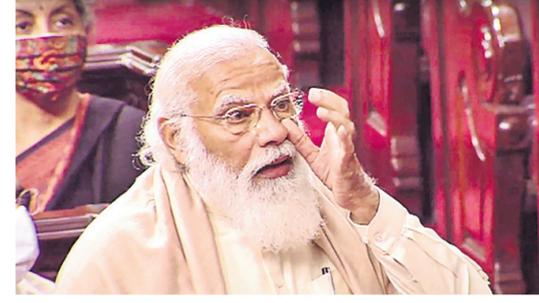
New Delhi, May 12: Several parts of India may witness rain and thunderstorm in next 3-4 days, the ministry of earth sciences has predicted and temperature could drop in the national capital by few notches.

Thunderstorm with lightning, hail and squall is likely at isolated places over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan and Muzaffarabad, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Telangana, said the Ministry of Earth Sciences. "Heavy rainfall very likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Coastal & South Interior Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Kerala, Mahe and Lakshadweep May 13," said the official statement.

Thunderstorm with lightning and gusty wind (speed reaching 30-40 kmph) is likely at isolated places over Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Kerala, Mahe and Lakshadweep, May 15. Heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely at a few places over Coastal & South Interior Karnataka, isolated places in North Interior Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Kerala, Mahe, Lakshadweep and Heavy Rainfall at isolated places over Konkan, Goa and Telangana May 16.

Oppn leaders write to PM

New Delhi, May 12: Leaders of 12 opposition parties Wednesday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking a free mass vaccination campaign against coronavirus, and a suspension of the central vista revamp project to aid the fight against the pandemic.



- ### DEMANDS GALORE
- Free mass vaccination
 - Suspension of Central Vista project
 - Foodgrains to the needy
 - ₹6K per month to the unemployed
 - Repeal of the 3 Central farm laws

human catastrophe in the country, and that it was absolutely imperative for the Central government to undertake and implement these measures. Unfortunately, your government has either ignored or refused all these suggestions. This only compounded the situation to reach such an apocalyptic human tragedy, they said. Without going into all the acts of commission and omission by the Central government that have brought the country to such a tragic pass, the opposition leaders demanded that some measures suggested by them must be undertaken on a war footing. Stop Central Vista construction. Use the allocated money for procuring oxygen and vaccines, instead. Release all money held in the unaccounted private trust fund, PM Cares to buy more vaccines, Oxygen and medical equipment required, they also told the prime minister. Repeal farm laws to protect lakhs of our annadatas becoming victims of the pandemic so that they can continue to produce food to feed the Indian people, they said.

SII, Bharat Biotech to ramp up capacity

New Delhi, May 12: Amid multiple states reporting a shortage of COVID-19 vaccine, Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech have submitted to the Centre their production plan for the next four months, informing they can ramp it up to 10 crore and 7.8 crore doses respectively by August, official sources said Wednesday.



Serum says will raise monthly production to 10 crore doses by August, Bharat Biotech promises 7.8 crore

The sources said the Union Health Ministry and the office of Drugs Controller General of India had sought from both the firms their production plan for June, July, August and September. The Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech's indigenously developed Covaxin and Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield, being manufactured by the Pune-based Serum Institute of India, are currently being used in India's inoculation drive against coronavirus. Dr V Krishna Mohan, the Whole-time Director of Bharat Biotech, is learnt to have conveyed to the government that the production of Covaxin would be raised to 3.32 crore in July, and to 7.82 crore in August which will be maintained in September too. Similarly, Prakash Kumar Singh, Director, Government and Regulatory Affairs at Serum Institute of India, has communicated that the production of Covishield would be ramped up to 10 crore doses each in August and will be maintained at that level in September, the official sources said. "We confirm that the quantities

mentioned will be fulfilled under all circumstances. Also, we are trying our best by utilising all our resources to increase our production capacity of Covishield. In view of this, the production during June and July may also increase by some quantity," Singh said in a communication to the health ministry. An inter-ministerial group, comprising Rajneesh Tingal, Joint Secretary in the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Dr Mandeep Bhandari, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Health, which was constituted for facilitating the capacity augmentation of domestic vaccine manufacturing, had visited the production facilities of both the Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech in April. Several states and UTs including Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telangana have decided to opt for global tenders for procurement of anti-coronavirus shots.

Panel had asked govt to up vax mfg in March

A parliamentary standing committee had in March suggested ramping up of production capacity of the two COVID vaccines manufactured in India for ensuring their availability to a wider population as soon as possible after it was informed that there could be a "shortage" if the inoculation is opened beyond the priority groups. The recommendation was made by the 31-member committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change, chaired by senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, in its report on Demand for Grants for Department of Biotechnology that was tabled in Parliament March 8.

Though it has not been the practice of your office or government, we would appreciate a response to our suggestions in the interests of India and our people, the leaders said in the letter.

Inoculation drive falters in states due to vax shortage

New Delhi/Mumbai, May 12: As states face an acute shortage of COVID-19 vaccines, Maharashtra decided Wednesday to suspend its drive to vaccinate people in the age group of 18 to 44 years while Delhi also temporarily shut Covaxin administering centres for them as it has run out of stock.

While the vaccination drive appeared to be faltering in several states, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan urged them to first focus more on second dose vaccinations. He stressed that India is the fastest country globally to reach the landmark of administering 17 crore doses in 114 days. The minister pointed out that of this, while 13.66 crore people have been administered the first dose, the second dose has been administered to only to 3.86 crore, the ministry said. "Hence, it is very important that we first focus more on second dose vaccinations. States should not lose sight of those who are to get the second dose of the COVID vaccine." "Seventy percent ought to be allocated to meet the requirement of the second dose, while 30 percent ought to be reserved for the first dose," he was quoted as saying in a statement.

The Tamil Nadu government was the latest to announce global tenders for procurement of COVID-19 vaccines, while the Rajasthan government was also mulling a similar step. Uttarakhand officials said the state will import 20 lakh doses of Sputnik vaccine over the next two months. States like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Delhi have already opted for global tenders to meet their needs.

JABBING THE TRIBE



A Reang woman receives a COVID-19 vaccine dose at Gobindabari village in Chawmanu, near Agartala, Wednesday

Launch of India's first 'sky eye' further delayed

Chennai, May 12: Uncertainty continues to dog the flight of India's first Geo Imaging Satellite (GISAT-1) this time due to coronavirus spread across the country, said an official of Indian space agency. The GISAT-1 will be the country's first sky eye or earth observation satellite to be placed in geostationary orbit. The satellite supposed to be put into orbit this month is all set to be delayed as employees at various centres of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) including that of the rocket launch centre in Sriharikota were affected by Covid-19.



Further with the demand for oxygen shooting up from the hospitals to save Covid-19 patients, the Indian space agency's rocket may not be getting oxygen to power itself for some time to come thereby delaying its space missions. The ISRO Propulsion Complex

GISAT-1 will be the country's first 'Geo Imaging Satellite' or earth observation satellite to be placed in geostationary orbit

for launch March 5, 2020, but hours before the launch Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) announced postponement of the mission owing to some technical glitch. Soon after the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown delayed the mission. The rocket had to be dismantled and cleaned up. Subsequently, the GISAT-1 launch was slated for March 2021 but due to problems in the satellite's battery side, the flight got delayed. With the replacement of the battery the satellite and the rocket were being readied for their flight at Sriharikota when the second wave of Covid-19 swept in affecting many at the rocket launch centre. The Indian space agency had

earlier said the 2,268 kg GISAT-1 would provide a real time image of a large area of region of interest at frequent intervals. It will also enable quick monitoring of natural disasters, episodic events and any short-term events. The satellite will have payload imaging sensors of six band multi-spectral visible and near infra-red with 42 metres resolution; 158 bands hyper-spectral visible and near infra-red with 318 metres resolution and 256 bands hyper-spectral short wave infra-red with 191 metres resolution. A four metre diameter Ogive shaped payload fairing (heat shield) has been used in the rocket for the first time, ISRO had said.

national



Sad news is coming again and again. The basic problems have not yet been resolved. How long will our fellow citizens bear the cruelty of the central government in this pandemic?
RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

NARAVANE SPEAKS TO US ARMY CHIEF

Chief of Army Staff Gen MM Naravane held a telephonic conversation with his American counterpart Gen James C McConville, focusing on bilateral military cooperation as well as effectively dealing with the coronavirus pandemic



of the day quote

Some 12 states in the country have recognised journalists and camerapersons as frontline workers and given them the vaccine. Unfortunately, the decision is still pending in Maharashtra
DEVENDRA FADNAVIS | MAHARASHTRA LEADER OF OPPOSITION

In the COVID-19 pandemic, our nurses are rendering their services to patients as frontline corona warriors
YOGI ADITYANATH | UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER

India is the largest vaccine-producing country. The BJP government marked 'Tika Utsav' on April 12, but did not make arrangements for providing vaccines and in 30 days there was an 82 per cent decline in our vaccinations
PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONGRESS LEADER

SUMMER SHOWER



A chinkara antelope walks through a water sprinkler to stay cool, inside an enclosure at Sarthana Zoo in Surat

Rural India sees spike in Covid cases

AGENCIES
New Delhi, May 12: India's coronavirus death toll crossed a quarter million Wednesday in the deadliest 24 hours since the pandemic began, as the disease rampaged through the countryside, overloading a fragile rural healthcare system. Boosted by highly infectious variants, the second wave erupted in February to inundate hospitals and medical staff, as well as crematoriums and mortuaries. Experts are still unable to say with certainty when the figures will peak. Deaths swelled by a record 4,205 while infections rose 348,421 in the 24 hours to Wednesday, carrying the tally past 23 million, health ministry data showed. Experts believe the actual numbers could be five to 10 times higher. Funeral pyres have blazed in city parking lots, and scores of bodies have washed up on the banks of the holy river Ganges, having been immersed by relatives whose villages were stripped bare of the wood needed for cremations. Experts said transmission of coronavirus through water is not a concern, after bodies of suspected Covid-19 patients were fished out of the Ganga and Yamuna. Lacking beds, drugs and medical oxygen, many hospitals in the world's second-most populous nation have been forced to turn away droves of sufferers, while tales of desperate relatives searching for someone to treat dying loved ones

Covid-19 vaccines may be safe in pregnancy: Study



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 12: Covid-19 vaccines may be safe during pregnancy, suggests a study that found no evidence of injury to the placenta in pregnant women who received the preventive. The first-of-its-kind study, published Tuesday in the journal Obstetrics & Gynecology, adds to the growing literature that Covid-19 vaccines are safe in pregnancy. "The placenta is like the black box in an airplane. If something goes wrong with a pregnancy, we usually see changes in the placenta that can help us figure out what happened," said Jeffery Goldstein, assistant professor at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in the US. "From what we can tell, the Covid vaccine does not damage the placenta," Goldstein said. The researchers noted that there is a lot of vaccine hesitancy, especially among pregnant people. "Our team hopes these data, albeit preliminary, can reduce concerns about the risk of the vaccine to the pregnancy," said study co-author Emily Miller, assistant professor at Northwestern University. The study authors examined the placentas from 84 vaccinated patients and 116 unvaccinated patients who delivered at a hospital in Chicago, US. Most patients received vaccines - either Moderna or Pfizer - during their third trimester.

Govt working to ramp up key drug production

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 12: The government is engaging with the drug manufacturers to ramp up the production of an antifungal drug used for the treatment of mucormycosis, the Chemicals and Fertilizers Ministry said, as a rash of cases of rare black fungus infection have been reported among people either recovered or recovering from Covid-19. With a spike in the cases of Covid-19 in the country, doctors have been reporting a rare infection mucormycosis, also called as black fungus, among people recovered from Covid-19. The infection is caused by exposure to mucor mould and it affects the sinuses, the brain and the lungs and can be life-threatening. "A sudden increase in demand has been observed in some states for Amphotericin B which is being actively prescribed by the physicians to patients suffering from mucormycosis, a post-Covid

BLACK FUNGUS



complication," the ministry said in a statement. The government is therefore engaging with the manufacturers to ramp up production of the drug. The supply position is expected to improve with extra imports of this drug and increase in its production domestically, it added. "After reviewing the stock position with the manufacturers/importers, and the demand pattern of Amphotericin B, the Department of Pharma, has on 11th May, 2021, allocated this drug amongst the States/UTs based on expected supply that will be available from May

'ILI' SCARE

LUCKNOW: It is now ILI that is creating a scare in Uttar Pradesh villages. Maqsood, 39, developed cold and mild fever. He did not take any medication, dismissing it to be a normal viral. On the third day, he developed breathing problem and by the time his family members could arrange for a vehicle to take him to the hospital, he had died. Maqsood was the third such case in a village in Ambedkar Nagar this week. In Prayagraj alone, during the mega testing drive, the rapid response teams (RRTs) have identified 11,707 suspected patients having influenza-like illness (ILI) symptoms in 3,178 villages of 23 development blocks of Prayagraj district.

10 to May 31, 2021," the statement said. States have been requested to put in place a mechanism for equitable distribution of supplies amongst government and private hospitals and health care agencies, it added.

NET ACROSS GANGA IN BIHAR

71 DEAD BODIES HAVE BEEN FISHED OUT FROM THE GANGA IN BUXAR DISTRICT TUESDAY

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 12: Authorities in northern India said they have installed a net across the Ganga river after the bodies of dozens of suspected COVID-19 victims washed up. Locals suggested to AFP that relatives immersed the bodies in the river because they could not afford wood for traditional Hindu cremations or because crematoriums were overwhelmed by the

number of funerals. Bihar's water resources minister Sanjay Kumar said on Twitter Wednesday that a "net has been placed" in the river on the state border with Uttar Pradesh and patrolling increased. He said the impoverished state's government was "pained at both the tragedy as well as harm to the river Ganga". Mr Kumar added that post-mortems confirmed that the corpses had been dead four to five days. Press reports said as many as 25

bodies had also been recovered in the Gahmar district of Uttar Pradesh. The Hindu daily quoted a local police official there as saying there were long queues at cremation grounds in the northern state. "It is possible that in hurry some disposed of the bodies in the river like this," Hitendra Krishna was quoted as saying. India's official Covid-19 death count soared past a quarter of a million Wednesday, but many experts

believe the real number is several times higher. This is particularly the case now that the surge has spread beyond major cities into rural areas where hospitals are few and far between and record-keeping poor. All the bodies recovered from the Ganga river in Ghazipur and Ballia districts were cremated and investigation has been initiated to find out where the bodies had been immersed in the river.

BHIMA KOREGAON CASE

SC dismisses bail plea of activist Gautam Navlakha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 12: The Supreme Court Wednesday dismissed a plea of activist Gautam Navlakha, seeking bail in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist link case of Bhima Koregaon in Maharashtra. A bench of justices UU Lalit and K M Joseph dismissed the appeal of Navlakha against the Bombay High Court order denying him bail in the case. Justice Joseph, who pronounced the verdict for the bench, said the court is dismissing the appeal of Navlakha. The top court had reserved its verdict March 26 on a plea of Navlakha. The top court had March 3 sought response from the NIA on Navlakha's plea in which he has claimed that the charge sheet was not filed within the stipulated time period and hence, he was entitled for default bail. The FIR against him was re-registered in January 2020, and Navlakha had surrendered before the NIA April 14, last year. He had spent 11 days in the NIA's custody till April 25, and since then he is in judicial custody. According to the prosecution, some activists allegedly made inflammatory speeches and provocative statements at the Elgar Parishad meet in Pune December 31, 2017, which triggered violence at Koregaon Bhima in the district the next day. It has also alleged that the event was backed by some Maoist groups. On February 8, the high court had dismissed Navlakha's plea saying that "it sees no reason to interfere with a special court's order which earlier rejected his bail plea".

SHORT TAKES

50 snakes found inside a house

Fatehpur (UP): Fear gripped the Laluganj area in Jahanabad police circle in Fatehpur district when snakes started coming out of a house. The house owner Gaya Prasad said that he first saw a few baby snakes in his house Tuesday afternoon and he caught them and released them in his fields. Later in the evening, more snakes started coming out from all corners of the house and villagers gathered in large numbers. A snake charmer was called and the snakes were caught and later released in a nearby forest area.

Azam critical but stable

LUCKNOW: Senior Samajwadi MP Mohd Azam Khan's condition is now stable though the next 72 hours are crucial for him. According to Rakesh Kapoor, director Medanta hospital, "The oxygen requirement of the veteran leader has come down but the severity of the ailment continues. He is in the ICU and is being treated by a team of doctors." Azam Khan, who was lodged in Sitapur jail, had tested positive for Covid earlier this month. He was admitted to the hospital on Sunday after he complained of breathlessness.

Four of a family killed

Patna: Four members of a family were allegedly killed by unidentified men and their bodies thrown into a dam in Bihar's Nawada district, said a police official. The bodies were spotted by some fishermen during early morning. The incident occurred at Phulwaria dam under Rajauli police station in Nawada district. Darbari Chaudhary, Station House Officer (SHO) of Rajauli police station, said, "We received information about bodies found floating in a dam. Subsequently, we reached there and recovered the bodies with the help of divers."

Fire in Ghaziabad carton factory

Array/Ghaziabad: A massive fire broke out in a carton manufacturing factory in the Kavi Nagar Industrial Area in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad district Wednesday morning. However, no loss of life or property has been reported till now. Fire brigade personnel arrived at the site on receiving information and brought the fire under control. The intensity of the flames was such that they could not be doused for nearly an hour.

A RAMZAN LIKE NO OTHER

Covid shadow on Muslim fasting month

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 12: The shadows over Ramzan are darker this time and the despair deeper; the scramble for oxygen, hospital beds and even a decent burial for their loved ones eclipsing the gloom that marked the fasting month last year. With no large congregations in mosques, no 'iftar' parties and no late night shopping, it was said 2020 Ramzan was like no other in living memory. But as a second, deadlier COVID-19 wave ravages large parts of the country, Ramzan 2021 has rewritten even that pandemic norm. "Ramzan is a time for family and friends, but this year I have lost many of my near and dear ones and many in the family have been infected by the virus. This has been a tough month and I spent it just praying to Allah that this deadly virus goes away from our lives," said



Tanvir Parvez, a lawyer from Ghaziabad. The festivities, the cheer, the morning 'sehri' at food joints that underscored Ramzan and Eid for not just devout Muslims but for others as well have receded like a distant dream for those like Parvez. As the holy month of Ramzan nears its end with Eid to be celebrated May 14 in India except in Kerala after the Moon was not sighted Wednesday, Covid fears hang like a cloud over the festivities. Kerala will celebrate it Thursday. "This year, the fasting month went by running around dealing with health emergencies, deaths and funerals for relatives and friends," said Qazi Rafat Masood, an agriculturist from Uttar Pradesh's Nagina district. Though

Mosques have been open in many places during Ramzan, prayers were held with Covid norms and restrictions. Also, many appeals were made by clerics asking people to pray at home, especially in Covid hotspots. Masood said Ramzan, a time for self-discipline and introspection, would be marked with great fanfare in his locality of 'Qazi Sarai' every year. Throughout the month, there would be a 'Roza Iftar' party in one house or the other. This year, somewhat like last year, it has been about lockdowns, deserted streets and shuttered shops - symbolic of the emptiness during what is generally a festive time. The special Eid prayers will also not be the same. In several cities, it has been decided that prayers will not be held in Eidgahs but in local mosques with social distancing norms. At other places, calls have made urg-

ing people to offer Eid prayers at home. In Delhi, two other prominent clerics - Ahmed Bukhari of the Jama Masjid and Mufti Mukarram Ahmed of the Fatehpuri mosque - have issued separate video appeals to Muslims to offer Eid prayers at home. Social media is also abuzz with calls for celebrating Eid in accordance with Covid protocols with hashtags such as 'EidAtHome' and 'SayNoToEidShopping' doing the rounds on Twitter. Madani said Muslims had acted with a lot of patience during Ramzan as many lost their loved ones, many saw their family members struggle in hospitals and many were infected by the dreaded virus themselves. This Ramzan, several people also missed their fasts after getting infected by coronavirus and lamented about not being able to fast throughout the duration of the holy month.

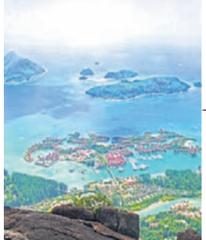
international



The US must act now to leverage rapidly increasing US domestic vaccine production, export ever-larger volumes of our surplus supplies, and go to work on the massive technical and logistical challenges to vaccine development on a global scale
JOE BIDEN | PRESIDENT, US

CASES DOUBLE IN WORLD'S MOST VACCINATED NATION

Seychelles, which has vaccinated more of its population against Covid-19 than any other country, saw active cases more than double in recent weeks, raising concerns that inoculation is not helping turn the tide in some places



of the day quote

About Chinese Ambassador's remarks on the Quad, we have made our position clear on this issue. We believe it is an exclusive clique against China and trying to rally countries around China to work against China
HUA CHUNYING | FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON, CHINA

In life you have to let things flow... And what will be, will be. We were not going to surrender to North American imperialism and we resisted on the entire front line where we had to resist
NICOLÁS MADURO | PRESIDENT, VENEZUELA

The reason that India is in such dire straits now is that they had an original surge and made the incorrect assumption that they were finished with it, and what happened, they opened up prematurely and wind up having a surge right now
DR ANTHONY FAUCI | DIRECTOR OF NIAID, US

Escalating violence bears hallmarks of 2014 Gaza war

The destruction of apartment towers was among several tactics used during the 2014 war that are now the subject of an investigation by the International Criminal Court into possible war crimes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Gaza City, May 12: Rockets streamed out of Gaza and Israel pounded the territory with airstrikes early Wednesday as the most severe outbreak of violence since the 2014 war took on many hallmarks of that devastating 50-day conflict, with no endgame in sight.

Gaza's Hamas rulers and other militant groups have fired barrages of hundreds of rockets that at times have overwhelmed Israel's missile defenses, causing air raid sirens and explosions to echo across Tel Aviv, Israel's biggest metropolitan area, and other cities.

Israeli airstrikes have levelled two apartment towers in the Gaza Strip, where 2 million Palestinians have lived under a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade since Hamas took power in 2007. Warning shots have allowed civilians to evacuate the buildings, but the material losses will be immense. Israel faced heavy criticism over the tactic during the 2014 war.

Just after daybreak Wednesday, Israel unleashed dozens of airstrikes in the course of a few minutes, targeting police and security installations, witnesses said.

MIDEAST MENACE



A wall of dark gray smoke rose over Gaza City. The Hamas-run Interior Ministry said airstrikes destroyed the central police headquarters in Gaza City, a compound with several buildings.

The death toll in Gaza rose to 43 Palestinians, including 13 children and 3 women, according to the Health Ministry. Nearly 300 people have been wounded, including 86 children and 39 women. Six Israelis, including three women

and a child, were killed by rocket fire Tuesday and early Wednesday, and dozens of people were wounded. Meanwhile, Gaza militants fired

an anti-tank missile across the border, killing an Israeli and wounding two others, who were evacuated under fire, according to Eli Bein, head of the Magen David Adom emergency service. It was not immediately clear if they were soldiers or civilians.

The Israeli military said militants have fired more than 1,050 rockets since the conflict began, with 200 of them falling short and landing inside Gaza. The military said it also shot down a drone that entered Israel from Gaza. Lt Col Jonathan Conrisc, a military spokesman, said two infantry brigades were sent to the area, indicating preparations for a possible ground invasion.

The destruction of apartment towers was among several tactics

Gaza commander killed

Militant group Hamas confirms that its Gaza City commander was killed in an Israeli airstrike, the highest-ranking militant killed since the 2014 war in the Palestinian territory. Earlier, Israel's internal security agency said that a series of airstrikes had killed Bassem Issa and several other senior Hamas militants. The army released a statement Wednesday, saying that it carried out a "complex and first-of-its-kind operation." Netanyahu says Israel will "stop the anarchy and restore governance to the cities of Israel, with an iron fist if needed, with all forces needed and all authorities required."

used during the 2014 war that are now the subject of an investigation by the International Criminal Court into possible war crimes. Israel is not a member of the court and has rejected the probe.

Israel and Hamas have fought three wars since the Islamic militant group seized power in Gaza from rival Palestinian forces in 2007. The conflicts ended after regional and international powers convinced both sides to accept an informal truce.

Kremlin-imposed cuts at US embassy leave thousands hanging

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Moscow, May 12: Under Kremlin orders, the US embassy has stopped employing Russians, forcing the embassy to cut its consular staff by 75 per cent and limit many of its services.

The order went into effect Wednesday, bringing the sharply deteriorating US-Russia relationship to an intensely personal level.

Because of the cuts, the embassy can offer only very limited services, such as considering "life-and-death" visa applications. That leaves Russian businessmen, exchange students and romantic partners adrift because they won't be able to obtain visas. Even Americans will be unable to register their newborns or renew their passports.

The embassy has made no statements on whether it is taking measures to beef up the consular staff with new employees from the United States. An order signed last month by President Vladimir Putin called for creating a list of "unfriendly" countries whose missions could be banned from hiring Russians or third-country nationals. The list includes the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Poland and several other European countries, but the United States is the first for which the ban is being enforced.

SHORT TAKES

Canada's province halts Astra doses

Toronto: Canada's largest province said Tuesday it will stop giving out first doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine due to concerns over its link to rare blood clots. Ontario's chief medical officer for health, Dr. David Williams, said the decision was made out of an abundance of caution because of increased instances of the rare blood clotting disorder linked to the shot.

Largest cooling stations installed

Makkah: As part of Saudi Arabia's efforts to provide high-quality services to visitors and pilgrims of the Holy Mosques using the latest technologies, the world's largest cooling plant of its kind has been installed in Makkah's Grand Mosque to ensure that worshippers perform their rituals in the cool and fresh atmosphere inside Al-Haram.

China gifts B'desh 500K vax doses

Dhaka: A special plane of the Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) carrying the China-donated Covid-19 vaccines and AD syringes landed in capital Dhaka early Wednesday. Chief of Air Staff of the BAF Mashuzzaman Seraniabat along with other senior officials were present at the BAF Base Bangabandhu in Dhaka's Kurmitola to receive the Sinopharm vaccines, the Xinhua news agency reported. A forklift unloaded boxes of the Chinese vaccines from the military transport plane shortly after it landed at around 5:30 am local time.

Egypt plans Suez Canal expansion

Cairo: Egypt Tuesday announced plans to widen and deepen the southern part of the Suez Canal where a hulking vessel ran aground and closed off the crucial waterway in March. The head of the Suez Canal Authority, Lt Gen Osama Rabie, announced details of the plan in a televised ceremony in the canal's city of Ismailia. The plan includes widening the canal's southernmost stretch by about 40 meters to the east, on the side of the Sinai Peninsula, Rabie said. That segment would also be deepened to 72 feet, from the current 66 feet in depth.

Highest purity uranium enriched by Iran, says UN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Berlin, May 12: Iran has enriched uranium to slightly higher purity than previously thought due to "fluctuations" in the process, the United Nations' atomic watchdog said Wednesday.

The report underscores the challenges diplomats face in ongoing talks, that began in April, to bring the United States back into the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran, which is supported by US President Joe Biden.



The initial announcement from Iran that it would start enriching to 60 per cent — which is not yet weapon's grade but its highest purity yet — came just as the talks were to begin in Vienna.

International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi reported to member agencies Tuesday that the latest inspections confirmed Iran continues to enrich uranium to up to 60% purity in its Natanz plant.

The agency added that inspectors had "verified that Iran had again changed the mode of production" by which it was producing uranium enriched to 60 per cent purity. Iran has been steadily violating the restrictions of the landmark 2015

Samples taken April 22 showed an enrichment level of up to 63% consistent with fluctuations of the enrichment levels experienced in the mode of production, said IAEA

deal after then-President Donald Trump pulled the US out unilaterally in 2018 and reimposed crippling sanctions.

The deal promised Iran economic incentives in exchanges for curbs on its nuclear program.

Iran has intended the violations to pressure the other nations involved — Germany, France, Britain, China and Russia — into finding ways to offset the US sanctions, so far unsuccessfully.

In addition to exceeding the purity of uranium enrichment past the 3.67 per cent allowed, Iranian violations of the JCPOA have also included installing more advanced centrifuges and stockpiling more enriched uranium than permitted.

The US has insisted that Iran must return to full compliance, but just how that would be carried out is still being discussed.

For example, diplomats involved concede that Iranian nuclear scientists cannot unlearn 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.

UK PM announces probe into his govt's pandemic handling

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, May 12: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson Wednesday announced a "full and independent" public inquiry into his government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, set to begin in the first half of 2022.

In a statement to members of Parliament during the weekly Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) session in the House of Commons, Johnson said the inquiry will be able to take oral evidence under oath and put the government's response to the crisis last year under the microscope.

The move follows calls from the Opposition for such a probe, with demands for it to include consultation with families affected by the pandemic over the past year.

According to Johns Hopkins university data, the deadly virus has so far infected 4,455,446 people and claimed 127,890 lives in the UK.

"I can confirm today that the government will establish an independent public inquiry on a statutory basis, with full powers under the Inquiries Act of 2005, including the ability to compel the production of all relevant materials, and take oral evidence in public, under oath," Johnson said.

"We will consult the devolved administrations before finalising scope and detailed arrangements, so that this Inquiry can consider all key aspects of the UK response. This process will place the state's actions under the microscope," he said.

Pointing to the scale of the undertaking, which would impose a "significant burden" on the National Health Service (NHS), the UK PM said the right moment for the inquiry to begin would be in Spring 2022.

EXHAUSTED FRONTLINERS



Nursing and care personnel lay on the floor in the ICU unit, during a demonstration on International Nursing and Care day, at the Mont Legia Hospital in Liege, Belgium, Wednesday, May 12, 2021

US hails India's stand on 5G trials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, May 12: India's recent decision authorising 5G trials without Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE is a sovereign one, a top State Department official has said, asserting that America is deeply concerned about the dangers of installing networks with equipment that can be manipulated, disrupted or potentially controlled by China.

India's Department of Telecom approved applications of telecom companies Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, Vodafone Idea and MTNL to conduct 5G trials but none of them will be using technologies of Chinese entities.

State Department Spokesperson Ned Price, at his daily news conference Tuesday, said: "This was a



It is true that we are deeply concerned about the dangers of installing networks with equipment that can be manipulated, disrupted or potentially controlled by the PRC
NED PRICE | US STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESPERSON

To exclude Chinese telecommunications companies from the trials will not only harm their legitimate rights and interests, but also hinder the improvement of the Indian business environment, which is not conducive to the innovation and development of related Indian industries
WANG XIAOJIAN | CHINESE EMBASSY SPOKESPERSON

"Allowing untested, untrusted telecommunication suppliers, like Huawei or ZTE, to participate in or to have any control over any part of a 5G network creates unacceptable risks to national security, to critical infrastructure, to privacy and to human rights as well," Price said.

WHO could have sounded pandemic alarm sooner

THE INDEPENDENT PANEL FOR PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE SAID A SERIES OF BAD DECISIONS MEANT COVID-19 WENT ON TO KILL AT LEAST 3.3 MILLION PEOPLE SO FAR AND DEVASTATE THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Geneva, May 12: The catastrophic scale of the Covid-19 pandemic could have been prevented, an independent global panel concluded Wednesday, but a "toxic cocktail" of dithering and poor coordination meant the warning signs went unheeded.

The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPPR) said a series of bad decisions meant Covid-19 went on to kill at least 3.3 million people so far and devastate the global economy.

Institutions "failed to protect people" and science-denying leaders eroded public trust in health interventions, the IPPPR said in its long-awaited final report.

Early responses to the outbreak detected in Wuhan, China in

December 2019 "lacked urgency", with February 2020 a costly "lost month" as countries failed to heed the alarm, said the panel.

To tackle the current pandemic, it called on the richest countries to donate a billion vaccine doses to the poorest.

And the panel also called on the world's wealthiest nations to fund new organisations dedicated to preparing for the next pandemic.

'Delay, hesitation and denial'

The panel was jointly chaired by former New Zealand prime minister Helen Clark and former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a 2011 Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

The report, "Covid-19: Make it the Last Pandemic", argued that the global alarm system needed overhauling to prevent a similar catastrophe. "The situation we find



ourselves in today could have been prevented," Sirleaf told reporters. The report said the emergence of Covid-19 was characterised by a mixture of "some early and rapid action, but also by delay, hesita-

tion, and denial." "Poor strategic choices, unwillingness to tackle inequalities and an uncoordinated system created a toxic cocktail which allowed the pandemic to turn into a catastrophic

human crisis," said Sirleaf.

Vaccine ultimatum

The panel did not spare the WHO, saying it could have declared the situation a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) its highest level of alarm — January 22, 2020. Instead, it waited eight more days before doing so.

The panel made several recommendations on how to address the current pandemic.

Rich, well-vaccinated countries should provide the 92 poorest territories in the Covax scheme with at least one billion vaccine doses by September 1, and more than two billion by mid-2022, it said.

The G7 industrialised nations should pay 60 percent of the \$19 billion required to fund vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics via the WHO's Access

to Covid Tools Accelerator programme in 2021, it added.

Invest billions, save trillions

To tackle future outbreaks and pandemics, the panel called for a Global Health Threats Council made up of world leaders, plus a pandemic convention.

The G20 should also create an International Pandemic Financing Facility, able to spend \$5-10 billion a year on preparedness, with \$50 to \$100 billion ready to roll in the event of a crisis. "Ultimately, investing billions in preparedness now will save trillions in the future, as the current pandemic has so clearly illustrated," Clark told reporters.

The panel believe their recommendations would have stopped Covid-19 from becoming a pandemic, had they been in place before the outbreak.

business

of the day quote

The semiconductor shortage will severely disrupt the supply chain and will constrain the production of many electronic equipment types in 2021. Foundries are increasing wafer prices, and in turn, chip companies are increasing device prices

KANISHKA CHAUHAN | PRINCIPAL RESEARCH ANALYST, GARTNER

Liquidity should be addressed by encouraging banks to lend to the export sector and more importantly instantly releasing all export benefits to name a few. This will help in making exports profitable else with delay in refund, exporters' profitability is wiped out with increasing interest burden

SK SARAF | PRESIDENT, FIEO

While a handful of developers continue to dominate auctions, new market entrants are giving them competition by bidding aggressively. These include large public sector firms like NTPC and CL, as well as smaller, private developers and international developers like Al Jomaih Energy and Water Co.

NIKHIL SHARMA | ASSOCIATE, CEEW-CF

SHORT TAKES

'OYO to move to 4-day work week'

New Delhi: Hospitality firm OYO will be shifting to a 4-day work week, OYO Founder and Group CEO Ritesh Agarwal said in a tweet Wednesday, as the company also launched a no questions asked flexible infinite paid leaves initiative. Agarwal in a tweet noted that COVID-19 continues to test the physical and mental well-being of people. One thing that truly matters is having more time for our loved ones and ourselves. Inspired by startups and large companies alike, we began a few initiatives this week at OYO, he said.

MG Motor India extends warranty

New Delhi: MG Motor India Wednesday said it has extended warranty and service validity of all schedules due in April and May. The MG customers will now be able to avail their schedules until July 31, 2021. The auto-extension of periodic maintenance schedules and maintenance contracts is in line to protect the customers as well as their interests, the automaker said in a statement. The company sells models like Hector and Gloster in the Indian market.

Airtel Africa Q4 profit soars

New Delhi: Airtel Africa Wednesday reported doubling of profit after tax for the March 2021 quarter to \$154 million (over ₹1130 cr), amid broad-based growth across key services and markets. The underlying revenue for the fourth quarter ended March stood at \$1,038 million (about ₹7,619 crore), rising 15.4% y-o-y on a reported currency basis.

Torrent donates 50 oxygen plants

New Delhi: The Torrent Group has donated 50 pressure swing adsorption (PSA) medical oxygen production plants to 50 different government hospitals across several states in the country. These plants are under construction and will start getting commissioned from the second half of May.



We are aware of the likelihood of the virus coming back in another wave. Therefore, (we) feel the need to support our country to prepare better by strengthening the healthcare system, especially in areas where the cases are to peak in the next 3-5 weeks based on analytics and data modelling

JAGDISH MITRA | CSO & HEAD OF GROWTH, TECH MAHINDRA

TIKTOK INDIA HEAD QUILTS

Nikhil Gandhi, the India Head of China's ByteDance-owned short video-sharing platform TikTok, has decided to quit and is currently serving his notice period, IWMBuzz reported. After the company folded its India business, Gandhi was recently redesignated as TikTok Head for the Middle East, Africa, Turkey and South Asia



Job postings dip 3% in April as 2nd wave hits India

AGENCIES

Mumbai, May 12: Job postings activity in April witnessed 3% decline sequentially as the country is hit with the second wave of the pandemic leading to lockdowns, according to a report.

The data indicates that the employment index saw a decline in job posting activity in April compared to March, by 3%, according to the Monster Employment Index.

The overall job postings also witnessed a decline of 4% year-on-year as of April 2021, compared to April 2020.

The Monster Employment Index is a broad and comprehensive analysis of online job posting activity conducted by Monster India.

The decline in postings is due to the onset of the second wave of



the pandemic leading to lockdowns, the report noted. Despite the decline in overall job postings, some industries continued to hold strong in some specific cities, it said.

Job postings in advertising, market research, public relations (PR) in Chennai and Hyderabad noted more than 50% y-o-y growth. Banking or financial services, in-

insurance in Kolkata, saw a 26% growth in April, compared with March despite the overall growth in job postings remaining neutral for the location, it stated.

Y-o-y hiring activity in Bangalore (28%), Hyderabad (23%), and Chennai (16%) indicated strong growth in job postings in April. There has been significant

The 2nd wave and certain lockdowns have impacted hiring activities. However, cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai indicate a positive uptick, and y-o-y growth across certain sectors and functions have been witnessed

SEKHAR GARISA | CEO, MONSTER.COM

growth in the top management (36%), senior-level (10%) and intermediate-level (13%) hiring y-o-y as of April 2021 compared to April 2020. The y-o-y numbers are still positive given that April 2020 also had Covid-19 impact in the base, the report said. In April, the shipping and marine

industry continued to witness a 2% increase sequentially in job postings. However, media and entertainment remained neutral.

Industries that exhibited the highest decline in job postings in April compared to the previous month include engineering, cement, construction, iron and steel (15%), retail (14%), FMCG, food and packaged food (12%) and logistic, courier or freight or transportation (12%).

Monster.Com CEO Sekhar Garisa said, "The second wave of the pandemic and various intensities of lockdowns across the country have impacted hiring activities.

However, hiring activities in some cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai indicate a positive uptick, and y-o-y growth across certain sectors and functions have been witnessed."

Big Bazaar brings in 'Doorstep delivery' initiative to Cuttack



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: To offer a safer shopping experience amid the second wave of the pandemic, Big Bazaar, the flagship hypermarket retail chain from Future Group, brought to Cuttack 'Two-hour Doorstep Delivery' initiative. Customers in Cuttack can now choose from a wide assortment of grocery, clothing, home and kitchen utilities. These include daily essentials like fresh fruits and vegetables, eggs, breads, rice, atta, dal, salt, and sugar to name a few. Customers can also order freshly baked bread, cupcakes, kulchas, and dairy products.

The orders can be placed on the website shop.bigbazaar.com or the mobile app of Big Bazaar. The service will be available from 8 AM to 8 PM. Customers can place a minimum order of ₹500 and avail this service for a delivery fee of ₹49. Orders above ₹1,000 will be delivered free of charge.

"Customers can choose the products, place their orders from the comfort and safety of their homes and get them delivered within 2 hours. Big Bazaar will bring all the savings and value that every household needs on their monthly and weekly shopping to their doorsteps," said Kishore Biyani, Founder-CEO, Future Group.

Big Bazaar's Two-hours Home Delivery service is now available in more than 150 cities and towns across the country.

BSNL, Vi lose subscribers, Jio gains in Feb

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: State-owned telecom service provider BSNL along with private operator Vodafone Idea (Vi) lost subscribers significantly, except Reliance Jio and Airtel, in the month of February, 2021 in Odisha, according to the report given by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).

TRAI's report says, "Voda Idea lost about 64,904 subscribers in the month of February while BSNL lost 35,884 subscribers in the same month."

Meanwhile, Reliance Jio added over 1.9 lakh new subscribers in the month of February, as per the latest telecom subscriber data released by TRAI, today. With this Jio has extended its market leadership in the state with over 1.4 crore mobile subscribers and 41% customer market share in the sector. Airtel added 66,908 mobile subscribers during the same month.

As per mobile subscriber data released by TRAI, overall mobile subscriber base in Odisha increased by 1,56,783 in February, and the total mobile subscriber base surpassed 3.4 crores as on February 28, 2021.

March industrial output zooms on low base effect



AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 12: Industrial production growth entered positive territory after a gap of two months with a record 22.4% rise in March this year, mainly due to the low-base effect and good show by manufacturing, mining and power sectors.

The manufacturing sector, which constitutes 77.63% of the index of industrial production (IIP), grew by 25.8% in March 2021, as per the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) Wednesday.

The mining sector output too grew 6.1% in March, while power generation increased by 22.5%. Industrial production had plunged 18.7% in March last year following the Covid-19 outbreak and remained in the negative zone till August 2020.

With the resumption of economic activities, factory output posted a

rise of 1% in September. The IIP had grown by 4.5% in October.

In November 2020, the factory output fell 1.6%, and it again entered the positive territory by growing 2.2% in December 2020.

The IIP had recorded a contraction of 0.9% in January and 3.4% in February this year. The government had imposed a lockdown to contain the spread of Covid-19 infections March 25 last year.

With the gradual relaxation of restrictions, there has been a relative improvement in the economic activities by varying degrees as well as in data reporting, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation had said in a statement issued in November.

The ministry had also given a disclaimer that it may not be appropriate to compare the IIP in the post-pandemic months with the data for the months preceding the

SILVER LINING

■ The manufacturing sector, which constitutes 77.63% of the index of IIP, grew by 25.8% in March this year

■ The mining sector output too grew 6.1% in March, while power generation increased by 22.5%

■ With the gradual relaxation of restrictions, there has been a relative improvement in the economic activities by varying degrees

■ The output of capital goods, which is a barometer of investment, grew by 41.9%

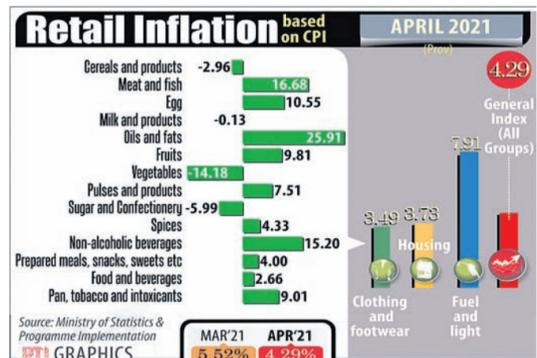
Covid-19 outbreak.

The manufacturing sector had recorded a contraction of 22.8% in March 2020. Mining sector output too fell by 1.3% in the same month last year. The electricity generation had declined by 8.2% in March 2020.

The output of capital goods, which is a barometer of investment, grew by 41.9% in March 2021, as against a contraction of 38.3% a year ago. Consumer durables manufacturing increased by 54.9% in the month under review, compared to a 36.8% decline in March 2020.

Consumer non-durable goods production grew 27.5% in March this year, compared to a contraction of 22.3% in the year-ago period. During 2020-21, the IIP contracted 8.6% as against 0.8% contraction in 2019-20.

Retail inflation cools to 3-month low of 4.29%



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 12: Retail inflation slipped to a three-month low of 4.29% in April, mainly on account of easing of prices of kitchen items like vegetables and cereals, official data showed Wednesday. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) based retail inflation stood at 5.52% in March.

Food price inflation eased to 2.02% in April from 4.87% in the preceding month.

According to the data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the rate of price rise in the vegetables basket was (-) 14.18% on an annual basis, sugar and confectionery (-) 5.99% and cereals (-) 2.96%.

CPI inflation had edged up to 5.5% in March 2021 from 5% a month ago on the back of a pick-

up in food as well as fuel inflation, while core inflation too remained elevated.

Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, ICRA Limited, said given the high base related to the supply disruptions seen during the nationwide lockdown in April 2020, the CPI inflation dipped to a three month low in April 2021, while printing somewhat higher than the expectations.

Overall, the prevailing localised restrictions appear to have had a limited impact on prices in April 2021.

"As the lockdown base fades away, we expect the CPI inflation to bounce back to an average of 5% in the remainder of the first half of fiscal year 2021-22, ruling out the possibility of further rate cuts to support economic activity and sentiment.

BIZ BUZZ

Royal Enfield to shut down two manufacturing plants

New Delhi: Mid-sized motorcycle maker Royal Enfield Wednesday said it has decided to shut down its two manufacturing facilities between May 13 and 16 in order to safeguard its employees amid the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic in the country. The company, which is a part of Eicher Motors, would utilise the shutdown to undertake maintenance activity at its manufacturing plants. "In light of the unprecedented situation owing to the spread of Covid-19, and with an objective to prioritise safety and well-being of its personnel, the company has decided to temporarily halt production operations at its manufacturing facilities in Chennai," Royal Enfield said in a statement.



₹18K cr PLI scheme for ACC batteries gets govt approval

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet has approved Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, 'National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage' for achieving manufacturing capacity of 50 Giga Watt Hour (GWh) of ACC and 5 GWh of 'niche' ACC, at an outlay of ₹18,100 crore. ACCs are the new generation of advanced storage technologies that can store electric energy, either as electrochemical or as chemical energy and convert it back to electric energy, as and when required. The consumer electronics, electric vehicles, advanced electricity grids, solar rooftop among others, which are major battery consuming sectors, are expected to achieve robust growth in the coming years. It is expected that the dominant battery technologies will control some of the world's largest growth sectors.



State amends IPR-2015, adds O₂ producers in priority list

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 12: State government has Wednesday amended Odisha Industrial Policy Resolution-2015 (IPR-2015) and included Odisha's oxygen manufacturing units under priority list to encourage these units. Earlier, these units were recognised as non-priority category in the policy.

Considering the rising demand of oxygen in the state in the view of surging cases of Covid-19 in state, the Odisha government has decided to bring manufacturing and refilling of oxygen and its containers under priority list. The IPR-2015 was approved for amendment by the State Cabinet presided

by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. The move is also part of encouraging the units for their efforts in supplying oxygen during the dearth in situation.

Industry department officials said that manufacturers of medical oxygen, oxygen cylinders and related equipments like valve and regulator and oxygen refilling units are brought under priority list and they can avail all benefits from the government. "Now these units can avail incentives like land at concessional rate, stamp duty exemption on land and other transaction, SGST reimbursement up to 200% on capital investment and electricity duty exemption for certain period," industry department official said.

Coal plant pollution can cause 8,300 deaths in India

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 12: Air pollution from planned new coal plants built by companies in which HSBC holds ownership stakes will cause an estimated 18,700 global deaths, close to half in India, from air pollution per year, a new research from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) said Wednesday.

The air pollution from these coal plants, when they are completed, will also lead to 29,000 emergency room visits due to asthma, 25,000 preterm births and 14 million days of work absence per year.

The health impacts amount to \$6.2 billion per year, with projected

deaths highest in India (8,300 deaths per year), followed by China (4,200), Bangladesh (1,200), Indonesia (1,100), Vietnam (580) and Pakistan (450).

The study builds on an April 2021 investigation by environmental organisation Market Forces, which showed that HSBC holds ownership stakes in coal companies via its asset management arm.

These companies together plan at least 73 new coal plants (137 individual coal plant units), generating 99 gigawatts (GW) of energy from coal. CREA then used this data to analyse air pollution deaths caused per year when all 73 plants are completed.

HSBC has acknowledged that its plan to end coal financing by 2040



does not include its asset management arm. The study by CREA used a well-established methodol-

ogy for calculating air pollution impacts, and assumes that all the plants follow their respective na-

The air pollution from new coal plants will lead to 29,000 emergency room visits due to asthma, 25,000 pre-term births and 14 million days of work absence per year

tional pollution standards.

Lauri Myllyvirta, Lead Analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, said, "HSBC's investments are perpetuating dependence on the dirtiest form of power generation, in countries that are already among the most polluted in the world."

The tens of thousands of cases of death and disease that would result from HSBC-linked coal power plants underline the urgency of shifting investments to clean energy to protect public health and the global climate.

Adam McGibbon, UK Campaign Lead at Market Forces, said, "As an investor in companies developing new coal power plants, HSBC has a financial interest in the failure of the Paris Agreement on climate change. Now we learn HSBC's investment portfolio would also lead to hundreds of thousands of premature deaths, mainly in developing countries that should be getting priority access to clean, renewable energy."

Citizens' virtual night out!

MANCHESTER UNITED'S 1-2 LOSS TO LEICESTER AT OLD TRAFFORD HELPS MANCHESTER CITY CLAIM THEIR THIRD PREMIER LEAGUE TITLE IN FOUR SEASONS

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Manchester, May 12: Locked out of their stadium for a year due to the pandemic, Manchester City fans couldn't resist gathering outside, waiting for the moment they'd be crowned champions for the third time in four seasons.

It was a result not inside the Etihad Stadium but a few miles across Manchester at their fiercest rival and nearest Premier League challenger that confirmed the title was reclaimed Tuesday.

Manchester United losing 1-2 to Leicester left City with an unassailable 10-point lead with three games remaining. United forward Mason Greenwood cancelled out Luke Thomas' 10th minute opener in the 15th minute.

However, Foxes had the last laugh



LIFTING TWO SIDES AT-A-TIME: Caglar Soyuncu celebrates with a teammate after scoring Leicester's winner against Man United, which helped Man City clinch Premier League title, Tuesday



when Caglar Soyuncu headed in the winner to dash Red Devils' hopes of any chance for the title.

Whereas United started the century dominating English football, now City is the force with five titles in 10 seasons and the biggest spenders on transfers and salaries.

While United fans gather outside Old Trafford in protest, at City they come to celebrate the 13 years of investment from Abu Dhabi that has transformed the fortunes of a club that was playing in the third tier until 1999 and won two English titles in the previous

Of course it's not the position we want to be in. We pushed (City) until the last 10, 12 days of the season. They have been lauded, and rightly so, as one of the best teams that's been in the Premier League. They've shown where the bar is. I want to congratulate Pep

OLE GUNNAR SOLSKJAER | MAN UNITED MANAGER

century — in 1937 and 1968.

Within minutes of the final whistle blowing at Old Trafford — after Caglar Soyuncu's 66th-minute header sealed the Leicester win that ended United's hopes of catching City — a "Champions" banner was unfurled over the entrance to the Etihad.

Soon, fans were setting off blue flares and parading small replica Premier League trophies. They will finally be allowed back into the stadium — up to 10,000 of them — to see City collect the real trophy after the final game of the Premier League season against Everton May 23.

But it's not the first trophy they have seen City lift this season, with a fourth successive League Cup won in front of around 2,000 spectators at Wembley last month.

And they could yet be allowed to

witness, likely in Portugal, the team contesting its first Champions League final against Chelsea May 29 when a treble could be completed.

"We have missed the fans so much," City captain Fernandinho said. "We wanted to do this for them. We will enjoy this moment and we hope the fans do too. Rest assured we will continue to do everything we can to bring the Champions League home this season." Ending Liverpool's reign as champions gives Pep Guardiola a third Premier League title in four seasons, adding to the trio of domestic titles he won at both Barcelona and Bayern Munich as coach.

And he could yet complete the season by ending his 10-year wait to win the Champions League again, just as he did twice leading Barcelona.

In a congested pandemic-impacted season that stretched the resources of teams, City was eight points from the lead in November languishing in 11th place after eight games. But Guardiola turned City's campaign around,

em-banking on a 28-match unbeaten after losing at Tottenham in November.

The champions have conceded the fewest goals in the league — 26 — thanks to the resurgence in form of John Stones forming a center back partnership with Ruben Dias, who joined ahead of the season for 68 million euros (then USD 78 million).

They have also scored the most goals — 72 — even without playing with a recognized



This has been a season and a Premier League title like no other — this was the hardest one. To come through this season — with all the restrictions and difficulties we've faced — and show the consistency we have is remarkable. It is relentless. They have been so, so resilient

PEP GUARDIOLA | MAN CITY MANAGER



EXPRESSION SAYS IT ALL: Barcelona players in dismay after conceding a late equaliser at Levante, Tuesday

Sloppy Barca squander title chance at Levante

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Madrid, May 12: Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman stared in disbelief from the bench. Lionel Messi walked with his head down near midfield. Defender Clement Lenglet batted the ball away with his hands in frustration after being called for a foul.

It was another frustrating night for Barcelona in the Spanish league. Barcelona missed yet another chance to reach the top after blowing a two-goal lead in a 3-3 draw at Levante Tuesday.

Barcelona was up 2-0 and 3-2 but couldn't hold on, despite knowing that a win would have put the team provisionally ahead of Atletico Madrid.

The draw left the Catalan club one point behind Atletico, which will host fifth-place Real Sociedad Wednesday. Barcelona is one point ahead of defending champion Real Madrid, which visits 10th-place Granada Thursday.

There will be two rounds remaining after the midweek matches. "We have to wait and see what happens in the other games, but this was a huge step backward for us," Koeman said.

Barcelona lose the head-to-head tie-breaker against both of their rivals. Madrid has the tie-breaking edge over Atletico. Sevilla also remain in contention for the title as they trail Atletico by six points ahead of its home game against mid-table Valencia Wednesday. Barcelona had already missed a

few other opportunities to reach the top, including Saturday when it was held at home by Atletico. It had squandered a chance to take the lead at home when it lost to Granada two weeks ago in a postponed match.

Messi, in what could be his last season with Barcelona, opened the scoring in the 25th minute with his league-leading 29th goal, hitting the net with a volley from inside the area after a cross by Jordi Alba that deflected on a defender and landed softly in front of the Argentina star.

Pedri added to the lead in the 34th with a shot from near the penalty spot after a pass by Ousmane Dembele, but the hosts needed a span of only two minutes to even the match in the second half.

Levante, sitting in 13th place, pulled closer with a header by Gonzalo Melero in the 57th, and Jose Luis Morales equalized with a shot from inside the area in the 59th after a bad pass by Messi outside the Barcelona area.

Barcelona thought it was in control again when Dembele put the team ahead again with a shot into the top of the net in the 64th, but Sergio Leon equalised again in the 83rd completing a low cross inside the area after American defender Sergino Dest slipped while trying to fend off his opponent.

Barcelona next hosts eighth-place Celta Vigo before visiting last-placed Eibar in the final round.

Djoko loses cool, wins match

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rome, May 12: Top-ranked Novak Djokovic shouted at the umpire before regaining his cool to see out his rain-delayed second-round match against Taylor Fritz at the Italian Open.

With conditions worsening during the second set and rain getting heavier, the defending champion's temper boiled over and he roared, "How much more do you want to play?" at the umpire. He added: "I asked you three times and you are not checking anything."

Djokovic, who has won the Italian Open five times, went on to beat the American 6-3, 7-6(7-5). "I was stressed out in the end obviously, but I think it was the right call to stop the match," Djokovic said.

"When I came back, I thought we were quite even actually till the last point. I'm glad that I managed

to finish off this match in straight sets. I know I can play better."

Djokovic, back in action after sitting out the Masters tournament in Madrid, was leading by a set and a break but was unable to serve out at 5-4 in the second.

Play was then suspended for approximately three hours. Fritz held his service game after the resumption to force the tiebreaker; but Djokovic closed out the win on his first match point.

Last year, Djokovic was disqualified from the U.S. Open for unintentionally hitting a line judge in the throat with a ball. Djokovic will next play a qualifier in either Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, who upset 16th-seeded Grigor Dimitrov 6-4, 7-6(7-2), or Cameron Norrie.

Daniil Medvedev's scheduled showdown with fellow Russian Aslan Karatsev was among the

matches postponed Tuesday.

Earlier, ninth-seeded Matteo Berrettini rallied to beat Nikoloz Basilashvili 4-6, 6-2, 6-4 — less than 48 hours after losing the final in Madrid. Fellow Italian Lorenzo Sonego also advanced, celebrating his birthday by beating 14th-seeded Gael Monfils 6-4, 5-7, 6-4.

Kei Nishikori was handed a walkover in his second-round match against 11th-seeded Pablo Carreno Busta. Eighth-seeded Diego Schwartzman was beaten 6-1, 6-3 by Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime, who moves into the third round.

In the women's tournament, former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko ousted 16th-seeded Johanna Konta 6-3, 6-1 and Kristina Mladenovic upset 10th-seeded Belinda Bencic 6-3, 6-4. Madison Keys rallied to win an all-American derby against Sloane Stephens 4-6, 6-2, 7-5.



Novak Djokovic plays a backhand during his match against Taylor Fritz, Tuesday

Ex-paddler Chandrasekhar succumbs to COVID

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, May 12: Arjuna award-winning former India table tennis player V Chandrasekhar died at a private hospital here Wednesday due to COVID-19 related complications, family sources said. He was 64 and is survived by his wife and a son.

Chandra, as he was popularly known, was a three-time national champion and was the president of Tamizhaga Table Tennis Association and Director and head coach of the SDAT-Medimix TT Academy in the city.

The Chennai-born player, who had reached the semifinals of the Commonwealth Games in 1982, was also a successful coach.

His playing career was cut short in 1984 following a botched knee surgery at a hospital here which led



to him losing mobility, speech and vision. He fought back to recover and served the game as a coach.

He also fought a legal battle against the hospital and got a verdict in his favour: The paddler was a three-time national champion and a gold medalist in BA (Economics) and Law at the time of the career-ending injury.

Subsequently, sheer willpower helped Chandra return to 70-80 per cent of his normal mobility and he decided to focus on training prom-

ising players.

According to a few paddlers who have played with him, Chandra was one of the most attractive players and took risks at crucial stages of the game to unsettle opponents. Chandra last appeared in the Indore nationals, held in 1983, losing to the eventual champion Kamlesh Mehta.

Mehta, recalling his association with Chandra, said it was difficult to find such an amiable character. "He was friendly on and off the court. It was he who made topspin popular in India. He learned the skills at (Chiro) Ogimura's academy in Japan.

"I spoke to him on the day he got admitted to the hospital (May 8). But who would have thought he would leave us all so soon," he added.

Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) president Dushyant Chautala paid rich tributes to Chandrasekhar:

"I was saddened to hear Chandra's demise today. It was very unfortunate that table tennis has lost another person to the dreaded disease. We recently lost Suhas Kulkarni and now Chandra. He was a superb person, very soft-spoken and a good coach," said Chautala.

"I have heard about his playing days and I was told how competitive he had been and equally receptive to his opponents, and a friend on or off-court. We and all those who were close to him will miss his persona. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family at this difficult period," he added.

Current Indian paddler G Sathiyam and former national champions S Raman and MS Mythili were among Chandra's trainees. Table tennis ace A Sharath Kamal condolled the death of Chandrasekhar.

UEFA finalising plans for CL final in Porto

ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, May 12: UEFA is finalising plans with Portugal to act as replacement host for the all-English Champions League final between Chelsea and Manchester City.

The UEFA showpiece is set to be moved from Istanbul to Porto just like last year due to pandemic issues in Turkey, people with knowledge of the situation told this agency Tuesday. They spoke on condition of anonymity because talks are ongoing.

The 50,000-capacity Estadio do Dragao in Porto has been lined up as the venue for the May 29 final after talks with the British government stalled Monday to use Wembley Stadium.

UEFA was unable to secure the quarantine exemptions required for media and guests to be able to fly into London for the climax of its biggest competition.

Semenya arrested for speeding

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cape Town, May 12: Olympic champion Caster Semenya was sentenced to 50 hours of community service for speeding while driving in South Africa, prosecutors said Wednesday.

The runner was arrested last Thursday and released on USD 35 bail, the National Prosecuting Authority said in a statement to this agency.

Semenya appeared in court in the capital, Pretoria, Friday and pleaded guilty to the offense, the NPA said. She faces a second court hearing in August when authorities will report back on whether she completed her community service.

The 30-year-old Semenya is a two-time Olympic and three-time world champion over 800 meters whose career has been halted by contentious rules regulating the natural level of testosterone in fe-



male runners.

World Athletics won't allow Semenya and other women with similarly high levels of natural testosterone to compete at any major international events in races

from 400 meters to one mile unless they agree to artificially reduce their hormone levels to below a specific threshold.

WA says their high levels of natural testosterone give them an unfair advantage over other female runners. Semenya has refused to follow the rules and lost two legal appeals against them, one at sport's highest court in Switzerland in 2019 and the second at the Swiss supreme court in 2020.

Her lawyers announced in February she would continue her fight against the regulations, which she's called discriminatory, at the European Court of Human Rights.

That's seen as a last-ditch legal challenge and there's unlikely to be a hearing before the Tokyo Olympics start in July, meaning Semenya will almost certainly be unable to defend her title. Semenya hasn't run a top-level 800 meters race for two years.