



## RIGHT RESOLVE

Actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas has raised USD 1mn to help India fight the 2nd wave of the Covid-19 pandemic

LEISURE P2



## WAR-LIKE SITUATION PERSISTS

The ongoing conflict between Israel and the Hamas continued with both sides indulging in rocket attacks and airstrikes

INTERNATIONAL P10

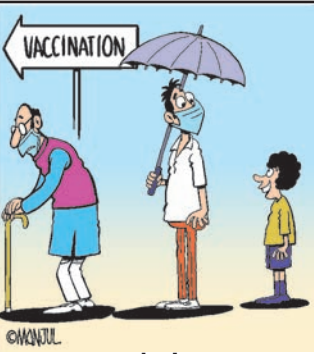


## POWAR REAPPOINTED

Ramesh Powar is reappointed as Indian women's cricket team head coach in place of WV Raman

SPORTS P12

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



By the time my turn comes, I will be 18!

11 GOVTS INCLUDING ODISHA FLOAT GLOBAL TENDERS TO GET JABS FROM ABROAD

# Vaccine 'war' continues

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 13: Due to an acute shortage of Covid-19 vaccines, India is struggling to contain the second wave of the pandemic. Even though the two main vaccine producers in the country, Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech have assured the government that they are ramping up productions, it seems that the states are not buying this. So far 11 states including Odisha have floated global tenders to procure vaccines from abroad. It just shows that they are not ready to depend on the Centre or the vaccine manufacturing units in India anymore.

Both SII and Bharat Biotech have submitted their production plans to the Centre from June to August as per the declarations made by Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan. He conducted a meeting Wednesday with seven states/UTs which are lagging behind in terms of vaccinating people against Covid-19. Vardhan informed that India's vaccine production is likely to reach eight crore doses in May and nine crore in June.

As per the plans disclosed, Bharat Biotech is all set to raise the production of Covaxin to 3.32 crore doses in July and 7.82 crore in August. SII on the other hand has targeted production of 10 crore Covishield doses in August.



LIFELINE: People queue up in front of the Covid-19 vaccination centre at the Old Town Municipality Hospital in Bhubaneswar

Meanwhile the Centre said Thursday it has so far procured 35.6 crore vaccine doses for the ongoing drive so far and more than 17 crore persons in India have been vaccinated. It also said that it is on the verge of procuring another 16 crore doses and added that the country will have two billion doses of vaccines between August and December.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal

has however, blamed the Centre for the shortage of vaccines. He has also said that the Centre is pitting the states in a vaccine war against one another and it is giving India a 'bad image' in its fight against Covid-19.

"Indian states left to compete/fight with each other in international market. UP fighting Maha, Maha fighting Orissa, Orissa fighting Delhi. Where is 'India'? Portrays such a bad image

## NOW VENTILATOR WOES SURFACE

NEW DELHI: Only the supply of vaccines to the different states is not bothering the Centre alone. Well it has another problem in hand. The 'Make in India' ventilators are developing glitches in many states thus creating another challenge for the Centre. The Centre has said 'many hospitals or medical colleges are not following' the user manual properly leading to the technical glitches. On the other hand, a number of states including Punjab have said the ventilators are malfunctioning as proper maintenance is not being done by the manufacturers who are supposed to provide 'after sales service'.

of India. India, as one country, shud procure vaccines on behalf of all Indian states (sic)," the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo said in a tweet.

Many states including Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have temporarily suspended vaccination of the 18-45 years age group. They have said that unless there is a seamless supply of vaccines, it is impossible to carry out vaccination properly. They have also pointed out that crores in the 45-plus category are yet to get the second dose.

## 'RATE OF INFECTION WORRYING' Lockdown may continue in state

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 13: With Odisha registering around 10,000 Covid-19 cases on a daily basis there is a strong possibility that the lockdown may be extended after May 19, experts said Thursday. The total number of active cases in Odisha went past the one-lakh mark Thursday morning for a brief while.

Out of 30 districts in Odisha, the test positivity rate (TPR) has remained over 10 per cent in 29 for the last seven days (May 6 to 12).

Kalahandi district has reported the highest TPR at 46 per cent. Other districts that have a TPR of more than 30 per cent are Sambalpur

(38.4%), Khurda (36.7%), Angul (34.1%), Bargarh (31.3%), Boudh (31.2%) and Sundergarh (30.8%).

Director of Capital Hospital Laxmidhar Sahu said that if the Covid-19 graph doesn't show a downward trend, the government will be forced to extend lockdown.

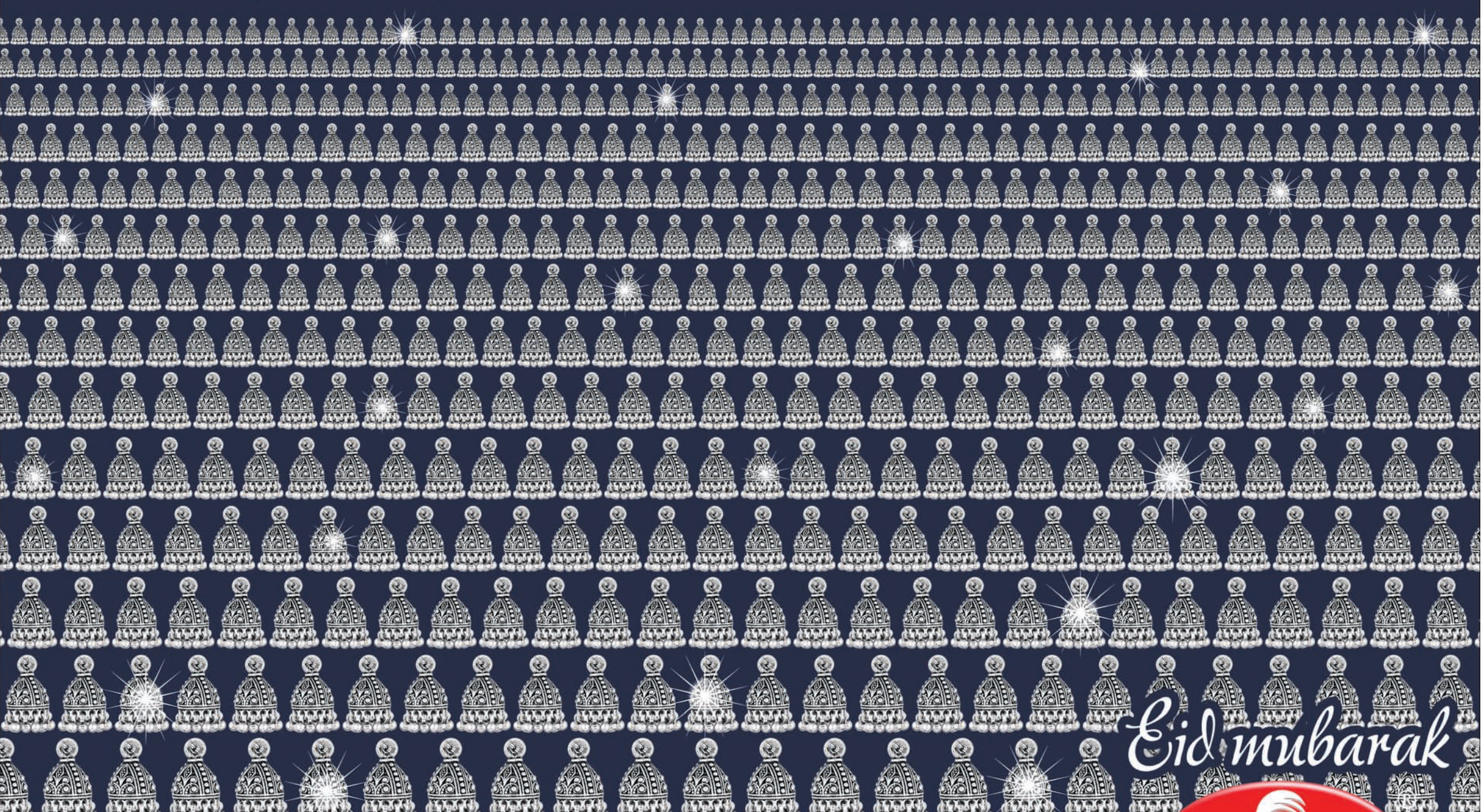
Similarly, another senior doctor and former public health director JK Tripathy opined that the government should continue with the lockdown as the infection rate continues to remain high. "The daily infection rate continues to remain above 10,000, so the government should not relax restrictions. Otherwise the rate will increase," asserted Tripathy.

**WEATHER**

	BHUB	CTK
TEMP MAX	32.8°C	35.9°C
TEMP MIN	25.0°C	27.9°C
Humidity	84%	100%
Rainfall	3.0mm	32.8mm

Forecast: Thunder-shower very likely

May all your prayers be blessed



Eid mubarak



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# leisure



## BEYONCE KNOWLES SLAYS IN ALL-BLACK ENSEMBLE

Pop star Beyonce Knowles looks like a million bucks on social media, dressed in an all-black thigh-high slit ensemble. In her latest post, Beyonce poses for the camera in a long black dress with a slit completing her look with a belt, a sunglass and a choker.

## MEDITATION HELPED ALICIA TO BE A GOOD MOTHER AND PARTNER

Singer Alicia Keys said that meditation helped her a lot after she became a mom. "Like so many new moms I was exhausted. So, I tried meditation which helped me to be a good mother to my children, and a good partner to my husband," she said.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
Today the stars advocate that you concentrate on money matters and how to save some, and in this purpose you will remain engrossed. However, Ganesha advises you not to neglect domestic duties lest you encounter a morose spouse. So carry on and make a dash for that movie as planned. Don't cancel it.

**TAURUS**  
You are likely to turn excessively self centred today, says Ganesha. This could cause you to be very insecure. You will have a tendency to control and dominate others. There is a likelihood that you may, thereby, jeopardize important relationships. You are advised to be sensitive to the needs and feelings of all those you come across.

**GEMINI**  
Ganesha opines that today you might feel a little blue and under the weather. You may harbour feelings of loneliness today. Your repressed emotions and yearnings as well as your intellectual leanings will likely come to the fore today, says Ganesha.

**CANCER**  
Your ideas today are source of your energy. A situation may arise, which will force you to take hard decisions later. A new business or venture may prove beneficial. Your magical touch will bestow success in every endeavour. Ganesha is with you.

**LEO**  
There are chances of conflict on the home front today. However you will be able to solve these problems owing to your understanding nature. However, these conflicts would likely not have cropped up if you would have paid more attention to your family.

**VIRGO**  
Keep an open mind and give vent to your imagination. You will feel very creative today, and will pursue your innovative ideas. Luck will favour you, and some things on which you took some risk will bear fruits. You will be very energetic and enthusiastic about all the work you do.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesha says that your social status will increase now. Today is an auspicious day for venturing in new business or changing your profession. For those involved in the fields of interior designing, or running beauty parlours, now is an especially bountiful time for making progress in your business.

**SCORPIO**  
A cheerful day lies ahead of you especially for the business community. It's a clincher, as good deals not only come to your door step, but yield good business. Feel, that you are the king of the world; bring out the best in you and you are bound to succeed.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
You are in a dilemma today. You may find yourself standing at crossroads, and your decision power does not seem to help you much, says Ganesha. You are likely to become controversy's favourite child; this may add fuel to the fire. Be wise, and take guidance of experienced people.

**CAPRICORN**  
God helps those who help themselves, likewise, your sincere efforts will be paid off well, today. If you're dealing with shares and stocks, it may be your day, today. Your life partner will prove to be lucky for your success, so give him/her the credit he/she deserves, suggests Ganesha.

**AQUARIUS**  
You always see the larger picture, and desire to channelise all your energies towards making things better. Such positive approach makes you an excellent team player, and enables you to bring novel ideas and effective solutions to the table, says Ganesha.

**PISCES**  
This day promises to be filled with much romance, laughter, and fine dining, says Ganesha. You will seem irresistible to the opposite sex. You might also find yourself falling for someone. A breathe of fresh air could wait into old relationships, or new ones could be formed.

## Patience is key in showbiz: MRUNAL

**Mumbai:** Actress Mrunal Thakur says uncertainty is a natural trait if one belongs to the film industry.

"I think the most important thing is patience. As an artiste, you are always curious to perform but the big question is content. You have to choose the right script. I feel pressured (and think) should I choose this script? I feel internally that I can do better but then I feel if I let this script go, will I get more films? This thought keeps bothering me all the time," said the Love Sonia actress.

"If I try to hurry up, I may end up taking up scripts just for sake of it. I will end up losing myself. For me, films are an integral part of my life and I want to be associated with a film that will have a message and do good for society in some way or the other," she sums up.

IANS



## ANTI-COVID DRIVE

# PC raises \$1mn for India, eyes \$3mn mark

**Mumbai:** Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas shared that over 14,000 contributors have helped raise \$1 million, to help India amid the second wave of Covid-19.

Priyanka shared a video on Instagram late Wednesday night according to India time, featuring a world map and the countries from where donations have poured in to help India.

"Through some of the darkest days in our history, humanity has once again proven that we are better together. @nickjonas and I are so humbled by your support and by the outpouring of help for India from so many parts of the world," she wrote alongside the video.

Priyanka shared that the fundraising target is now \$3 million.

"We can all continue to help so let's not stop here. We're raising the fundraising target to \$3 Million and we know that with your help and support, we can achieve this too. Thank you all for your support and thank you @give\_india for the incredible work you are doing on ground," the actress concluded.

IANS

# Raima always had audition phobia

**Mumbai:** Actress Raima Sen recalls giving a screen test for her role in the upcoming web series *The Last Hour*, adding it was something she has never done before.

"In all these years in the industry, I have never done a screen test. When I learnt that (director) Amit (Kumar) wanted to do a screen test for my character in Calcutta, I first avoided it as I have always had a phobia of auditions. Later, I gathered my

strength and somehow decided to do it. I first thought I was never going to get the part but surprisingly, I got a confirmation call from him in a couple of days," says Raima, who essays the role of Nyima.

"With all my work, I've always tried to understand the vision of the director and then added my individuality, which helps me stay focused on my character," she said. *The Last Hour* also features Sanjay Kapoor, Shahana Goswami, Karma Takapa, Robin Tamang and Shaylee Krishen. The series releases on Amazon Prime Video May 14.

IANS



# Radhe among Salman's weakest films ever

For the record, the film is officially inspired by the 2017 Korean film 'The Outlaws', but director Prabhudeva misses out the thriller quotient of that film

This is Salman's third film with Prabhudeva as director, after *Wanted* (2009) and *Dabangg 3* (2019). Those two films marked epochal moments in the actor's career. *Wanted* was the Eid release that would catapult him to the stature of Mumbai's top Khan of the 2010s, a year before the more-hyped *Dabangg* would establish him in that position. *Dabangg 3*, a decade later, was the warning knell that even the hardcore Salman Khan fans were no longer in the mood to blindly applaud the trademark Salman Khan package.

Yet, the superstar and his chosen director have fallen back on the same bag of tricks in *Radhe*, in a bid to garner instant 'seti maar' reaction. Perhaps it would have worked if the film had a wide theatrical release.

The trouble is Salman has ended up serving a big movie that won't appear that



is more accustomed to content-driven fare and that often dismisses the *Radhe* brand of 'entertainment' as ludicrous.

The fact is of no help that AC Mugil and Vijay Maurya's writing makes it seem like the script lay in cold storage from around the time *Wanted* was emerging as a blockbuster. For the record, the film is of-

**Cast:** Salman Khan, Disha Patani, Randeep Hooda, Jackie Shroff  
**Direction:** Prabhudeva

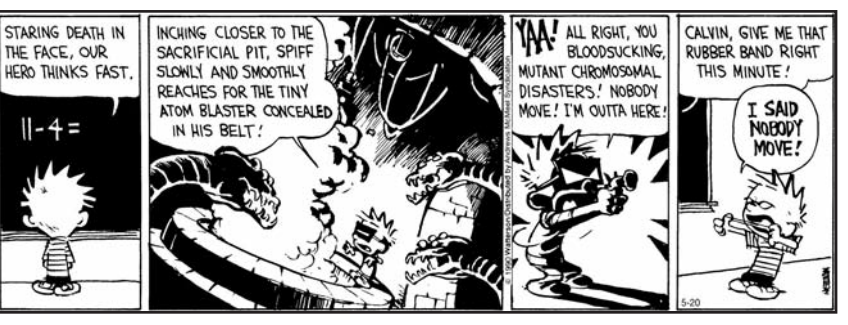
officially inspired by the 2017 Korean film *The Outlaws* in content and execution. But director Prabhudeva wholly misses out on the edge and thriller quotient of that film in trying to set up a Salman Khan showcase. The aging superstar does everything he has always done, but that's the problem—he has always only done all that he does in *Radhe*.

*Radhe* is among Salman Khan's weakest films ever. Thankfully for his fans, it's also his shortest film in a long time.

### PEANUTS



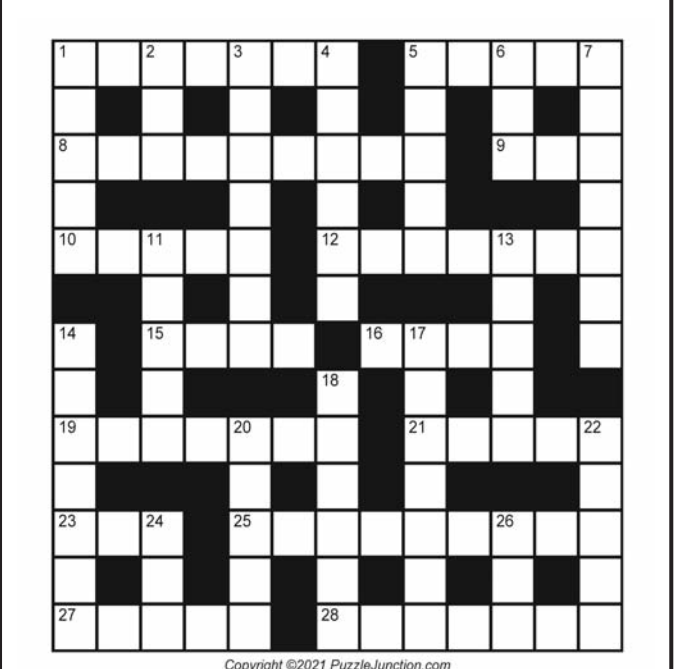
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



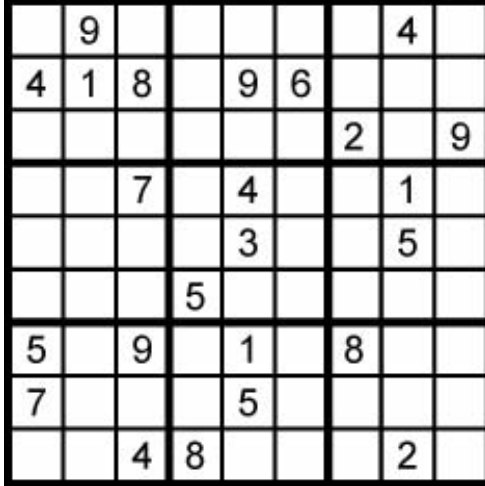
## FUN post CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Northern seabirds
  - 5 Mystiques
  - 8 Restricted
  - 9 Come out on top
  - 10 Video store section (3-2)
  - 12 Trap
  - 15 Require
  - 16 Fellow
  - 19 Tell tales
  - 21 Anzio locale
  - 23 Yoga class item
  - 25 Roam
  - 27 Valuable fur
  - 28 Is generous
  - Down**
  - 1 Treasure map distances
  - 2 Cone bearer
  - 3 Picture
  - 4 Noble metal
  - 5 Peruvian peaks
  - 6 Like sushi
  - 7 Earnest
  - 11 Word with ear or peace
  - 13 Top dog
  - 14 Go-getters
  - 17 Port-au-Prince native
  - 18 Cured
  - 20 Quarrel
  - 22 Abominable snowmen
  - 24 Spa spot
  - 26 Aardvark's tidbit

### 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

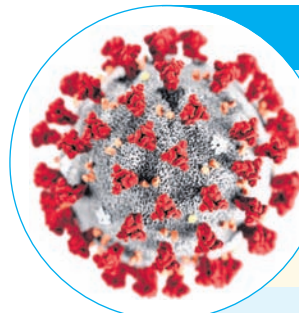


# downtown



## OXYGEN ON BIKES

Federation of Blood Donor Organisations of Odisha launches two-wheeler oxygen express in Cuttack, Thursday



## COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	16,14,72,007	13,92,97,226	33,51,167
India	2,37,03,665	1,97,34,823	2,58,317
Odisha	5,76,297	4,82,345	2,251

# Collectors can take a call on home delivery of liquor

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 13:** The state government has empowered district Collectors to take a call on home delivery of liquor during the lockdown.

Excise secretary Sushil Kumar Lohani has informed Excise Commissioner Ashish Singh about the decision of the government. The Collectors have been asked to take decision on home delivery of liquor by shops selling India Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and country-made liquor in their respective districts after taking into consideration the prevailing situation.

"After careful consideration and in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 93 of Odisha Excise Act, 2008, the government has been pleased to delegate the decision of introducing home delivery of liquor by IMFL, OFF/ON and country-made liquor shops as well as by food aggregators during the lockdown period to Collectors, who will take appropriate decisions in this regard," Lohani said in his letter. The



The govt has allowed operation of all godowns under Odisha State Beverages Corporation for wholesale trade between 6am and 2pm

## AMIDST LOCKDOWN

The Collectors have been asked to take decision on home delivery of liquor by shops selling IMFL and country-made liquor in their respective districts after taking into consideration the prevailing situation

Excise secretary has instructed the Collectors to follow the guidelines issued last year (during the lockdown) regarding home delivery of liquor.

The state government has allowed operation of all godowns under Odisha State Beverages Corporation for wholesale trade between 6am and 2pm.

The government has imposed lockdown with effect from May 5 that will continue till May 19. During the lockdown, all non-essential services including shops

selling non-essential items will remain shut. Hence, all the liquor shops have remained closed during this period.

A few days ago, Lohani had submitted a proposal in this regard to the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) PK Jena.

During the lockdown last year, the state government had allowed home delivery of liquor by food aggregators/delivery service providers/technology platforms as well as by liquor license holders.

# 2nd wave hits hotel industry hard

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Puri, May 13:** The Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions imposed by the government to check the virus spread have taken a heavy toll on the hotel industry of the Holy city, a major tourist destination in Odisha.

The hotel industry of Puri has suffered three back-to-back blows in last three years. As a result, around 15,000 people associated with the industry here have been pushed into financial miseries, sources said.

Puri district is home to many famous shrines and iconic structures like Srimandir, Konark Sun Temple, Alarnath temple, Baliharchandi and Ramchandi temple. Besides, Chilika Lake, Puri and Chandrabhaga beaches, Buddhist structures at Kuruma and heritage crafts village of Raghurajpur attract tourists and visitors from across the country and abroad.

At least 1,000 hotels and lodging houses have come up in Puri city and its nearby areas to cater to the needs of tourists. Similarly, the city has several tour and travel agencies that provide service to the visitors. Many locals usually earn a livelihood depending on the flourishing tourism sector.



## IN THE DOLDRUMS

The hotel industry of Puri has suffered three back-to-back blows in last three years, pushing 15,000 people associated with the industry into financial miseries

Just two years ago, the hotel industry suffered huge losses due to the cyclonic storm Fani that had left a trail of devastation in the coastal district

The hoteliers had spent huge sums to repair the damaged facilities at their hotels and lodging houses

However, the outbreak of novel coronavirus in March last year and the prolonged lockdown imposed by the Union and state governments broke the backbone of hoteliers of Puri

Just two years ago, the hotel industry suffered huge losses due to

the cyclonic storm Fani that had left a trail of devastation in the coastal

district. The hoteliers had spent huge sums to repair the damaged facilities at their hotels and lodging houses. However, the outbreak of novel coronavirus in March last year and the prolonged lockdown imposed by the Union and state governments broke the backbone of hoteliers of Puri, sources said.

The industry got some relief in terms of relaxation in the lockdown norms in the last quarter of 2020. But, the devastating second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has given a body blow to the hotel industry and tourism sector of the Pilgrim city.

"The state government has imposed a 14-day lockdown in Odisha to tackle the second wave of Covid-19. This has put the livelihood of 15,000 employees of hotels in Puri in danger. Most of the hotels have just downed their shutters. The hoteliers are spending money from their savings to maintain their infrastructure," said hotelier Bibhudatta Patra.

It is learnt that the hoteliers have urged the Centre to announce some assistance for the hotel industry.

"The hotel association of Odisha has urged the Centre to provide some assistance to the hotel industry," said Girish Chandra Nayak, a member of Puri Hotel Association.

# Centre asks MCL to set up 2 Covid hosps

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 13:** Union Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi has instructed Central PSU Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) to set up two temporary Covid care hospitals and make provision for additional beds in three other facilities. Joshi has issued the instructions on the request of Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Pradhan, in order to ramp up medical infrastructure in the state for combating Covid-19, had sought personal intervention of Joshi to set up healthcare facilities in high Covid burden districts like Sambalpur, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda and Angul.

PRADHAN HAD SOUGHT PERSONAL INTERVENTION OF JOSHI TO SET UP HEALTHCARE FACILITIES IN HIGH COVID BURDEN DISTRICTS LIKE SAMBALPUR, SUNDARGARH, JHARSUGUDA AND ANGUL

UNION MINISTER JOSHI HAS INSTRUCTED THE MANAGEMENT OF MCL TO CONSIDER PRADHAN'S REQUEST FOR SETTING UP A TEMPORARY SUPER SPECIALTY HOSPITAL WITH 150 BEDS IN SAMBALPUR AND A 50-BED HOSPITAL AT BASUNDHARA IN SUNDARGARH DISTRICT

JOSHI HAS INSTRUCTED THE MCL TO MAKE PROVISION OF 50 OXYGENATED BEDS, ICUS AND VENTILATOR FACILITIES AT BRAJRAJNAGAR COVID HOSPITAL IN JHARSUGUDA DISTRICT

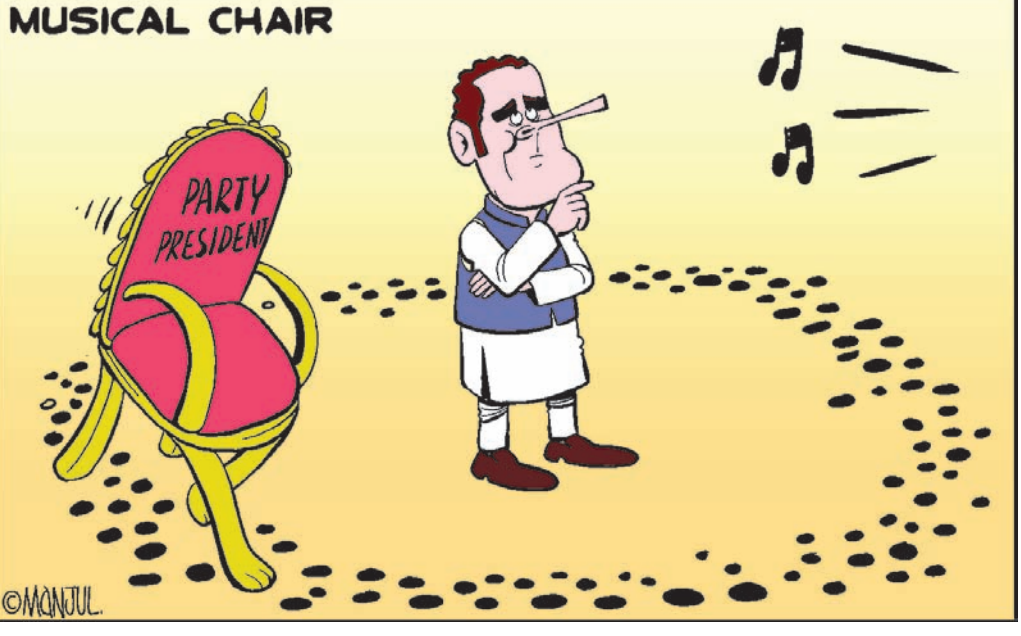
and ventilator facilities. Similarly, the MCL has also been asked to install 150 oxygen beds, ICU and ventilator facilities at Jharsuguda Lakhapur Covid hospital and Talcher Covid hospital which is managed by the MCL itself.

This apart, the Union minister has instructed the MCL to make provision of 50 oxygenated beds, ICUs and ventilator facilities at Brajrajnagar Covid Hospital in Jharsuguda district.

As per Pradhan's letter, the MCL has so far contributed a sum of over Rs 140 crore towards Covid management and preparedness in Odisha.

Joshi, in his reply, stated that it is bounden duty of every individual and institution in the country to rise to the occasion and lend their support to the Prime Minister of India in his efforts to contain spread of the pandemic and mitigate the sufferings of the people.

## POLITICKLE by MANJUL



# nCoV norm violators cough up ₹2.80 crore in 15 days



Police enforcing the lockdown at Kalpana Square in Bhubaneswar, Thursday

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 13:** Odisha police has collected Rs 2.80 crore as fines from around 1 lakh violators

of Covid norms during the last 15 days. ADG, Law & Order, YK Jethwa Thursday revealed that the state police registered 71 cases while as many as 269 violators have been

arrested during the period. Jethwa claimed that 8,302 vehicles have been seized by the police for violating Covid guidelines.

He urged people to follow all the Covid-19 restrictions so that police would not be forced to take coercive action. As many as 22 teams comprising officials of special task force (STF), Crime Branch and drugs inspectors have been set up to check illegal activities like hoarding of Covid essential items and price jacking by private hospitals during the pandemic.

He requested people who have taken the first dose of vaccination to patiently wait for the second dose. People have been urged not to crowd the vaccination centres unnecessarily.

# No morning walk, cycling during lockdown: CP

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 13:** The twin city Commissioner of Police, Saumendra Priyadarshi Thursday instructed the denizens not to step out for morning walk or cycling during the lockdown. Speaking on Covid-related enforcement activities, Priyadarshi stated that activities like morning walk, evening walk and cycling have been prohibited during the lockdown as per guidelines.

He also said that denizens have been coming out of their houses during lockdown for evening and morning walk, brazenly violating the guidelines. He urged the citizens to stay indoors to thwart the virus spread.



Denizens have been coming out of their houses during lockdown for evening and morning walk, brazenly violating the guidelines

SAUMENDRA PRIYADARSHI | POLICE COMMISSIONER

Similarly, the deputy commissioners of police (DCPs) of both Bhubaneswar and Cuttack revealed the steps taken in twin city for proper enforcement of Covid-19 restrictions during lockdown.

HELPLINE NUMBERS	
BHUBANESWAR	For grievances 8093028100 For permits 8144207100
CUTTACK	For grievances 8763068167 For permits 6370701550

Bhubaneswar DCP Umashankar Dash revealed that around 1,500 police personnel have been deployed at different places for enforcement of the lockdown in City.

Dash cited the helpline numbers, 8093028100 and 8144207100, issued for senior citizens and persons seeking permission for marriage and funeral ceremonies respectively. He instructed denizens to download the format shared as the profile pictures of the dedicated WhatsApp numbers to apply for marriage and funeral events.

Dash also spoke about plans to issue self-generated passes for the workers engaged in IT and IT Enabled Services (ITeS) sectors.

Cuttack DCP, Prateek Singh revealed that 18 platoons of police force have been deployed in the city for the implementation of lockdown. He reiterated zero tolerance towards persons found violating Covid guidelines.

He requested citizens of Silver City to air their grievances with the police through helpline number 8763068167. He also said that they can call 6370701550 for marriage and funeral related permission.

Both the DCPs have urged the denizens to cooperate with police for successful enforcement of lockdown.

# 65 slum dwellers held in Cuttack skirmish

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Cuttack, May 13:** As many as 65 slum dwellers including 16 women were arrested Thursday morning in connection with the attack on Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC) staffers and local policemen at Nuapara-Balisahi slum area under Madhupatna police limits in Cuttack May 11.



File photo of a face-off between the slum dwellers and police

Five platoons of forces have been deployed to bring the situation under control and maintain law and order, keeping in mind palpable tension that prevails in the locality, a police station official said.

Notably, some civic body officials including a local police team had gone to Nuapara-Balisahi slum area upon receiving information

that the temporary tents, wherein hundreds of displaced slum dwellers had been accommodated, were blown away by strong Nor'wester winds Tuesday afternoon.

Around 1,200 families had been evicted a few days ago from nearby slums located at Behera Sahi, Sagadia Sahi of Ranihat, Das Sahi area near Pilgrim Road area and

Temporary tents, in which hundreds of displaced slum dwellers had been accommodated, were blown away by strong Nor'wester winds Tuesday

Jalua Sahi area of Malgoddan area to facilitate an ongoing expansion work of Taladanda Canal Road in Cuttack city.

The dwellers had attacked the CMC and police personnel and vandalised vehicles alleging that the tents had injured their children. Situation escalated at Nuapara-Balisahi area after some children were found trapped under the tents. Hundreds of slum dwellers had staged a dharna as well.

## LORD'S THRONE



A silver throne being carried to Narendra pond in Puri for the upcoming Chandan Yatra of Srimandir deities, Thursday



# 19 more nCoV deaths in state; active cases near 1-lakh mark

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, May 13:** The sharp rise in daily Covid-19 cases and deaths in the state continued Thursday even as the number of active cases came closer to the 1-lakh mark for the first time in the coastal state since the beginning of the pandemic last year, a Health department official said.

The Covid-19 caseload in the state mounted to 5,76,297 as 10,649 more people tested positive for the virus while 19 fresh fatalities pushed the death toll to 2,251, he said.

Odisha now has 91,648 active cases, the official said, adding that 4,82,345 patients have so far recovered from the infection.

Khurda district, which comprises the state capital Bhubaneswar, accounted for 14,886 active cases, followed by Sundargarh (11,466) and Cuttack (8,274).

Of the fresh cases, 5,965 were reported from quarantine centres and 4,684 detected during contact tracing.

According to the official, Khurda also recorded the highest number of new cases at 1,557, followed by Cuttack (930), Sundargarh (774), Angul (557) and Balasore (503).

Taking to Twitter, the Health and Family Welfare department said, "Regret to inform the demise of nineteen Covid positive patients while under treatment in hospitals."

Three fresh deaths were reported from Angul district and two each from Sundargarh and Puri. One patient each from Balasore, Bargah, Khurda, Bolangir, Boudh, Ganjam, Jagatsinghpur, Kandhamal, Malkangiri, Nuapadda, Rayagada and Sambalpur succumbed to the infection, he said.

Fifty-three other Covid-19 patients have so far died due to co-morbidities, the H&FW department official said. The state has so far conducted over 1.07 crore



UNENDING CRISIS

**THE CORONAVIRUS CASELOAD IN ODISHA MOUNTED TO 5,76,297 AS 10,649 MORE PEOPLE TESTED POSITIVE FOR THE VIRUS IN LAST 24 HOURS**

Three fresh deaths were reported from Angul district and two each from Sundargarh and Puri. One patient each from Balasore, Bargah, Khurda, Bolangir, Boudh, Ganjam, Jagatsinghpur, Kandhamal, Malkangiri, Nuapadda, Rayagada and Sambalpur succumbed to the infection

The coastal state has so far conducted over 1.07 crore sample tests for Covid-19, including 51,451 Wednesday

## 98-year-old woman defeats Corona

Amidst the gloom caused by the second wave of Covid-19, a 98-year-old woman with co-morbidities has defeated the infection at the SUM Covid Hospital here, spreading cheer all around.

Annapurna Biswal of Chandrasekharpur area was detected with Covid-19 May 5 after which her family members rushed her to the SUM Covid Hospital for treatment.

After being treated by the doctors and nurses, Biswal who suffered

from filaria, hypertension and diabetes responded to the medication and came around within a week, SUM Hospital sources here said.

"The dedicated care extended to my mother has helped her recover," Annapurna's son Kulamani Biswal said.

"We never thought she would recover after she was infected by Covid-19, but we are extremely happy with the treatment given to her," Annapurna's granddaughter-in-law Rajashree Biswal said.

sample tests for Covid-19, including 51,451 Wednesday

sample tests for Covid-19, including 51,451 Wednesday

## Sethi takes charge as I&PR secretary

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 13:** Senior IAS officer Bishnupada Sethi took additional charge as Information & Public Relations (I&PR) secretary, Thursday.

After assuming office, Sethi reviewed the Covid awareness programme taken by the department so far. Sethi, a 1995-batch IAS officer, is currently serving as secretary of Revenue & Disaster Management department and holding additional charge of Odia Language, Literature and Culture department. Meanwhile, IAS officer G Mathivathanan has been given additional charge of BMC administrator. Mathivathanan is now serving as Housing & Urban Development secretary with additional charge of Parliamentary Affairs department.



The Puri-LTT-Puri weekly Special Express will be cancelled from Puri May 18 and 25 and from LTT May 20 and 27

Bhubaneswar-LTT- Bhubaneswar bi-weekly Special Express from Bhubaneswar will remain cancelled May 17, 20, 24 and 27 and from LTT May 19, 22, 26 and 29

Cuttack-Bhadrak-Cuttack Special, Visakhapatnam-Raipur-Visakhapatnam Special, Puri-Angul-Puri Special, Puri-Cuttack-Puri Special and Bhubaneswar-Palasa-Bhubaneswar Special.

Similarly, Puri-Angul-Puri Special will run between Puri and Talcher and remain cancelled between Talcher and Angul from both the directions May 13, 17 and 22.

Likewise, Bhubaneswar-Junagarh Road-Bhubaneswar Special will run between Bhubaneswar and Rayagada and remain cancelled between Rayagada and Junagarh Road from both the directions from May 13 to 22.

Sambalpur-Rayagada-Sambalpur Special will run between Sambalpur and Titlagarh and remain cancelled between Titlagarh and Rayagada from both the directions from May 13 to 23.

## DECLARE CHEMISTS AS COVID WARRIORS

# Medicine shops threaten closure

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 13:** The Chemists and Druggists' Association of Odisha threatened Thursday to close down medicine shops if the government did not declare chemists and staff of the outlets as Covid-19 warriors immediately. Office-bearers of the association said that they need to be also vaccinated on a priority basis.

At a press conference here Thursday Pragati Ranjan Mohanty, president of Khurda Druggists and Chemists Association said that they will give the state government 15 days time to declare them as Covid-19 warriors. "The demand is coming from all parts of Odisha," Mohanty pointed out. He also informed that the association has appealed to the state government on this issue a number of times. "More than 100 chemists and

staff of the shops have died in the first wave of Covid-19. Many more have been infected during the second wave. As the situation has worsened in the second wave, the Odisha Government should recognise us as Covid-19 warriors and vaccinate us on priority basis. Till date we have not any assurance from the government in this regard. Unless it is done, shops will have no option, but to down shutters," informed Pragati.

"We have been rendering our services and we are among the most exposed to infected people. Since more than 20,000 of us are involved in this business, the government should consider our appeal and provide us with vaccine," she added.

Pratap Kumar Jena, secretary, Chemists Association said medicine shops are providing various services amidst the lockdown.

## More staffers get 'frontline worker' tag

**BHUBANESWAR:** Following demands from various employees' organisations, the state government has included some additional categories of staffs as Frontline Worker (FLW) for Covid-19 vaccination. The State Steering Committee has recently approved the proposal for inclusion of the new categories of staffs—Forest officials and bankers as FLWs for vaccination, said Additional Chief Secretary, Health, PK Mohapatra to collectors and municipal commissioners. All forest officials, banking staff, employees of insurance companies, staff of National Payments Corporation of India, payment system providers/ operators/vendors, cash logistic companies, cash-in-transit companies, ATM maintenance, banking correspondence and customer care points are to be treated as FLW. Similarly, staffs of railways, DCPU, childline, 181 helpline, One Stop Centres and child care institutions have been included in the group. The employees of oxygen plants, filling stations and call centres are also FLW now. Besides, government veterinary doctors, livestock inspectors and para-veterinarians will be treated as frontline workers. Mohapatra made it clear that present priority of the state government is to ensure 2nd dose vaccination of due beneficiaries. The above categories of staffs will only be vaccinated, once adequate vaccine supply is available in the state, he added.

"We are also making home delivery of medicines taking huge risks. So the government should seriously consider our demand,"

Jena said. Earlier, the All Odisha Lower Secondary Teachers Association also demanded that all tutors be declared as Covid-19 warriors.

## H&FW dept advises masking up children

**BHUBANESWAR:** The state Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department Thursday issued an advisory for children, adolescent, pregnant women and lactating women in the wake of the second wave of Covid-19. The advisory read that since it has been observed that many children are getting affected during the second wave, wearing mask is mandatory for children above two years of age while stepping out of their homes and parents should ensure the same.

## ATM robbery bid foiled

**BHUBANESWAR:** Commissionerate Police foiled a robbery bid at an ATM kiosk in Ghatikia under Bharatpur police limits. A patrolling team of Bharatpur police station spotted four persons moving suspiciously inside an SBI ATM kiosk late Wednesday night. When the police team rushed to the kiosk, the bike-borne miscreants fled the spot. Police later found the front lock of the ATM broken.

## SC ON MIGRANT WORKER CRISIS

# Odisha govt gets 10 days to reply

POST NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi, May 13:** Expressing dissatisfaction over the delay and inadequate response over the handling of migrant worker crisis, the Supreme Court gave Thursday the last chance to Odisha, Delhi and five other states to inform it specifically about the steps taken by them to resolve the plight of such people. A two-judge bench comprising Justices Ashok Bhushan and MR Shah asked Odisha government and the other states to file their responses within 10 days.

"As a last chance, we give further 10 days' time to Odisha, NCT of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar, Gujarat and Maharashtra to file their specific responses on issues referred to our earlier orders dated June 9 and July 31 last year. The states have



to inform us about the steps taken or to be taken to ease the plight of the migrant workers. Also how much time the states will require to implement the steps," the bench said.

It should be stated here that during the lockdown last year more than 10 lakh migrant workers had returned to different districts of Odisha from other states.

## Jharpada jail supdt shunted for failing to control inmates

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 13:** The Home department of the Odisha government Thursday transferred Dharendra Nath Barik, the superintendent of special jail at Jharpada after some viral videos revealed various illegal activities carried out within the prison premises. Barik was transferred to the Bolangir district prison in the same position.

As per the Home department notification, Saroj Kumar Biswal, who currently holds the post of superintendent in Puri district jail will replace Barik. Urmila Minz, the superintendent of Bolangir jail, will join the Puri prison holding the same designation.



A video grab of Jharpada jail inmates went viral leading to the transfer of prison superintendent, Thursday

The three video clips that went viral revealed the use of contrabands and smartphones by the inmates. The videos showed that the inmates were indulging in merrymaking, disregarding Covid-19 protocols. The first clip showed some inmates sitting together, singing devotional songs and smoking ganja. In the second clip, some other inmates could be seen dancing to popular song numbers. The third video showed a prison staff receiving something from an unknown person and later on handing it over to inmates at an isolated place in the prison.

Authorities, however, claimed that the videos were old ones and were shot before the Covid-19 pandemic.

# 4 special trains to remain cancelled till end of May

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 13:** In view of poor occupancy in trains and the recent surge in Covid-19 cases, it has been decided to cancel four pairs of special trains from both the directions till May last.

The cancelled trains are: Puri-LTT-Puri weekly Special Express, Bhubaneswar-LTT-Bhubaneswar bi-weekly Special Express, Visakhapatnam-Cuddapah-Visakhapatnam daily Express and Visakhapatnam-Lingampalli-Visakhapatnam daily Special Express.

The Puri-LTT-Puri weekly Special Express will be cancelled from Puri May 18 and 25 and from LTT May 20 and 27. Similarly, Bhubaneswar-LTT- Bhubaneswar bi-weekly Special Express from Bhubaneswar will remain cancelled May 17, 20, 24 and 27 and from LTT May 19, 22, 26 and 29.

Visakhapatnam-Cuddapah-Visakhapatnam daily Special Express will be cancelled from Visakhapatnam from May 14 to May 31 and from Cuddapah from May 15 to June 1.

Visakhapatnam-Lingampalli-Visakhapatnam daily Special Express will remain cancelled from Visakhapatnam from May 14 to May 31 and from Lingampalli from May 15 to June 1.

Earlier, the railway authorities had decided to cancel nine pairs of local passenger/MEMU trains from both the directions till May 23 to check the spread of novel coronavirus.

These trains are: Bhubaneswar-Kendujhargarh-Bhubaneswar Special, Bhubaneswar-Bhadrak-Bhubaneswar Special, Cuttack-Bhadrak-Cuttack Special, Cuttack-Paradip-Cuttack Special,

# Centre lauds BPIA for seamless delivery of medical essentials

POST NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi, May 13:** Playing an active role in the fight against Covid-19, the Biju Patnaik International Airport in Bhubaneswar has been facilitating seamless transportation of medical equipment and material, the Union Civil Aviation ministry said Thursday.

To overcome the oxygen crisis in the country, a total of 156 empty oxygen tankers, 526 oxygen concentrators, 140 oxygen cylinders were transported by 75 Indian Air Force aircraft like C17, C130J, AN32 from April 23 to May 11. A total of 669 boxes (20.53 MT) of Covid vaccine have been transported through various airlines till May 9 through the Bhubaneswar airport, the Union ministry informed.

"41 pieces of oxygen concen-



156 empty oxygen tankers, 526 oxygen concentrators and 140 oxygen cylinders were transported by 75 IAF aircraft from April 23 to May 11

trators were transported through various airlines. Transportation of 3,500 units of 10-litre seamless cylinders and 1,520 pieces of 46.7-litre seamless cylinders are in

pipeline and the consignment is expected within a week from foreign countries," the ministry said. Apart from this, the Union ministry said, Bhubaneswar airport is also following all the Covid-19 related guidelines and protocols as per the instructions of the Union and state governments to ensure a safe journey for passengers.

"To create awareness regarding Covid-appropriate behaviour, the airport is also displaying instructions through several electronic and permanent displays at the terminal. Bhubaneswar airport has also organised Covid vaccination camp for employees of Airports Authority of India (AAI) and other stakeholders with support from Government of Odisha, taking all safety measures into consideration," the ministry said.

# HEAVY RAIN LASHES CAPITAL; THUNDERSTORM TO RETURN

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 13:** The state capital received heavy showers and thunderstorm affecting visibility and movement Thursday afternoon. This is the second time in a week that the city has received heavy rains. Similar conditions are expected for next 24 hours.

As per the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Bhubaneswar, about 32.8 mm of rainfall was recorded Thursday. Some parts of the city reported severe water logging. Vaccination and testing centres also observed reduced footfall as rains lashed for more than an hour.

Meanwhile, the IMD predicted rain and thunderstorm with gusts for the next 24 hours in the state capital. While maximum temperature is likely to be around 36 degree Celsius, minimum is expected to be around 23 degree Celsius.

Furthermore, the IMD also warned of rain, thunderstorms with lightning in districts of Odisha over the next two days. Orange warning was issued for districts of Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khurda, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Gajapati, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Dhenkanal, Angul, Kandhamal and Rayagada. Also, heavy rainfalls are very likely to occur at one or two places over Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack and Khurda, the IMD stated.

Yellow warning was also issued for 24 hours for the districts of Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Bargarh, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Sonepur, Boudh, Nuapada, Balangir, Kalahandi, Nawarangpur, Koraput and Malkangiri. The IMD predicted maximum temperature to fall by 3-5 degrees Celsius May 13 and rise May 14 by 2-4 degrees Celsius.

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# 7 rivers drying up; 1,114 LI points defunct

# DDUGJY flickers in Bargarh district courtesy 'scam'

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Kendrapara, May 13:** Farming will be seriously hit in the district with seven rivers going dry and 1114 lift irrigation (LI) points becoming defunct, a report said. It is apprehended that over 25,718 hectares of land might remain uncultivated due to lack of irrigation facilities.

This has happened even as 'Akshaya Trutiya' the festival of agriculture, draws near. However, farm works are yet to pick up in the district with farmers showing no enthusiasm to take up cultivation due to lack of irrigation facilities. Their hopes hinge on rain.

Reports said seven rivers flowing through the district have gone dry from the start of this summer season. As a result, farmers are increasingly facing problems in watering their land. The LI points have also become defunct as there is not enough water in the rivers.

The district has 152,000 hectares of farm land out of which 86132 hectares are irrigated by water from canal, LI points, shallow tube wells and other water sources like

## AGRI CRISIS LOOMS IN KENDRAPARA



**The water level in the rivers has declined due to summer. Efforts are being made to make water available to the farmlands by desilting the rivers**

**PRABODH KUMAR ROUT | EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, IRRIGATION DEPARTMENT**

ponds and wells.

The dip in river water has also resulted in water scarcity for the riparian villagers. The decline in

water level in the rivers has also led to simultaneous decline in water level of tube wells, wells and ponds.

Farmer leaders Bidhu Bhusan Mohapatra, Gayadhar Dhal, Bijay Kumar Parida and farmers Niranjana Parida and Chittaranjan Das said seven rivers under the Mahanadi, the Brahmani and the Baitarani river systems flow through the district. The fishermen dependent on these rivers for their livelihood have been equally hit.

They alleged that construction of a barrage on the upstream of the

Farmers alleged that construction of a barrage on the upstream of the Mahanadi by the Chhattisgarh government has spelled disaster for the state. The water level in Luna, Paika, Chitrotapala, Mahanadi and Birupa rivers on the downstream have declined due to construction of the barrage

They claimed that the lift irrigation points drawing water from these rivers were helpful in irrigation of farmlands. There are 82 LI points in Kendrapara block, 37 in Derabish, 100 in Marshaghai, 119 in Mahakalapara, 97 in Garadapur, 138 in Pattamundai, 248 in Aul, 180 in Rajkanika and 113 in Rajnagar.

Mahanadi by the Chhattisgarh government has spelled disaster for the state. The water level in Luna, Paika, Chitrotapala, Mahanadi and Birupa rivers on the downstream have declined due to construction of the barrage. Similarly, the water level in

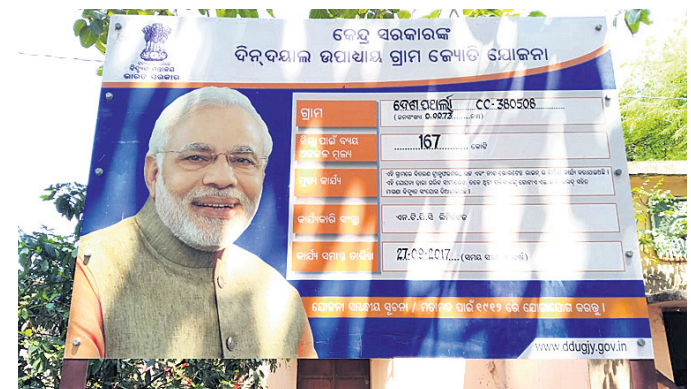
Gobari, Brahmani and Kharasrota under the Baitarani river system has also declined. The canals emerging from these rivers have gone dry and so have the wells and ponds in the district.

Farmers claimed that the lift irrigation points drawing water from these rivers were helpful in irrigation of farmlands. There are 82 LI points in Kendrapara block, 37 in Derabish, 100 in Marshaghai, 119 in Mahakalapara, 97 in Garadapur, 138 in Pattamundai, 248 in Aul, 180 in Rajkanika and 113 in Rajnagar.

Similarly, 3,063 shallow tube wells and 10,624 other sources drawing water from these rivers helped in irrigating their farmlands. However, these are lying defunct with the rivers going dry.

Left with no options, the farmers are now waiting for the arrival of the monsoon season.

When contacted, Prabodh Kumar Rout, executive engineer, irrigation department, said the water level in the rivers has declined due to summer. He said efforts are being made to make water available to the farmlands by desilting the rivers.



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Attabira, May 13:** Due to massive irregularities in the rural electrification work under the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY), a Centre-sponsored scheme, the programme has allegedly flopped in Attabira and Bheden blocks in Bargarh district. Officially, it is claimed that crores of rupees have been spent for electrification of BPL households in two blocks in 2017, but the ground reality tells a different story.

In fact, poor people in hundreds of houses are still living in dark. Electricity is still a dream for them, it was learnt.

Actually, no common man had any idea about how the rural electrification is being carried out. A few days ago, some locals of Bheden block were dismayed by an information plaque about the DDUGJY put up near Deshparthala livestock inspection centre. Matching the ground realities with the data on the plaque, the locals suspected massive irregularities committed in the name of DDUGJY. They alleged that some contractors engaged in the rural electrification drive put up the board without doing the work.

Locals said, "While hurriedly laying the foundation for the DDUGJY information plaque near the livestock centre, the underground water pipe got damaged. Water supply was disrupted to the

**Matching the ground realities with the data on the info plaque, locals suspected massive irregularities committed in the name of rural electrification drive in various villages**

livestock centre."

The plaque revealed that the NTPC had been entrusted the electrification in the area under DDUGJY. It was claimed that the work was done three years ago while Rs 167 crore has been spent for the electrification of scores of villages in Bargarh district.

In reality, many BPL families included in the DDUGJY have been deprived of free electricity.

Locals wondered why contractors put the information plaque three years after their work.

They alleged that the rural electrification is shown in pen and paper while its fund is misappropriated owing to an unholy nexus among contractors, engineers and people's representatives.

Locals accused the administration of deliberately doing nothing to monitor the rural electrification drive.

They have demanded a vigilance investigation into the rural electrification scheme for the poor.

# Lady lecturer sacked for furnishing forged PG docus



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Udala, May 13:** A lady lecturer had been allegedly serving for 14 years at Khunta Degree College in Mayurbhanj district by furnishing forged a PG certificate and a mark sheet.

The higher education department came to know of her fraud and sacked her from job, a report said. According to the report, the lady

lecturer is Aweepsa Pattanayak, a native of Udala.

She started her career as an English lecturer at Khunta Degree College in 2007. During appointment, she had produced forged PG certificate. Following an allegation about her fraud, the higher education department started an investigation and directed Patanayak to furnish all her documents and certificates. On verification, the department found her PG mark sheet forged.

However, Patanayak had resigned from her post three months ago.

The assistant director of the higher department in his letter (20113) May 12, 2021, has directed the Udala Sub-Collector and chairperson of the college to remove her from the job and recommended criminal proceedings against the accused.

## COOLING ACT



Children bathing in Mahanadi on a hot summer afternoon in Sambalpur

OP PHOTO

# Covid-19 spreading in Bolangir villages

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Khaprakhol, May 13:** Covid-19 situation in villages under Khaprakhol block of Bolangir district is becoming serious by the day, if official data is anything to go by.

In villages, not all people are educated to keep themselves abreast of the day-to-day developments regarding coronavirus. Those who have some knowledge about coronavirus get themselves tested immediately after they feel they have Covid-19 symptoms and recover.

But the ones with little access to healthcare services are the worst sufferers. According to a source, these villagers consume medicines

**Bolangir Thursday reported 198 new cases of Covid-19 and 1 fatality. The tally and toll of the district stood at 16,940 and 54 respectively**

without getting tested for Covid-19. Of them, those who are lucky win the battle against the virus and the unlucky ones lose it.

After coming to know that people have Covid-19 like symptoms, a medical team recently visited Kuthuria village under Nandupala panchayat under Khaprakhol block. The symptomatic villagers took

Covid-19 test. Two days ago, the village had reported six positive cases. It registered 11 positive cases Wednesday. Among them, there are three children.

A team comprising block development officer (BDO) Tarani Suna, block programme manager (BPM) of health department Jugal Kishore Sahu, health worker Ranjan Meher and some others visited the village and created awareness about Covid-19 among the villagers recently.

Notably, according to health department, Bolangir district Thursday reported 198 new cases of Covid-19 and one fatality. With this, the tally and toll of the district stood at 16,940 and 54 respectively. The district's active caseload is at 2,894.

# Two jumbos die in Similipal; probe starts

**BARIPADA:** Two elephants, including a calf, have died in Similipal sanctuary of Mayurbhanj district in the last 72 hours. Forest officials recovered the carcass of the jumbo calf in Podadiha range inside the Similipal Tiger Project Wednesday. The calf is aged about 6 years. Forest officials and veterinary staff visited the spot and started an investigation into the cause of its death. "It is not clear how the calf died. The cause of its death will be known after the post mortem report is available," said Jainadatt Pati, deputy director of the Similipal Tiger Project. Notably, a female elephant died in Similipal Tuesday. Locals have demanded a high level investigation into the elephant deaths.

# 2 docs at PHC test Covid +ve

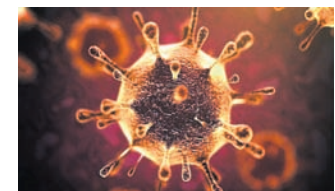
POST NEWS NETWORK

**Baunsumi, May 13:** With Covid positivity graph on an upward trend in Boudh district, two doctors have tested positive for Covid-19 Thursday at Janhapanka primary health centre, triggering panic among local people.

People fear that hundreds of people might have contracted the virus while visiting the doctors.

On the other hand, it was alleged that wedding feasts are being organised with large crowds while the administration and police have allegedly failed to curb social gatherings.

Recently, an organiser of a wedding party was fined ₹10,000.



A few days ago, a doctor at Janhapanka PHC was found positive for Covid. Another doctor and a security guard of the same hospital have tested positive Wednesday. This has become a cause of concern for the people in Khuntabandh, Laxmiprasad,

Padmanpur, Mundapada, Brahmanipalli, Telibandh and Mundipadar panchayats.

Locals said thousands of people from these panchayats have visited the hospital and come in contact with the two doctors.

Community spread can't be ruled out in the region, they lamented. They demanded immediate step for contact tracing. Meanwhile, Polam village under Khuntabandh panchayat was declared containment zone Thursday after several Covid cases were detected. The CZ will be in force till May 18.

# Mini CZs increasing in Chhatrapur sub-division

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Chhatrapur, May 13:** The lethal Covid-19 is playing havoc in Chhatrapur sub-division in Ganjam district with the administration increasing mini containment zones by the day.

The rate of Covid positivity is soaring rapidly. Over 500 Covid active cases are reported from the subdivision.

Meanwhile, health officials are carrying out door-to-door health screening to detect cases.

Mini CZs have been enforced at Gopabandhu Marg in ward-14, Keuta Sahi, Thana Tota Sahi, Block Colony (Ward 6), Seventh Lane of Mohan Colony, Somepur, (Ward-7), Jagannath Marg (Ward-13), Master Colony and Pochilima (Ward-19) under Hinjilicut

Municipality. Several other parts and villages like Palik Padmanabhpur, Adua Sahi, Nua Sahi, Chidananda Nagar (Polsara NAC), Kubhargan, Malbelapada (Begunaiapada block) and Banadevi (Kabisuryanagar NAC) were declared CZs after detection of new cases. Kitchen essentials are being supplied by the administration to people in the mini CZs.

## SHOWING COMPASSION



A girl is seen feeding stray cattle in Jeypore town in Koraput district during the lockdown

# Five girls of Bonda tribe rescued

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Kudumulguma, May 13:** At least five girls of the primitive Bonda tribe were rescued while they were being trafficked to other states to work as bonded labourers during a mask verification drive here under Khairput block in Malkangiri district, Thursday.

The girls were rescued when tehsildar Bijay Mandangi was conducting a mask verification drive on Gobindpalli-Balimela main road. He noticed five girls of Bonda tribe on a pick-up van and detained them.

On being informed, a team of Childline officials reached the spot and recorded the statements of the girls who are from Kadeiguda village under Mudulipada panchayat. The girls revealed that they have been going to work in Andhra Pradesh. The girls were later handed over to the Child Welfare Committee.

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER,**  
**DHENKANAL (R&B) DIVISION, DHENKANAL**  
E-mail ID: eedkpw@gmail.com  
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No. B-87: Due to imposing of lockdown in the State and as per instruction of the Engineer-in-Chief (Civil) Odisha vide Letter No. 19156 Dt. 10.05.2021 for extension of last date of receipt of tender upto at least 10 days after the last date of lockdown. Hence, the tender called vide Tender Call Notice No. 04 of 2021-22 is hereby cancelled and fresh tender will be invited.  
Sd./- Executive Engineer  
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No. CAD-279 (A Government of Odisha Undertaking)  
JANAPATH, BHOINAGAR, BHUBANESWAR - 22  
Ph.: 0674-2541545, 2542921, Fax: 0674-2541543,  
E-mail: ophwc.od@nic.in, Website: www.ophwc.nic.in  
**e-Procurement Notice No. 03/OPHCW/2021-22**  
**INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)**  
The Chief Engineer (OSPH&WC), Odisha, Bhubaneswar invites  
1. Percentage Rate Bids in Single Cover System in ONLINE MODE only, for the work as detailed below:  
2. Nature of work : Building works  
3. No. of Works : 40 Nos.  
4. Bid Cost : Rs.2,360.00 to Rs.7,080/- (To be paid online)  
5. Value of Tender : Rs.2.00 lakh to Rs.49.00 lakh  
6. Class of Contractor : 'D' Class to 'A' Class  
7. Availability of Bid Documents in the website : Dt.18.05.2021 to Dt.31.05.2021  
8. Last date/time of receipt of Bids in the Portal : Dt.31.05.2021 upto 5.00 P.M.  
9. Date of Opening Bid : Dt.01.06.2021 at 11.30 A.M.  
10. The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website: <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. Any addendum/corrigendum/cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.  
Sd./- Chief Engineer (OSPH&WC), Odisha  
N.B.: The quoted rate should be all inclusive but excluding G.S.T. as applicable under works contract.  
OIPR-12025/11/0005/2122

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA** No. O-178  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER**  
**RURAL WORKS DIVISION, GAJAPATI, PARLAKHEMUNDI**  
**NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement**  
Identification No. Online Tender 01/GJP/2021-22  
1. Name of the work : Road Works  
2. Total No. Work : 14 (Fourteen) Nos of Road works  
3. Estimated Cost : Rs. 47.74 lakhs to 2.65 lakhs  
4. Class of Contractor : 'B' and 'A' Class Contractor, 'C' and 'B' Class Contractor, 'D' and 'C' Class Contractor (as applicable)  
5. Period of Completion : Furnished in Annexure  
6. Availability of Tender Online for bidding : 20.05.2021 at 10.00 A.M. to 31.05.2021 upto 5.30 P.M.  
7. Date and Time of Opening of Tender : 01.06.2021 at 11.30 A.M.  
8. Place of Opening : As per Annexure  
Further details can be seen from the Website [www.tenderorissa.gov.in](http://www.tenderorissa.gov.in).  
**EXECUTIVE ENGINEER**  
R.W. DIVN., GAJAPATI  
OIPR-25158/11/0001/2122

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES**  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER,**  
**JONK IRRIGATION DIVISION, NUAPADA**  
1st CORRIGENDUM TO e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE No. (JID/01/2021-22)  
e-mail address: ee.jid.npd@gmail.com  
**PERCENTAGE RATE e-TENDER**  
No. A-123: The Bid Security/EMD in Column No. 7 for Bid ID No. 01 to 19 of e-procurement Notice No. (JID)-01/2021-22 is modified to Nil, the date & time mentioned in column No. 09 is modified to 17.05.2021 upto 5.00 P.M. and the Bid documents available in website in modified as follows.  

	As per Notice invited tender earlier	Modified to
Tender documents available on website	Can be downloaded from website ( <a href="http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in">http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in</a> ) upto 13.00 hrs	Can be downloaded from website ( <a href="http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in">http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in</a> ) upto 13.00 hrs
Bid documents available	05.05.2021 to 15.05.2021 upto 13.00 hrs	05.05.2021 to 17.05.2021 upto 13.00 hrs
Bid clarification start date & closing date	05.05.2021 to 15.05.2021 upto 13.00 hrs.	05.05.2021 to 17.05.2021 upto 13.00 hrs.
Date, Time and Venue of opening of bid Online	17.05.2021 at 11.30 hrs. Office of the Executive Engineer, Jonk Irrigation Division, Nuapada	18.05.2021 at 11.30 hrs. Office of the Executive Engineer, Jonk Irrigation Division, Nuapada
If stipulation arises the tender will be decided through Lottery System	20.05.2021 at 10.00 hrs. Office of the Executive Engineer, Jonk Irrigation Division, Nuapada	21.05.2021 at 10.00 hrs. Office of the Executive Engineer, Jonk Irrigation Division, Nuapada

  
All other terms and conditions are remaining unchanged.  
Sd./- Executive Engineer  
Jonk Irrigation Division, Nuapada  
OIPR-32393/11/0002/2122



FOCUS PANDEMIC

# OVERCOMING COVID-19



**After decades of improvement, future generations' prospects have suddenly plummeted. Some regions are experiencing a reversal of gains achieved in the past 20 years. Achievements such as higher employment, expanded essential services, and better education (particularly for girls) are at risk**

the International Health Regulations and drive a simultaneous upgrade in all national systems that need it.

Fifth, we must intensify international cooperation to develop and deliver the vaccines, diagnostics, and treatments that are necessary for achieving universal health coverage. That means building on initiatives like the ACT-A to establish a permanent forward-looking mechanism for ensuring equitable access to critical health technologies for all who need them.

Lastly, and above all, there is an urgent need to reset the response to this crisis. Everyone needs to recommit to supporting a singular and cohesive strategy that is built on equity and fairness, driven by a single-minded focus to end the pandemic as quickly as possible, and in keeping with the WHO's mantra: solidarity, science, and solutions.

As special envoys for COVID-19, we will continue to support countries and communities as they confront this crisis. The task now is to prevent and mitigate as much of the damage as we can, which will require concerted action within and across countries to implement the right public-health policies and build capacity wherever it is falling short. Sustaining these efforts will be critical, because it will be many months – even years – before vaccines against current and future variants of the virus are accessible to everyone.

We urge everyone to do their part to help prevent, prepare for, and manage the next outbreak. Above all, we call on today's leaders to muster the solidarity needed to work together for the common good. What the leaders decide to do now will have implications for everyone living today and tomorrow.

*Palitha Abeeykoon is a senior adviser at the Sri Lankan Ministry of Health. Maha El Rabbat is a former Minister of Health and Population of Egypt. David Nabarro is a former special adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Climate Change.*

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As special envoys on COVID-19 for the director-general of the World Health Organization, we have witnessed firsthand the intensity of the suffering caused by the pandemic, especially in poorer communities. This profound tragedy has been evolving before our eyes and still is nowhere near its end.

In our experience, the first priority in responding to an infectious disease is to save lives and protect the health and well-being of current and future generations. At the same time, we are increasingly concerned by the tremendous social and economic damage that COVID-19 has wrought. With people everywhere struggling to preserve their livelihoods under the constant threat of the coronavirus, it has become clear that this pandemic is more than a health emergency. It has become a global whole-of-society crisis.

In this context, one of our greatest fears is that after decades of improvement, future generations' prospects have suddenly plummeted. Some regions are experiencing a reversal of gains achieved in the past 20 years. Achievements such as higher employment, expanded essential services, and better education (particularly for girls) are at risk. So are improvements in infrastructure, water and sanitation, disease control, political stability, and governance institutions.

This loss of momentum toward the international community's Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 will have far-reaching costs, most of which will be borne by the most vulnerable. Consider the vaccine rollout. Through extraordinary global scientific cooperation, the international community has created an Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) to facilitate the sharing of technology and the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) facility to deliver vaccines equitably and efficiently around the world. But while hundreds of millions of vaccine doses have been administered globally, there are deep disparities. In high-income countries, vaccine supplies are sufficient to provide for around one in four people, on average; in low-income countries, this figure drops to one in 500. At

this point, it should go without saying that no one will be safe until we have made these cutting-edge technologies available to everyone. The longer we delay, the greater the risk that dangerous new variants will emerge.

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is certainly not the last contagious pathogen that humanity will face. But it could be the last one that inflicts such exorbitant costs. Whether the next pandemic can be prevented is up to us all. Success will depend on commitments from all countries to implement the International Health Regulations, the WHO's legal framework establishing how they should prepare for and respond to the cross-border transmission of pathogens and other health emergencies.

Beyond following through on these existing measures, world leaders should take six additional steps. First, we must dramatically scale up investment in global preparedness, so that we can spot the next potential pandemic as early as possible. There is now ample evidence of what works well, and we have gained hard-earned experience in getting the necessary systems to function as they should, everywhere. All countries should commit to sharing relevant information rapidly and

ensuring its reliability.

Second, we must do more to prevent pathogens from moving to humans from animals and the environment. That means appreciating the risks of crossover transmission and adopting a "One Health" mindset that reflects awareness of biological interdependencies and our shared obligation to protect fragile ecosystems.

Third, we need to ensure that all countries can respond rapidly when the alarm bells start to ring. There is an urgent demand for more investment in local, national, and regional health systems, particularly those that currently lack the capacity for prompt detection and response.

Fourth, public officials need to demonstrate enlightened leadership by committing to, and engaging in, constructive international cooperation, without which the world will always be at risk. As WHO envoys, we are encouraged by the call from 26 heads of state and government, the president of the European Council, and WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus for an international treaty on pandemic preparedness. This effort can provide a solid foundation for high-level coordination between governments. Ideally, it would result in a new compact designed to complement

Palitha Abeeykoon, Maha El Rabbat & David Nabarro

**THIS LOSS OF MOMENTUM TOWARD THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS FOR 2030 WILL HAVE FAR-REACHING COSTS, MOST OF WHICH WILL BE BORNE BY THE MOST VULNERABLE**



There is a thirst for Love which no human relation can quench. It is only the Divine's love that can satisfy that thirst.

THE MOTHER

## Beware Economists

Neoliberalism is dead. Or perhaps it remains very much alive. Pundits have been calling it both ways these days. But either way, it is hard to deny that something new is afoot in the world of economic policy.

US President Joe Biden has called for a vast expansion of government spending on social programmes, infrastructure, and the transition to a green economy. He wants to use government procurement to rebuild domestic supply chains and bring manufacturing jobs back to the United States. His Treasury Secretary, Janet Yellen, is pushing for a globally coordinated increase in corporate taxes. Jerome Powell, Chair of the Federal Reserve, traditionally the most hawkish arm of government on price stability, is playing down inflation fears and lending his support to fiscal expansion.

All of these policy changes represent a sharp departure from the conventional wisdom in Washington. Do they also augur a new economic policy paradigm?

Economic policies in the US and the West more broadly, have long been in need of overhaul. The ideas dominant since the 1980s – variously called the Washington Consensus, market fundamentalism, or neoliberalism – originally gained traction because of the perceived failures of Keynesianism and excessive government regulation. But they took on a life of their own and produced highly financialised, unequal, and unstable economies that were unequipped to cope with today's most significant challenges: climate change, social inclusion, and disruptive new technologies.

The needed paradigm change might usefully start with how we teach economics. Economists tend to be enamored of the power of markets to promote overall economic prosperity. Adam Smith's invisible hand – the idea that self-interested individuals seeking only their personal enrichment might produce collective prosperity instead of social chaos – is one of the crown jewels of the economics profession. It also remains deeply counterintuitive, which is perhaps why economists devote an inordinate amount of time proselytizing about the magic of markets.

But economics is not a paean to free markets. In fact, much of economics instruction focuses on how markets may produce too much inequality, and how they fail on their own terms of allocating resources efficiently. Perfectly competitive markets that harmoniously produce stable equilibria are only one possibility among many. The Smithian model is not the only one. Still, the knee-jerk reaction of many economists is to treat well-functioning, competitive markets as the relevant benchmark for any proposed departure from laissez-faire.

Fortunately, a new paradigm for teaching economics does exist. The CORE Project is an online teaching tool and free, open-access textbook. Two leading economists, Samuel Bowles of the Santa Fe Institute and Wendy Carlin of University College London, are the visionaries behind it. But a large group of economists worldwide has collaborated in its development. Already, it is in use in a majority of university economics departments in the United Kingdom.

A key advantage of the CORE approach is that it tackles issues like inequality and climate change head-on. But the pedagogically more interesting move is that it replaces the standard benchmarks of economics with alternative benchmarks that are more realistic and useful. For example, in contrast to conventional economics, CORE assumes that individuals are pro-social and myopic, rather than selfish and far-sighted. Competition is imperfect, with winner-take-all characteristics, rather than perfect. Power is ever-present in the form of principal-agent relationships in labour and credit markets, instead of being treated as either diffuse or exogenous. Economic rents are ubiquitous and often required for well-functioning economies, not rare or the result of policy error.

Such a new paradigm for teaching and doing economics will produce better understanding of social outcomes. But we should recognize that it will not produce a new paradigm for economic policy. And that is as it should be.

All of our previous policy paradigms – whether mercantilist, classical liberal, Keynesian, social-democratic, ordoliberal, or neoliberal – had important blind spots because they were conceived as universal programmes that could be applied everywhere and at all times. Inevitably, each paradigm's blind spots overshadowed the innovations it brought to how we think about economic governance. The result was overreach and pendular swings between excessive optimism and pessimism about government's role in the economy.

The right answer to any policy question in economics is, "It depends." We need economic analysis and evidence to fill out the details of what the desired outcome depends upon. The keywords of a truly useful economics are contingency, contextuality, and non-universality. Economics teaches us that there is a time for fiscal expansion and a time for fiscal retrenchment. There is a time when government should intervene in supply chains, and a time when it should leave markets to their own devices. Sometimes, taxes should be high; sometimes, they should be low. Trade should be freer in some areas, and regulated in others. Mapping the links between real-world circumstances and the desirability of different types of interventions is what good economics is about.

Our societies are confronted with vital challenges that require new economic approaches and significant policy experimentation. The Biden administration has launched a bold and long-overdue economic transformation. But those who are seeking a new economic paradigm should be careful what they wish for: Our goal should be not to create the next ossified orthodoxy, but to learn how to adapt our policies and institutions to changing exigencies.

The writer is Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

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### WISDOM CORNER

Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending. **CARL BARD**

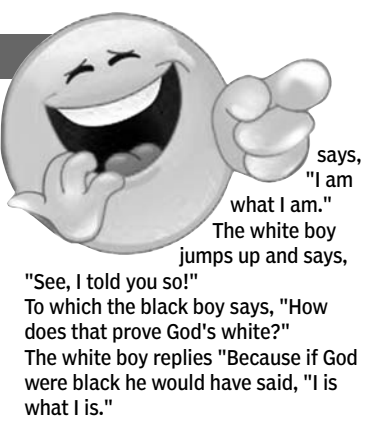
Some men see things as they are and say why – I dream things that never were and say why not. **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**

Nobody ever wrote down a plan to be broke, fat, lazy, or stupid. Those things are what happen when you don't have a plan. **LARRY WINGET**

### LOL

#### DESCRIBING GOD

A white boy and a black boy were arguing one day. The white boy screams "God is white!" The black boy screams "God is black!" This goes on and on for about an hour when all of a sudden there comes a loud crack of lightning and the heavens open up and a booming voice



says, "I am what I am."

The white boy jumps up and says,

"See, I told you so!"

To which the black boy says, "How does that prove God's white?"

The white boy replies "Because if God were black he would have said, 'I is what I is.'"

### SPECTRUM ROUND THE WORLD

## QUAD should step in Afghanistan

Violence has spiked in Afghanistan since Americans declared withdrawing their remaining troops. They had given the deadline of May 1 under Donald Trump administration. Joe Biden extended it to September 11, the 20th anniversary of the twin-tower attack. Americans entered Afghanistan in order to flush out Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind of the attack in the United States. Taliban, however, are treating May 1 as the deadline, and have stepped up the violent assaults on Afghan government agencies and the civilians. Not yet engaging the American forces, they are waiting perhaps for the September deadline.

The violence by Taliban points to the things that are about to come. The Interior Ministry Monday last said that around 11 people were killed by a bomb that exploded in a bus in southeastern Zabul province. It was in fact followed by the carnage two days before Monday, outside a school in Kabul when a series of bombs went off killing 50 people and wounding over 100, many of them young girls. Taliban is making it loud and clear its attitude about women receiving education

and about non-Sunni population.

It may have two motivations in unleashing the violence. One, they are warning the Americans that unless they keep the second deadline they could engage the Americans too. Second, they would continue to attack until the Americans and NATO forces have withdrawn. Taliban, in fact, is adamant that they will not enter into any more negotiations until all the foreign forces are withdrawn from their soil.

Whatever be the drivers for Taliban violence, the US withdrawal leaves Afghanistan in the lurch, abandoning the country to bombers of school kids and innocent civilians. The US, the reigning super power with a mighty military does help the helpless countries when their independence and human rights are threatened. But it does not do so pretty strategically. The US often-times creates a monster and then decides to fight it. Be it Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Pol Pot in Cambodia, Marcos in Philippines, authoritarian regime in China and Mujahedinin Afghanistan, who later became Taliban and the military dictatorship in Pakistan.

In relation to Afghanistan, let

us recall that America heavily supported Pakistan to create and nurture Mujahedin to drive out the Soviets. Many of the Mujahedin leaders went on to form Taliban actively supported by the Pakistani army. Although Soviets had withdrawn and subsequently, due to their own disintegration, lost interest and influence over Afghanistan, Pakistan continued to meddle in that country and wanted a puppet government with Taliban helping it.

Americans interest in Afghanistan dwindled and Pakistani-backed Taliban took over the country. Islamabad used most of its military support received from the US in cross-border terrorism against India. Also, it was no accident that in 1999, Pakistani terrorists hijacked an Indian plane, Indian Airlines 814, and took it to Kandahar to negotiate with Indian government for the release of dreaded terrorist Masood Azhar.

Americans stormed back to Afghanistan after the terror attack on the World Trade Centre in New York City. They came to hunt down Bin Laden who was sheltered by the Taliban. It is another matter, after 11 years Osama Bin Laden was

found and killed in Abbottabad, Pakistan. They are now leaving the country without completing the work, vanquishing the enemy – that is Taliban. Will Taliban and other terrorist groups associated with it not bite back? Without putting a viable alternative in place to rein in on Taliban, the exit of Americans defies comprehension. Perhaps, Americans think they can bounce back should such an eventuality arise threatening their security and interests.

Understandably, the opinion on American withdrawal is divided. In the Senate, Mitch McConnell called the plan reckless and a grave mistake. He said: "It is a retreat in the face of an enemy that has not yet been vanquished and abdication of American leadership". Some fear that the US exit will lead to the collapse of the government in Kabul and so will the gains made in social development, health, education, women's rights and so on. Government supporters say they will link with the Kabul government diplomatically and extend necessary political support.

The writer is a professor of International Politics at JIMMC.

INFPA

## 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](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

**OrissaPOST**

B-15, Russagarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

### Universal free vaccination

Sir, The announcement of the BJP-led Central government that henceforth countrymen below 45 years will have to pay a higher price for anti-COVID vaccine is highly shocking. It means the poor citizens will have to die without vaccine. We all know that during the first wave of COVID-19, our Prime Minister was busy in organising the 'Namaste Trump' extravaganza and pushed lakhs of migrant workers to almost ruination. The same PM had earlier assured free vaccine to all and said that finance for the same would not be a problem. After the first wave, the government got enough time to fill the gaps in the medical infrastructure in the country. But it did nothing. Now making a U-turn, how can the government pronounce such a policy in a country like India where millions of poor and destitute are struggling to get one square meal a day? We cannot understand how a bunch of Central ministers, including the Prime Minister, can waste hundreds of crores of money in air travel almost daily for election campaign, while the common citizens, especially the working class, is in dire distress in the wake of the second spell of the pandemic. Now the Prime Minister has shamelessly placed all the responsibilities of saving the countrymen on the people themselves. This is highly condemnable and the people of India strongly register their protest against this irresponsible conduct of the Central government. We once again demand universal free vaccination.

Asit Mohanty, JAJPUR

### Vaccine supply

Sir, It was expected that with the roll out of vaccination, the caseloads of COVID-19 would come down drastically. Over 17 crore people have been reportedly administered with vaccines. Still, vaccine supply has fallen far short of demand. Of course it is not easy to supply vaccine at twice the number of population of 135 crore in India. People are fully protected only after the second dose is received. A large number of people who have got first dose of vaccine are not getting the second dose within the stipulated time of 28-42 days from the date of first dose taken. As much vaccine as needed for two dosages should have been supplied to avoid the imbalance in the first and second dosages. If the second dose is not taken within the stipulated time, then the first dose taken may go waste. The country cannot afford to waste the vaccines at a time when the vaccines are in short supply.

KV Seetharamaiah, HASSAN



# 2 BJP MPs who won Assembly polls in Bengal resign

*Nishit Pramanik and Jagannath Sarkar were among the five BJP MPs the party fielded for the Assembly polls hoping to form government where they could play key roles. That didn't happen*



Nishit Pramanik and Jagannath Sarkar

AGENCIES

**Kolkata, May 13:** In Bengal, the BJP's tally of 77 MLAs in the Assembly is down to 75. Two BJP MPs who contested and won have submitted their resignations to the Speaker Wednesday on instructions of the party high command. The Trinamool has mocked the move as the BJP's bid to play safe in the Lok Sabha. The Trinamool has accused the Centre's decision to give Central security to all BJP MLAs in Bengal as misuse of taxpayers' money.

ernment where they could play key roles. That didn't happen. Now the BJP clearly feels they are more useful in Parliament. "The results in Bengal were not as expected. If the BJP had formed government, we would have a specific role. Now that is not the case so the party has said we should remain MPs and resign as MLAs. That's why we are doing it," said Jagannath Sarkar, BJP MP from Ranaghat. He had won from the Santipur Assembly seat, both in Nadia district. As MPs, both Pramanik and

Sarkar have central security cover. So does Suwendu Adhikari, BJP's Nandigram MLA and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly. He has Z-Plus security. The Union Home Ministry has recently said it would provide central security to all BJP MLAs, based on a review of their threat perceptions. The ministry will also foot the bill for it - all of Rs1.5 crore per month. "For two years, I worked with the BJP without much of a problem. But ever since 2nd May...the day the election results came out,

the situation has changed. We need the security (cover). I feel our life is at risk. We have been elected by the people, but it is the failure of the state government that the Centre has to provide security," BJP MLA Agnimitra Paul of Asansol South said. "Definitely we need security from the Centre because we cannot trust the Bengal government... If the elected MLAs don't feel secure, they can't work," said BJP MLA Subrata Thakur from Gaihatata in North 24 Parganas. The Trinamool has mocked both moves - the resignations and the central security. "They have insulted the people who have voted for them and sent them first to Parliament and then to Assembly. Secondly, the Union government has decided to give all MLAs security cover... which is mis-utilisation of public funds," said senior party leader Sukhendri Shekhar Roy. "It has never happened before," he added. One BJP MLA has declined central security. Ashok Lahiri, the former economic advisor to the Centre said that he is banking on the state government to do what it takes to keep him and the people safe.

# Amid Covid surge, old graves being dug up for new burials

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Aligarh (UP), May 13:** Despite assurances of all help by UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath to the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in dealing with the pandemic, the rising death toll has cast an unnering shadow on the campus graveyard. With at least three dozen serving and retired AMU employees having died in the past few weeks due to Covid, old graves are now being dug up to bury the dead. The AMU campus has seen more deaths in past few weeks than in the entire year. The alarming death toll has sent shock-waves leading to apprehensions that a deadlier 'AMU strain' of the virus is wreaking havoc. Vice-Chancellor Tariq Mansoor has written to the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) so that all aspects can be studied through genome sequencing. AMU Proctor, Professor Mohammad Waseem Ali, said, "In the past 20 days, we have lost almost



16 members of our faculty, eminent teachers, including the chairman of the medicine department, dean of law faculty and many others. As we come to terms with this loss, there is a sense of fear and restlessness." A senior faculty member said, "The graveyard is comparatively small and old graves are now being dug up to make way for the new. This is not entirely unforeseen but it also explains the situation. At AMU, we never witnessed so many deaths."

The Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College (JNMC) is one of the biggest hospitals in Aligarh and caters to four neighbouring districts. Doctors at the hospital have been dealing with an unprecedented situation with the rising number of Covid cases. A high inflow of Covid patients from surrounding areas along with the faculty from within the AMU campus, has strained the facility. Sources said that 8 to 10 burials are taking place on an average every day. "Even the 'namaaz' is being offered collectively," said a student.

# Blow conch shells to keep Covid at bay: Yoga experts

*There is no scientific evidence to prove that blowing conch shells helps prevent Covid-19 but they say it definitely helps one in lung exercise*



confines of their homes. Since we cannot go out for morning walk, this gives us a sense of unity as well. Even the children are now taking interest and blowing the 'shankh'," said GP Singh, an octogenarian who lives on Stanley Road. He insisted that the blowing of conch shells also dispels all the negative energy in the surroundings. A Lucknow resident, Sameer Khanna, said, "While performing yoga, each and every group member blows conch shells for at least five minutes every day. As Covid affects the respiratory system, blowing conch shells is a good way to strengthen the lungs and increase their capacity."

The members of the group admit that there is no scientific evidence to prove that blowing conch shells helps prevent Covid-19 but they say it definitely helps one in lung exercise. "We started practicing blowing conch shells since April and are continuing our exercise to strengthen the lungs. We feel better and more positive," said Khanna. Group members also train each other on the right method of blowing conch shells and share its benefits. Interestingly, women are also practicing blowing conch shells at their homes. They say that the sound of 'shankh' purifies the atmosphere at home.



Relatives and family members wait to cremate Covid-19 victims on the banks of River Ganga in Unnao, Thursday

HELL ON EARTH

# Probe ordered into reports of bodies buried on riverbank

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Unnao, May 13:** The Unnao district administration has ordered a probe after some bodies were found buried on the Ganga riverbank in the Bighapur Patan tehsil area, officials said Thursday. The district administration swung into action after locals spotted bodies buried on the Baksar ghat of the river with some photographs of the bodies too going viral on social media, they said. "After the matter came to the

light, a sub-divisional magistrate was sent to the spot for the probe. He will submit his report," Unnao District Magistrate Ravindra Kumar said. He said the Baksar ghat is on the border of many districts including Raebareilly, Fatehpur and Unnao and people go there for the cremation of bodies. "We will take appropriate action after seeing the situation. Directives have been issued that such situation does not arise," the DM said when asked about the al-

leged burial of bodies on the ghat. SDM Dayashankar Pathak, who visited the Baksar ghat of the river with the circle officer, said they did not find any dead body out in the open. On the exact number of bodies buried on the riverbank, the SDM said he was not aware of the number. People living near the riverbank Thursday said no dead body was allowed to be buried and all the bodies being brought to the Ghat are being cremated.

# Bengal ups Ganga vigil to block floating bodies

*Ganga enters West Bengal through Malda and so surveillance has been increased in the district to restrict the bodies from entering the state*

AGENCIES

**Kolkata, May 13:** After large number of bodies were fished out of Ganga in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the West Bengal government asked Malda district administration to step up vigil along the river for bodies found floating downstream and cremate them in keeping with protocol. Ganga enters West Bengal through Malda and so surveillance has been increased in the district to restrict the bodies from entering the state. According to senior government officials, Ganga touches the state at Manikchawk block via Rajmahal in Jharkhand and so measures have been taken to stop the floating bodies near Manikchawk so that it doesn't reach Farakka barrage. "The river in Manikchawk is wide and so we are trying to restrict it near Gadai island where the river is comparatively narrow. Gadai island is little away from Manikchawk. It will be easier for us to trace the floating bodies there," a senior district state government official said. Several boats have been arranged - near Gadai island of Manikchawk

block - to inspect the Ganga from Friday. Police stations adjoining the river bank in -Bhutni, Manikchak, Mothabari and Baishnabnagar - have been alerted as also civil defence volunteers. "The time of surveillance is yet to be finalized. We are waiting for a nod from the DM. We are announcing for people not to panic." "As soon such a body is spotted, it would be recovered and disposed of accordingly," the DM said. "We are taking all measures but considering the present level and current of water in the Ganga, we think the possibility is remote of bodies flowing in in the next 24 hours," a senior administrative official at Manikchawk block said. The floating bodies attracted government attention after many decomposed and bloated bodies were found floating in the Ganga over the past couple of days, triggering fears among local residents in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh that bodies of Covid victims were being dumped in the river. While 71 of the bodies have been fished out in Bihar's Buxar district, at least 25 bodies were found in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur district.

# 'Bengal facing pandemic, post-poll violence challenges'

*The Governor said he was shocked by incidents of attack following the West Bengal Assembly elections, and decided to visit various places affected by the post-poll violence in the interest of the people*

The country is facing the Covid crisis, and West Bengal is facing twin challenges of the pandemic and unprecedented post-poll violence only on the ground that some people decided to vote as per their own choice," he said while embarking on a visit to various places in Cooch Behar district. He said the Mamata Banerjee government must ensure that everyone who took the law into their hands must be brought to justice. The opposition BJP has been accusing the Trinamool Congress of indulging in violence against their supporters, a charge which the ruling party has also brought against the saffron camp in the state. "History will judge Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister. History will also judge Jagdeep Dhankhar, the Governor, and it will judge the bureaucracy and the media," he said. Claiming that he did not get any response from the state government despite efforts being made to get information about the post-poll violence, Dhankhar said the state government must provide him with



History will judge Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister. History will also judge Jagdeep Dhankhar, the Governor, and it will judge the bureaucracy and the media  
JAGDEEP DHANKAR | WEST BENGAL GOVERNOR

**Cooch Behar (WB), May 13:** Claiming that people, who cast their votes as per their choice, are being subjected to attacks in West Bengal, Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar Thursday said while the country is facing the Covid crisis, the state is grappling with the twin challenges of the pandemic and the post-poll violence. The Governor said he was shocked by incidents of attack following the West Bengal Assembly elections, and decided to visit various places affected by

the requisite particulars under Article 167 of the Constitution. "I will perform my constitutional duties unhindered, undeterred by any situation whatsoever," he said. The Chief Minister and the Governor got involved in a war of words Wednesday after Mamata Banerjee wrote to him claiming that his planned visit to the post-poll violence-affected Cooch Behar district violates norms, while Dhankhar hit back saying he was discharging duties mandated by the Constitution.

"I find from social media that you are unilaterally proceeding to Cooch Behar district May 13, and sadly, I find that to be violative of the long-standing norms as evolved over several decades." "I, therefore, would expect you will kindly follow the well-established norms of protocol, and desist from abrupt decisions with regards to field visits," Banerjee said in a letter to the Governor. Soon after receiving the letter, Dhankhar wrote back saying that he has been following the Constitution since taking oath as

the governor and his visit to Cooch Behar was to share the pain and agony of the people suffering from post-poll violence. Speaking to reporters at the Cooch Behar airport after alighting from a BSF helicopter by which he travelled from Kolkata, the Governor claimed that the Chief Minister, who took oath May 5, has full power to control the situation. He claimed that those who did not give political support to the ruling party were subjected to attacks and atrocities, and women and children of their families were also not spared.







When will the government realise that Covid cannot be fought with lies but with more testing, availability of medical services and door to door vaccines

PRİYANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONGRESS GEN SECY

GENEROUS GESTURE

Responding to the state government's appeal, over 400 unemployed doctors, nursing students, laboratory technicians and pharmacists in Mizoram have voluntarily agreed to assist the government in Covid management, health officials said Wednesday



of the day quote

Throughout last year, when our scientists, doctors and innovators were racing against time to find a vaccine, Congress party leaders left no opportunity to mock these efforts

It does not require rocket science to figure out that if different Indian States compete for vaccines in international market manufacturers/suppliers will go laughing to the bank

Out of extreme miseries dead bodies were thrown into the Ganges. Dogs are eating corpses. Hindus are being buried. Where are you taking this country and humanity?

Actively considering live telecast of SC proceedings: CJI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 13: Chief Justice N V Ramana Thursday said he was "actively" considering the proposal to live telecast the proceedings of the Supreme Court.

The CJI, however, said before initiating concrete steps in this regard, he would seek general consensus among his colleagues in the top court.

Ramana was speaking at the launch of application for granting access of virtual proceedings of the Supreme Court to media persons.

Recalling his days as a journalist, the CJI said media faces great challenges in reporting and came to know that journalists were depending on advocates to get links

Unfortunately, when COVID-19 struck, the systems which were earlier in place could no longer be relied upon. The judicial system has had to adapt quickly, in order to ensure that justice dispensation does not stop in the country

N V RAMANA | CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA



did not have car or bikes. We used to travel on bus as we were directed not to avail conveyance of organisers of the event," he said.

Urging the media to use the resources (app) responsibly and fol-

low all Covid protocols, the CJI said, "Technology, particularly one that is newly developed, is sensitive and might be subject to some flaws in the early days of its use."

which should not be unnecessarily magnified. I request everyone to be patient, to be encouraging and supportive to the technical team to ensure that the application works without any problems. I hope that everyone gives the system the requisite time to evolve and expand."

"Additionally, I would like to also highlight another feature we are introducing today on the official website and mobile application of the Supreme Court. This new feature, called 'indicative Notes' is aimed at providing concise summaries of landmark judgments in an easy-to-understand format. This will serve as a useful resource for media persons and the general public who wish to be better informed about the rulings of the Court," he said.

PNB SCAM

Show cause notice served to Nirav Modi



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, May 13: A special court here has issued a public notice to fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, wanted in India for alleged fraud and money laundering in the PNB scam case, asking why his properties should not be confiscated under the Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEO) Act.

Special Judge V C Barde has also asked Modi to appear before the court June 11.

The court said if the accused failed to appear, it will proceed with action against him under the FEO Act.

The special court had in December 2019 declared Nirav Modi a fugitive economic offender, on a plea of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which is conducting a probe into the case.

"I, V C Barde, Special Judge, PMLA, 2002 and Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018, issue NOTICE to you to show cause as to why the properties mentioned in the application (ED's plea), in which you have pecuniary interest and/or otherwise, should not be confiscated under the said Act," the recent notice said.

A similar notice was also issued to Nirav Modi's wife Ami, sister Purvi and brother-in-law Maikani Mehta.

The notice said the family members have been enumerated as "interested person" in the application.

The investigating agency has alleged that Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi, in connivance with certain bank officials, allegedly cheated the Punjab National Bank (PNB) to the tune of ₹14,000 crore through issuance of fraudulent Letters of Undertaking (LoUs).

The LoUs were allegedly issued in a fraudulent manner by a Mumbai branch of the PNB to a group of companies belonging to Nirav Modi since March 2011, till the case came to light.

Gap increased between doses of Covishield vax

However, the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation has suggested no change for the dosage interval for Covaxin



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 13: The Centre Thursday approved extending the gap between the two doses of the Covishield vaccine to 12-16 weeks following a recommendation from a government panel, and said it is a "science-based decision" taken with confidence that there will be no extra risk.

However, the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) has suggested no change for the dosage interval for Covaxin, the Union health ministry said.

"Based on the available real-life evidences, particularly from the UK, the COVID-19 Working Group agreed for increasing the dosing interval to 12-16 weeks between two

doses of Covishield vaccine. No change in interval of Covaxin vaccine doses was recommended," the ministry said. The present gap between two doses of Covishield, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, is 6-8 weeks.

The Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech's indigenously developed Covaxin and Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield, being manufactured by the Pune-based SII, are currently being used in India's inoculation drive against coronavirus.

The Central government's move comes amid reports from several states about shortage of COVID-19 vaccines. Some states and UTs have also reported that they had to suspend its vaccination drive for 18-44 days in view of the scarcity.

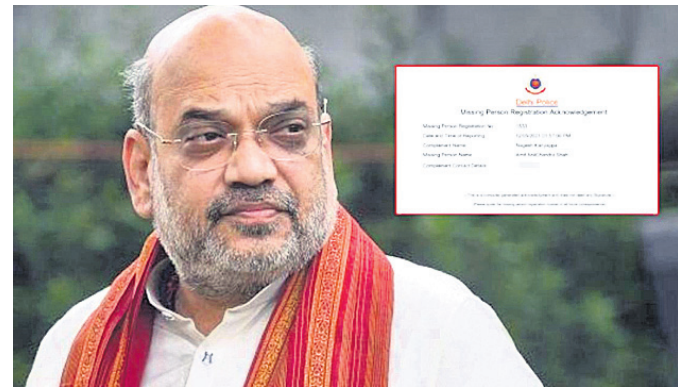
Sputnik V to be available in market next week: Govt

NEW DELHI: The Union Health Ministry Thursday announced that Russia's Sputnik V, the vaccine against the Covid-19 pandemic, will be available in markets across the country early next week. The announcement comes 12 days after the first consignment of 150,000 doses of the Sputnik V vaccine landed in Hyderabad from Russia. Sputnik V is developed by Russia's Gamaleya National Center. It will be the third vaccine to be cleared for use in India at a time when the country is in the grip of an intense second wave and demand for vaccines has shot up.

While Maharashtra decided on Wednesday to suspend its drive to vaccinate people in the age group of 18 to 44 years in view of vaccine shortage, Delhi also temporarily shut Covaxin-administering centres for this age group as it has run out of stock.

Several states and UTs including Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telangana have also decided to opt for global tenders for procurement of anti-coronavirus shots with the domestic supply falling short to meet the rising demand.

AMIT SHAH IS MISSING: NSUI



AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 13: Delhi Police Wednesday visited the National Students' Union of India office on a complaint filed by NSUI national general secretary Nagesh Kariyappa that 'Union Home Minister Amit Shah is missing'. The student leader Wednesday filed the report at Parliament Street police station alleging that the minister has "disappeared amid the pandemic and the citizens are in a crisis".

Kariyappa said that politicians were supposed to serve the nation and not run away from a crisis situation. "When the country is suffering from a deadly pandemic and the citizens are in a crisis, it is the duty of the politicians to be accountable for the whole country," said the complaint. Party's national secretary and in-charge of media and communications Lokesh Chugh said: "Until 2013, politicians were responsible towards the citizens, but things changed com-

pletely after the BJP came to power in 2014."

"Now, the second most powerful and responsible person in command is missing amid the pandemic." Meanwhile, Nagesh Kariyappa, asked: "Amit Shah is the home minister of the country or of only the BJP?" Kariyappa alleged the current government has failed and so, the NSUI filed a 'missing complaint'. "We are waiting for the government to present us with the answers," he said.

When asked about the police team's visit, the NSUI said they came to enquire about Chugh and Kariyappa about the complaint. However, the Delhi Police said the NSUI leaders had themselves called the police. "They had called the Police Control Room that the minister is missing. The police then went to the NSUI office to look into the matter," said a senior police officer. "This is a mischievous act and the police will not act on such a complaint," said another officer.

IMD issues cyclonic storm warning

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, May 13: The IMD Thursday issued a warning and said that a low pressure area formed over the Arabian Sea is likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm by May 16, which may bring heavy rainfall at some places in Goa and south Konkan region.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said, A low pressure area has formed over the southeast Arabian Sea and adjoining Lakshadweep area today. It is very likely to become well marked over Lakshadweep area by Friday morning.



It will concentrate into a depression over the same region by Saturday morning and intensify into a cyclonic storm during the subsequent 24 hours, it said in the warning report.

It is very likely to intensify further and move north-northwest-

wards Gujarat and adjoining Pakistan coasts, it said.

It is likely to reach near Gujarat coast around May 18 evening, the IMD added.

Due to this, south Konkan and Goa region would receive light to moderate rainfall at many places on Saturday and its intensity would increase further and it would receive heavy to very heavy rainfall at a few places Sunday and Monday, it said.

According to the department, 64.5 mm to 115.5 mm rainfall in 24 hours is considered as heavy, while precipitation between 115.6 mm to 204.4 mm in 24 hours is termed as very heavy rainfall.

Centre challenges SC on 102nd Amendment

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 13: The Centre has filed a review petition in the Supreme Court in connection with its judgment conferring the President with the sole power for identification of a community as backward and its eligibility for reservation benefits.

The Centre has challenged the top court's interpretation of 102nd Constitutional Amendment in the Maratha reservation judgment delivered May 5. The Centre's petition has contended that state governments cannot be stripped their

powers to identify socially and educationally backward classes (SEBC). The top court had upheld the 102nd Constitutional Amendment while denuding the power of states in this regard. "By introduction of Articles 366(26C) and 342A through the 102nd Amendment, the President alone is empowered to identify SEBCs and include them in a list to be published under Article 342A (1), which shall be deemed to include SEBCs in relation to each state and union territory for the purposes of the Constitution," the top court had held.

BRICS discusses framework on Social Security Agreement

SOCIAL SECURITY AGREEMENT WOULD HELP THE INTERNATIONAL WORKERS TO PORT THEIR BENEFIT TO THEIR HOME COUNTRIES THEREBY PREVENTING LOSS OF THEIR HARD-EARNED MONEY, SAID THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 13: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) nations have converged on devising a multilateral framework on the issue of Social Security Agreement (SSA).

Social Security Agreement would help the international workers to port their benefit to their home countries thereby preventing loss of their hard-earned money, said the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Further they will be exempted from contributing both in home as well as host countries.

The decisions were taken in the first BRICS Employment Working

Group (EWG) meeting in which the member nations resolved to enter into dialogue and discussion with each other and take the issue forward towards signing of the agreements. The two-day virtual meeting concluded Wednesday with India assuming BRICS Presidency this year.

The prime agenda for the discussions were promoting Social Security Agreements amongst BRICS nations, formalisation of labour markets, participation of women in labour force and Gig and platform workers --role in labour market.

The representatives of International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Social



Security Agency (ISSA), who also took part in the meeting, made valuable interventions and suggestions on the agenda issues. They also expressed willingness to pro-

vide technical support in facilitating conclusion of such agreements.

On the issue of formalisation of labour market, member nations



The two-day virtual EWG meeting concluded Wednesday with India assuming BRICS presidency this year

discussed various initiatives taken by them towards formalisation of jobs and how Covid-19 has enhanced informalisation risk.

On participation of women in the labour force, the member coun-

tries resolved to promote participation of women in remunerative, productive and decent work and to extend social security cover to the women workers engaged in informal sector. Impact of Covid-19 on participation of women in labour force was also discussed.

On the issue of Gig and platform workers and their role in labour market, the member nations discussed how the proliferation of Digital Labour Platforms is transforming the labour processes in the world of work. Challenges faced by them and various measures being taken by member nations including extension of social protection system were also discussed.



# national



The Prime Minister is also missing, along with vaccines, oxygen and medicines. All that remain are the Central Vista Project, GST (goods and services tax) on medicines and the Prime Minister's photos here and there RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

## INDIA, PAK ARMIES EXCHANGE SWEETS

The armies of India and Pakistan Thursday exchanged sweets at the Line of Control (LoC) in Kupwara and Uri sectors of Jammu and Kashmir on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, a defence spokesman said



### of the day quote

Why the Centre has so much contempt against Karnataka and Kannadigas? Is it due to the fact that Karnataka has elected the highest MPs for the BJP or is it an effort to project Yediyurappa (Karnataka CM) as a villain? H D KUMARASWAMY | JD(S) LEADER

We should not get into global tendering for vaccination. Why should states do separate tenders? It will bring a bad name for the country SATYENDAR JAIN | DELHI HEALTH MINISTER

Conditions in the rural areas are appalling due to coronavirus infections. The government should take immediate cognisance of the matter and conduct a thorough investigation and should increase the health services and resources in rural areas on a war footing KAMAL NATH | MP CONGRESS PRESIDENT

# Lightning kills herd of 18 wild elephants in Assam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Guwahati/ Nagaon, May 13:** Eighteen elephants died in lightning strikes at a forest in Nagaon district of Assam, a senior Forest Department official said Thursday. The incident happened Wednesday night at a hill in the Kundoli proposed reserve forest in the Kathiatoli range, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) Amit Sahay said. "The area is very remote, near the Nagaon-Karbi Anglong border, and our team could reach there Thursday afternoon. It was found that carcasses were lying in two groups. Fourteen were lying atop the hill and four were found at the bottom of the hill," he said. The preliminary investigation found that the jumbos were killed due to electrocution caused by lightning, but the exact reason will

be known only after post-mortem, which will be done Friday, Sahay said. "Two Divisional Forest Officers (DFOs) and one Conservator of Forest have conducted the preliminary investigation. On Friday morning, another team with veterinary doctors will reach the spot and conduct the post-mortem," he added. When asked how could such a huge number of elephants die together, Sahay said usually elephants stay in huddles in case of storms or rain. "Probably, at that very moment, lightning struck and the entire group got killed. I have asked the concerned DFO to provide more information like how many males or females were there. It will take some more time," he said. Nagaon DFO Binod Dulu Bora said the Forest Department with the help of the Veterinary Department will conduct the post-mortem. "Now, forest officials have started



their departmental investigation of the case at the spot," he added. Villagers living near the hill claimed that the herd of the wild elephants was screaming unnaturally throughout the night and the cries faded gradually as the day broke. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma expressed concern over the incident and asked Environment and Forest Minister Parimal Suklabaidya to visit the spot to in-

quire into the matter. Suklabaidya mourned the deaths and said he would visit the site with Sahay and other officials Friday morning to take stock of the situation. Elephant expert Bibhuti Lahkar termed the incident shocking and said such cases are very rare and unheard of in the Northeast. "In open areas of some places like the African grassland such accidents have taken place, but

rarely in India. If we consider Eastern India, then one such incident took place at Jaldapara in West Bengal around 12-15 years ago, but the number of deaths was not so high," he said. Though officials are attributing the reasons to lightning from preliminary investigation, it is too early to arrive at a conclusion before the post-mortem as the number of elephants dying is "simply too high," said Lahkar, the head of elephant conservation at NGO Aaranyak. "If they really died due to lightning, then these are signals of climate change. Our climate has become erratic, thunderstorm, rain - everything has become erratic. If we really want to arrest this, we need to save our nature," said the winner of the 'Heritage Heroes Award 2016' of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

## Peak will come, virus can again emerge: Govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 13:** As the country battles the second wave of Covid-19, the government Thursday said the virus may emerge again and so preparations have to be made at the national level in collaboration with states, infrastructure needs to be ramped up while curbs and appropriate behaviour must be followed. Dismissing allegations that the government was unaware of the intensity of the second wave, NITI Aayog member (health) Dr V K Paul said, "We kept warning again and again from this platform that the second wave of Covid-19 will come." "It was said that the sero-positivity is 20 per cent, 80 per cent of the population is still vulnerable and that virus has not gone anywhere and other countries were also witnessing a resurgence." At a press conference, Paul said, "The Prime Minister had conveyed the country about the emerging second wave March 17 without creating panic and had said that we have to fight it."



"Was such a peak expected," he said, "well, no modelling can predict the size of a peak as the unexpected behaviour virus is well known." "So peak will come, the virus can again emerge, we know. So preparations have to be made at country level in collaboration with states, infrastructure has to be ramped up, containment measures have to be implemented and Covid appropriate behaviour has to be followed." "We had not created panic. Other countries have faced multiple peaks after all it's a pandemic," he said. He said it is the nature of the disease that it will ultimately go to villages. This epidemiology is well known, Paul said as he urged people to follow Covid appropriate behaviour and embrace vaccination.

# Doubts surround official Covid toll

Experts say the official quarter-million death count is hugely underreported. Harrowing images from overwhelmed crematoriums, graveyards, and even makeshift funeral pyres have highlighted the scale of the crisis



AGENCIES

**New Delhi, May 13:** India added 3,62,727 new coronavirus infections in a day taking the COVID-19 tally of cases to 2,37,03,665, while the death toll rose to 2,58,317 with 4,120 daily fatalities, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated Thursday. Across the vast nation, the devastating Covid-19 wave has overwhelmed hospitals with patients and crematoriums with bodies, and many coronavirus deaths are not being properly recorded as such. "Even three to four times would be an underestimate," Anant Bhan, an independent health policy and bioethics researcher said. Bodies of suspected Covid-19 victims have also been seen floating down the holy Ganga River. The discrepancies appear particularly stark in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat. In Rajkot in the west of the state, the official death toll between April 1-23 was 154, yet the city's

own health officials put it at 723. And in Bharuch, the official count for the same period was just 23 but there were 600 funerals. Gujarat's Chief minister Vijay Rupani insisted that the state was following guidelines from the Indian Council of Medical Research. Those say only deaths directly caused by Covid-19 can be recorded as such, but not fatalities triggered by co-morbidities - when a patient had heart problems and dies of cardiac arrest, for instance. Even before the pandemic, just 22 percent of the nearly 10 million annual deaths in India were medically certified, and experts say the spike in funerals points to the same happening with Covid-19 fatalities. 'MASSIVE UNDERREPORTING' The surge has pushed the Aishbagh Burial Ground in Lucknow, capital of Uttar Pradesh state, to the brink. Hafiz Abdul Mateen from the graveyard said it handled four to five burials a day before the pandemic.

"Today, 45 bodies of Covid victims have been buried here," he said in a statement. "We've increased the number of gravediggers but that's not enough as these men are getting tired and falling sick." The official figures for deaths in some other states including Uttar Pradesh and Haryana also do not align with the number of funerals. Media reports have also suggested that the official numbers for the capital New Delhi also fall well short of the reality. Health economist and researcher Rijo M. John described the situation as a "battle for data, data sharing and transparency". But a spokesperson for India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party denied allegations of undercounting or political motivations behind the mismatch in fatality numbers. Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh are among 10 states that account for 72.42 per cent of the 3,62,727 new cases in the country in a span of 24 hours, the Union Health Ministry said Thursday.

## NHRC issues notices to Centre, UP & Bihar

AGENCIES

**Patna, May 13:** The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notices to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, after receiving complaints about several bodies found floating in the Ganga river in the two states. "It (NHRC) has issued notices to the chief secretaries of both the states and the secretary, Union Ministry of Jal Shakti, today calling for action

### CORPSES IN GANGA

It said it received a complaint dated May 11, 2021, based on several media reports, wherein apprehensions were expressed that these bodies floating in the Ganga were of Covid-19 victims. The complaint noted that the disposal of bodies in such a manner may seriously affect all those persons who are dependent on the Ganga for their day-to-day activities, the NHRC mentioned. "It (complaint) further stated that even if these dead bodies were not of Covid victims, then such practice/incidents are shameful to the society as a whole as that amounts to violation of human rights of even deceased persons," the NHRC added.

to eyewitnesses, the majority of the dead bodies are partially burnt. India has been badly hit by the second wave of coronavirus infections and cremation grounds and burial grounds across the country have been overburdened. The NHRC's statement said, "The practice of disposal of dead bodies in our sacred river Ganga is clearly in violation of guidelines of the National Mission for Clean Ganga project of the Ministry of Jal Shakti." It said it received a complaint dated May 11, 2021, based on several media reports, wherein apprehensions were expressed that these bodies floating in the Ganga were of Covid-19 victims. The complaint noted that the disposal of bodies in such a manner may seriously affect all those persons who are dependent on the Ganga for their day-to-day activities, the NHRC mentioned. "It (complaint) further stated that even if these dead bodies were not of Covid victims, then such practice/incidents are shameful to the society as a whole as that amounts to violation of human rights of even deceased persons," the NHRC added.

### SHORT TAKES

#### Low-key Eid celebrations

**Srinagar:** Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations in Kashmir were a low-key affair Thursday as the faithful marked the culmination of the fasting month of Ramzan by offering the thanksgiving prayers in small congregations at local mosques by observing social distancing in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### nCoV- hit families to get pension in MP

**Bhopal:** The Madhya Pradesh government has announced ₹5,000 pension per month to families hit by the pandemic where poor and destitute children have lost their parents or guardian to coronavirus. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, referring to the deepening crisis due to the pandemic, said, "The corona epidemic has broken many families. There are families where Covid has snatched the earning members and aged people have been left alone as there is no one to take care of them. There are some families where innocent children were orphaned as their parents have died due to Covid. Hence we have decided to provide a pension of ₹5,000 per month so that they can survive without anyone's support."

#### Delhi court junks Kalra's bail plea

**New Delhi:** A Delhi court Thursday dismissed the anticipatory bail application of Navneet Kalra in connection with allegedly black marketing oxygen concentrators, saying that allegations against him are serious and his custodial interrogation is required to "unearth the entire conspiracy".

#### Jawan shoots self

**Jaisalmer (Rajasthan):** A jawan of the Border Security Force (BSF) has shot himself dead using his service rifle, police said Thursday. The incident took place in Shahgarh Balj area here Wednesday, they said. The jawan, identified as Prem Singh Yadav, had returned to duty April 30 after a one-month vacation in Madhya Pradesh's Bhind.

#### Lockdown extended

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra government Thursday extended the lockdown-like restrictions in the state till June 1 to break the chain of COVID-19. Chief Secretary Sitaram Kunte in an order said the curbs will remain in force till 7 am June 1.

## VIRUS SCARE



Telugu Talli flyover wears a deserted look during COVID-induced lockdown, in Hyderabad

PTI PHOTO

# Vaccination race exposes India's digital divide

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, May 13:** For anyone aged between 18 and 44, getting a slot in the expanded vaccination drive - already plagued by shortages and political squabbles - has been like buying tickets for a rock concert where popular bands sell out in minutes. Maskara, like millions of younger Indians terrified by the current surge in infections, is rushing to get vaccinated against the coronavirus after the country this month opened up its inoculation drive to all adults. But the expansion came with restrictions, including only online registrations for the 18-44-year-olds, locking out up to half of population, particu-



larly in poor and rural areas, who don't have smartphones or internet access. Numerous states are also struggling with vaccine shortages, meaning there are limited slots available for the up to 600 million

people in the 18-44 cohort now eligible for jabs. So far, only three percent of the country's 1.3 billion people - or 39.5 million - are fully vaccinated with both doses. An additional 10.6 percent have received

just their first shot. HACKATHON Techies have developed workarounds to help users in some cities where slots have been opening up at random times of day and are filled within one or two minutes. Berty Thomas, 35, a Chennai-based hobbyist programmer and business analyst, created a tool that alerts users via the Telegram messaging app when slots in their district open. It's already gotten more than 400,000 subscribers. "My focus right now is to expand these alerts to multiple small towns and villages across the country," Thomas told AFP, adding that some users wanted to book for relatives in regional and rural areas. "(Getting slots) has been an issue,

particularly in the villages where internet is scarce. So the only way is... for people who have access to internet to help those who don't." Local media say some families have even travelled long distances to secure slots for their younger members. NO INTERNET, NO VACCINATION But for Seema, a house-help working in Lucknow - which has been ravaged by the virus - getting vaccinated seems unlikely. "I don't have access to the internet. A few boys in my neighbourhood do have smartphones but they don't know how to use it for this (registration)," the 40-year-old said. "(The government) should think about people like us. Every day I run the risk of exposing myself to the dis-

ease as I work for three households. I wish I could get myself vaccinated." Experts say that the government should allow walk-ins at vaccination centres - a measure already introduced for people above 45 years old. Authorities should also consider "taking vaccines to the people rather than having people coming to the vaccines", Ashoka University physics and biology professor Gautam Menon said. He suggested steps like mobile vaccination clinics in remote areas. "There needs to be a system for door-to-door vaccination. Those who don't have a smartphone - what will they do?," the 26-year-old told AFP at a milk store in Delhi where he works.





**We must finally guarantee healthcare to everyone as a human right, regardless of immigration status, income, employment, or anything else. That's why I'm proud to be introducing the HEAL Act, a first step towards removing barriers to health care for immigrants**  
PRAMILA JAYAPAL | HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, US

## NEW ROYAL MAIL STAMPS FEATURE PRINCE PHILIP

The UK's Royal Mail Thursday announced that it has issued four new stamps in the memory of Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip, who died at the age of 99 last month



### of the day quote

**With the Zero Pollution Action Plan, we will create a healthy living environment for Europeans, contribute to a resilient recovery and boost transition to a clean, circular and climate neutral economy**  
VIRGINIUS SINKEVICIUS | EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR ENVIRONMENT

**The events of Ballymurphy should never have happened, the families of those who were killed should never have had to experience the grief and trauma of that loss. They should have not had to wait nearly five decades for the judgment this week**  
BRANDON LEWIS | SECRETARY OF STATE, NORTHERN IRELAND

**Sanctions are a swindle on the people, direct oppression on the poorest in society, an abuse of the rights on the sick who lack medicines, and an act of cruelty on the underprivileged who are forced to buy bread at a high price**  
HASSAN ROUHANI | PRESIDENT, IRAN

### SHORT TAKES

#### Relief package for mouse plague

**Sydney:** The Australian state of New South Wales Thursday announced a relief package for farmers dealing with a catastrophic mouse plague that has destroyed crops and caused havoc in communities. State Agriculture Minister Adam Marshall told the media that A\$50 million in funding will go to farmers dealing with the emergency. "We haven't seen a plague on this scale really since the early 80's, and everyone was hoping that the cool conditions in winter would actually see their numbers dented. Nothing so far has worked," Marshall said.

#### Ex-UK PM grilled over finance firm

**London:** Former British PM David Cameron said Thursday he never suspected that a financial services company he lobbied for would go under, threatening thousands of jobs at a steel firm it helped finance. Cameron was summoned to answer lawmakers' questions about his efforts to win government funds for Greensill Capital. His involvement with the firm has spurred inquiries into political lobbying in Britain. Greensill was one of the company's key financial backers.

#### Hefazat militant pleads guilty

**Dhaka:** A top Hefazat-e-Islam militant has pleaded guilty to his involvement in the violent riots that erupted across Bangladesh during Indian PM Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka in March. Mufti Harun Izzah, education and culture secretary of the Hefazat's now-defunct central committee, made the confession at a court Wednesday after two days of remand in police custody.

#### Burmese beauty queen turns rebel

**Nay Pyi Taw:** Burmese beauty queen Htar Htet Htet has turned rebel, promising to bring down the brutal military junta in Myanmar or die fighting it. Htet Htet represented Myanmar in the first Miss Grand International beauty pageant in Thailand in 2013. Hundreds of ethnic Barmars or Burmese, angered by death of protesting comrades in military police firings, have joined the newly-formed urban rebel groups like the Federal Army and United Defence Force.

## Fighting soars amid truce efforts

GAZA'S HEALTH MINISTRY SAID THE DEATH TOLL HAS CLIMBED TO 83 PALESTINIANS, INCLUDING 17 CHILDREN AND 7 WOMEN, WITH MORE THAN 480 PEOPLE WOUNDED

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Gaza City, May 13:** Hamas sent a heavy barrage of rockets deep into Israel in a matter of minutes Thursday and Israel pounded Gaza with more airstrikes.

The relentless escalation of hostilities came even as Egyptian negotiators held in-person talks with the two sides, intensifying efforts at mediation.

Previous fighting between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers, including a devastating 2014 war, was largely confined to the impoverished and blockaded Palestinian territory and Israeli communities on the frontier. But this round seems to be rippling farther and wider than at any time since the 2000 Palestinian intifada, or uprising, and is tearing apart the country at its seams.

While some rocket attacks have reached the Tel Aviv area, Arab and Jewish mobs have rampaged through the streets, savagely beating people and torching cars. Flights have been cancelled or diverted away from the country's main airport.

Gaza's Health Ministry said the death toll has climbed to 83 Palestinians, including 17 children and seven women, with more than 480 people wounded. Islamic Jihad confirmed the deaths of seven militants, while Hamas has acknowl-



HAMAS-ISRAEL CONFLICT

edged 13 of its militants killed, including a senior commander.

Israel says the number of militants dead is much higher.

Seven people have been killed in Israel. A visit by Egyptian security officials was a significant development in international mediation efforts, which have been key to ending past rounds of fighting. The officials met first with Hamas leaders in Gaza before holding talks with the Israelis in Tel Aviv, two Egyptian intelligence officials said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to talk to the press. Still, both Israel and Hamas

### No ceasefire till Israel stops: Hamas

The Islamic Hamas movement, which controls the Gaza Strip, has said that it will not accept any ceasefire with Israel until the Jewish state "completely stops violations against Al-Aqsa Mosque and the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah in Jerusalem." In an interview with the local media, Hamas spokesman in Gaza Fawzi Barhoum also denied reports that a high-ranking Egyptian security delegation was expected to arrive in Gaza as part of the efforts to reach a ceasefire between Israel and the militant groups in the coastal enclave. In response, Israeli fighter jets have also intensified bombing on militants' posts and facilities in Gaza.

### Massive reinforcement

Israeli troops massed at Gaza's border Thursday and Palestinian militants pounded Israel with rockets in intense hostilities that have caused international concern and touched off clashes between Jews and Arabs in Israel. Israel's defense minister has approved the mobilisation of 9,000 more reservist troops amid fighting with Hamas, and Israel's military spokesman says forces are massing on the border with the Gaza Strip. The Defense Ministry said Thursday that the latest mobilisation approved by Defense Minister Benny Gantz was an "exceptional call-up." It comes after days of heavy fighting in which Hamas has fired hundreds of rockets deep into Israel. The military has responded with punishing airstrikes.

## Oli to be reappointed as PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kathmandu, May 13:** K P Sharma Oli set to be reappointed as Nepal Prime Minister as the Opposition alliance of Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) Thursday failed to muster majority support to form the next government.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari had asked the Opposition parties to come up with the support of majority lawmakers to form a new government by 9 PM Thursday after Oli lost a crucial trust vote in the House of Representatives Monday.

However, as the deadline which ended at 9:00 pm Thursday, the NC-Maoist Centre alliance has its hopes crashing down as disgruntled Nepal-Khanal faction of the ruling CPN-UML did not forward their



resignation, which they had been claiming to do for long as a bargaining chip with embattled former prime minister Oli.

Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba and CPN-Maoist Centre chairman Pushpakamal Dahal "Prachanda" held a meeting Thursday at the former's residence at Budhanilkantha in the outskirts of Kathmandu to discuss the formation of the new government. Similarly, Prime Minister and chairman of ruling CPN-UML Oli and dissident leader of the party

### Covid spirals out of control

Amid an ongoing second wave of the pandemic, Nepal is heading towards an India-like Covid disaster as at least 14 infected patients died in hospitals due to lack in oxygen supply. The second wave in Nepal has led to serious oxygen shortages, as well as an unabated spike in the number of daily Covid cases. The mortality rate is also high like in India. "The required oxygen supply is running out, we tried to sustain it yesterday but we are now helpless, we do not have more stock now," Santosh Poudel, Director at Bir Hospital Trauma Center wrote on Facebook.

Madhav Kumar Nepal held a meeting in an attempt to make the last effort to patch up their differences.

### CUTE CUBS



Three Siberian tiger cubs is shown by a keeper in the Kecskemet Zoo in Kecskemet, Hungary, Thursday, May 13, 2021

## US hits China for repressing religious freedom

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Washington, May 13:** The Biden administration Thursday took aim at China for repressing religious freedom as it forges ahead with its aim of restoring human rights as a primary focus of American foreign policy.

The condemnation was similar to that lodged by the Trump administration, which had been criticised for prioritising religious freedom over other rights, and reflected continuity in the US position that China's crackdown on Muslims and other religious minorities in western Xinjiang constitutes "genocide."

Yet, a senior official said religious freedom is just one element



in the administration's broader human rights strategy.

Much as his predecessor did, Secretary of State Antony Blinken issued the release of the State Department's annual International Religious Freedom Report to lam-

**China broadly criminalises religious expression and continues to commit crimes against humanity and genocide against Muslim Uyghurs and members of other religious and ethnic minority groups**

ANTHONY BLINKEN | US SECRETARY OF STATE

baste China for severe restrictions on its citizens' ability to worship freely. He also announced a travel ban on a former senior Chinese official the US accuses of persecuting members of the Falun Gong religious sect.

"China broadly criminalises religious expression and continues to commit crimes against humanity and genocide against Muslim

**They want to sabotage Xinjiang's harmony and stability, contain China's rise and alienate relations between China and Islamic countries**

ABDUREQIP TOMURNIYAZ | HEAD OF ISLAMIC STUDIES IN XINJIANG

Uyghurs and members of other religious and ethnic minority groups," Blinken told reporters as he unveiled the report for the calendar year 2020.

The report itself said Christians, Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists and Falun Gong practitioners in China all suffer from "severe societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities."

## Virus, Mideast turmoil stifle Eid al-Fitr celebrations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Jakarta, May 13:** Muslims celebrated Eid al-Fitr in a subdued mood for a second year Thursday as the Covid-19 pandemic again forced mosque closings and family separations on the holiday marking the end of Ramadan.

In the embattled Gaza Strip, the call to prayer echoed over pulverised buildings and heaps of rubble as Israeli warplanes continued to pound the territory in the worst outbreak of violence since the 2014 war.

Worshippers wearing masks joined communal prayers in the streets of Indonesia's capital, Jakarta. The world's most populous Muslim-majority nation allowed mosque prayers in low-risk areas,

but mosques in areas where there was more risk of the virus spreading closed their doors, including Jakarta's Istiqlal Grand Mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia.

Indonesians and Malaysians were banned for a second year from travelling to visit relatives in the traditional Eid homecoming.

In Bangladesh, however, tens of thousands of people were leaving the capital, Dhaka, to join their families back in their villages for Eid celebrations despite a nationwide lockdown and road checkpoints. Experts fear a surge in cases in a country grappling with a shortage of vaccines and fear of spreading coronavirus.

The Jakarta governor also ordered malls, restaurants and leisure destinations usually packed during



the holiday period to shut.

While police set up highway checkpoints and domestic flights and other modes of transporta-

tion were suspended, anxiety lingers that people will defy the prohibition. Television reports showed city dwellers hiding on disguised trucks

## Biden signs order to beef up cyber defences

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Washington, May 13:** Alarmed at repeated cyber-attacks on the country especially after a key fuel pipeline last week, US President Joe Biden has signed an executive order, implementing new policies to improve national cyber security.

"Protecting our nation from malicious cyber actors requires the Federal Government to partner with the private sector. The private sector must adapt to the continuously changing threat environment, ensure its products are built and operate securely, and partner with the Federal Government to foster a more secure cyberspace," he wrote in the executive order.

The executive order was passed after the Colonial Pipeline Company, which is the largest refined-products pipeline in the country, was forced to shut down due to a cyber security attack May 7.

The company temporarily halted all pipeline operations after the cyber security attack involving ransomware was detected. It has now partially restored the pipeline.

The Colonial Pipeline transports more than 100 million gallons of fuel daily on the East Coast.

Biden said that incremental improvements would not give the country the security it needs.

"Instead, the Federal



Reducing barriers to information sharing between the government and the private sector

Mandating the deployment of multi-factor authentication in the federal government	Establishing a cyber security Safety Review Board
Standardised playbook for responding to 'cyber incidents'	

Government needs to make bold changes and significant investments in order to defend the vital institutions that underpin the American way of life. The scope of protection and security must include systems that process data (information technology (IT)) and those that run the vital machinery that ensures our safety (operational technology (OT)," he emphasised.

## 28 cases of blood clot linked to J&J: US CDC

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Washington, May 13:** The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have confirmed 28 cases, of a rare blood clotting disorder in adults who have received the Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine, the media reported Thursday.

The number of cases has increased from 15 last month, all of which were in women, the New York Times reported. Although the latest report has identified a handful of cases in men, women - especially those between the ages of 30 and 49 - remain at high risk.

"The trend is that the reporting rates are higher in females compared to males in all age categories," Tom Shimabukuro, the



deputy director of the immunisation safety office at CDC, was quoted as saying. Shimabukuro presented the new cases Wednesday at a meeting of a panel of advisers to the CDC, the report said. Among the 28 confirmed cases, 12 people who developed the disorder had obesity, 7 had high blood pressure, 3 had diabetes, and 3 were taking estrogen, though it is not yet clear whether any of those factors might substantially increase the risk of the disorder, the report said.

### Worshippers wearing masks joined communal prayers in the streets of Indonesia's capital, Jakarta. The world's most populous Muslim-majority nation allowed mosque prayers in low-risk areas

or fishing boats and officers at roadblocks being overwhelmed by desperate motorists.

In the southern Philippines, coronavirus outbreaks and new fighting between government forces and Muslim insurgents in one

province prevented people from holding large public prayers. Instead, most hunkered down in their homes, while in Maguindanao province, many families displaced by recent fighting marked the holiday in evacuation camps.

In Malaysia, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin unexpectedly announced another nationwide lockdown from Wednesday until June 7 to curb a spike in cases. Inter-state travel and all social activities are banned, which means that like in Indonesia, Muslims cannot visit each other or family graves.

Malaysia reported 4,765 cases Wednesday, pushing its tally to 453,222, nearly fourfold from the start of the year. Deaths also rose to 1,761.



# business



**Foaps would facilitate better efficiency in the operation of the existing food-delivery apps by enabling restaurants quickly disperse packets without any error**  
ABDUL SALAH | CO-FOUNDER, LASPER

## AIRTEL LAUNCHES 'DIGIGOLD'

Airtel Payments Bank launched DigiGold in partnership with SafeGold, the leading provider of digital gold. With DigiGold, Airtel Payments Bank's savings account customers can invest in 24K gold using the Airtel Thanks app. They can also gift DigiGold to their family and friends, who have a savings account with Airtel Payments Bank



## of the day quote

Our objective is to deliver free of cost Covid care kits to 25L households benefiting 50 lakh adults at their homes. Our service went live today and mass supplies will begin from today. To help avoid duplication/wastage, we will charge ₹25 from each household as delivery charges

**NIKHIL CHARI** | PRESIDENT, DHANI HEALTHCARE

Over the years, we have created a niche positioning for ourselves in the rural and semi-urban markets with deep distribution across north, west and central India, on-ground sales and collection infrastructure to cater to the underserved customer segment, strong underwriting and focus on asset quality

**RAJENDRA SETIA** | PROMOTER

After successes in the structured trade and supply chain, our efforts are now focused on streamlining through digital platforms that can address all concerns related to the commodities ecosystem

**SUNOOR KAUL** | CO-FOUNDER, ORIGO COMMODITIES

## SHORT TAKES

### Alibaba records 1st quarterly loss

**Hong Kong:** Alibaba had its first quarterly operating loss since it went public in 2014 after Beijing slapped a record \$2.8 billion fine on the nation's largest e-commerce company for abusing its market position. The loss tied to the anti-monopoly fine was 7.66 billion yuan (\$1,170 million) for the quarter that ended in March, though revenue growth was 64%, reaching 187.4 billion yuan (\$28.6 billion).

### GoAir rebrands as 'Go First'

**Mumbai:** After being in the skies for 15 years, Wadia Group-owned GoAir has rebranded itself as 'Go First' as the airline focuses on ultra-low-cost business model amid the aviation industry grappling with pandemic headwinds. The announcement on Thursday also comes amid reports that the airline was preparing for an initial share sale to raise funds for its ambitious expansion plans. The Go First as ULCC (ultra-low-cost carrier) would operate single aircraft type across its fleet, it said.

### Ola adds new EV category in UK

**New Delhi:** Ride-hailing major Ola Thursday said it is launching a new 'electric vehicle' category on its platform in London that will allow users to specifically book rides in a fully electric vehicle. The category, called Ola EV, is a global first for Ola and will be available across London from Thursday, a statement said. Over time, this will be rolled out to other cities around the world where Ola is operational, it added.

### IFFCO warns against fake firm

**New Delhi:** Leading fertiliser cooperative IFFCO Thursday warned public against fake firm 'Fertilizer Frenchie' offering dealership or franchise in the name of the cooperative and collecting huge amount. IFFCO said it has come to its notice that some unscrupulous elements are actively operating in various parts of the country in the name and style of 'Fertilizers Frenchie' on internet and other social media platform.

## Auto dealers seek fiscal support to tide over 2nd wave

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 13:** Automotive dealers have sought fiscal support, including an extension of GST payment for the next three months, to survive the second wave of Covid-19. As per industry sources, the automotive dealers' body FADA has written to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, apprising them of the difficulties being faced by the sector while seeking immediate relief measures.

Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA), which represents over 15,000 dealers having around 25,000 dealerships across the country, has sought a three-month extension for the delay in filing returns of GST payment, the



sources said. Besides, the industry body has urged the RBI to provide guidelines to banks and NBFCs to give a moratorium equivalent to the number of days of lockdown each state has declared for the payment

of instalments of term loans, short term loans, corporate loans, inventory funding, scrutinised loans, and cash credit lines, among others. The body has also suggested the RBI to reduce interest rates on all loans by 400 basis points for 90 days.

**FADA, which represents over 15,000 dealers having around 25,000 dealerships across the country, has sought a three-month extension for the delay in filing returns of GST payment**

They also sought a moratorium extension on EMI payments for people who have bought vehicles.

The automotive dealers have also asked the government to allow employer's contribution to PF and ESI to be reduced proportionately, the way it was done during the first wave of the Covid-19 last fis-

cal, the sources said.

If actions are not taken promptly, there would be an adverse financial impact on the auto retail segment. Many of the dealerships, being family-run enterprises, may not be able to survive by the time the second wave comes to an end, the body noted. The second wave is not only impacting the urban centres like last year but there is a massive impact on rural demand as well this time around, FADA said in the letter, as per the sources.

As per FADA, total vehicle registrations in India fell by 28% to 11,85,374 units in April versus 16,49,678 units in March. Similarly, as per SIAM vehicle wholesales last month have declined by 30% to 12,70,458 units compared to 18,19,682 units in March this year.

## Oil prices fall as India's Covid crisis puts brakes on rally



REUTERS

**Mumbai, May 13:** Oil prices fell more than 2% Thursday as India's coronavirus crisis deepened and a key US pipeline resumed operations, halting a rally that had lifted crude to an eight-week high after the IEA and OPEC forecast a rebound in global demand later in the year.

Brent crude was down \$1.75, or 2.5%, at \$67.57 a barrel by 1315 GMT after rising 1% on Wednesday. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) was down \$1.80, or 2.7%, to \$64.28 a barrel, having risen 1.2% in the previous session.

If those losses are sustained, both contracts would mark their biggest daily drops in percentage terms since early April.

In a bearish signal for oil demand, a variant of the coronavirus has swept through the countryside in India, the world's third-biggest importer of crude. More medical professionals have not been able to say when new infections will plateau and other countries are alarmed over the transmissibility of the variant that is now spreading worldwide.

"Concerns are growing that the untamed spread of the coronavirus in India and in Southeast Asia will dent oil demand," PVM analysts said in a note.

"Its impact, however, is expected to be relatively brief and the second half of the year will see the healthy revival of oil demand growth."

Meanwhile, fuel shortages worsened in the southeastern United States, six days after the shutdown of the Colonial Pipeline, the largest US fuel pipeline network, following a ransomware attack.

## SWAMIH Fund for stalled housing projects to benefit 1.16L buyers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 13:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Thursday said the Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) Fund will benefit 1.16 lakh home loan borrowers whose housing projects were stalled due to last mile funding issues.

Many real estate projects across the country were stalled due to fund crunch. To address this issue, the government, in November 2019, announced a ₹25,000 crore-SWAMIH fund to help complete over 1,500 stalled housing projects comprising 4.58 lakh housing units.

Recalling that 2019 was a very testing time for the real estate sector, the minister said the industry was cash-strapped and banks, because of the very inherent stress, would not lend money to them.

So, Sitharaman said many of the projects that were near completion or two-thirds completed were stalled because of last mile funding, she said.

Departments of the government and SBICap despite Covid-19 worked relentlessly in getting the stalled projects completed and handing over possession to home loan bor-



rowers, she said at a virtual event of key handing over of keys to more than 600 home buyers of Rivali Park of Mumbai.

This is the first stalled project completed with funding by SWAMIH Fund, which is managed by SBICap Ventures Ltd. The Department of Economic Affairs under the Ministry of Finance administers the scheme.

"SWAMIH Fund I, under which 640 people are getting homes today, will benefit 1.16 lakh Indian families. All of them will get houses which got stuck because of so many different reasons and hin-

drances. "All this is happening in the pandemic. What more happiness can be given to families which have been waiting for years to get their homes during this time of lockdown," she said.

As many as 72 projects with 44,115 dwelling units have got funding of ₹6,995 crore under SWAMIH Fund I and 132 preliminary approvals

have been given for 132 projects with 72,457 units with an investment of ₹11,581 crore. The total cost of these

stalled projects stands at ₹54,520 crore.

The finance minister said the Government of India had stepped in to provide funding to the stressed affordable and mid-income housing projects, thereby giving relief to the home buyers who had invested their hard-earned savings.

**SWAMIH Fund I, under which 640 people are getting homes today, will benefit 1.16L Indian families. All of them will get houses which got stuck because of so many different reasons and hindrances.**

**NIRMALA SITHARAMAN** | FINANCE MINISTER

## CAIT TARGETS eCOMM COS

## 'Stop delivery of non-essential items'

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, May 13:** The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) in a communication sent to Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal has said that going one step further, various e-commerce entities even in the ongoing Covid-19 induced national emergency are delivering non-essential goods in blatant contravention of lockdown guidelines imposed by various state governments.

The CAIT has also sent similar communications to Chief Ministers of all states urging them to take immediate cognisance of this violation by e-commerce portals.

The CAIT said that the sole purpose of the lockdown is to limit human-to-human interaction and reduce exposure of the general population to the Covid-19 virus and thereby break the chain of the spread of Covid-19. Therefore, all non-essential activities, including the sale and delivery of non-essential items, are prohibited during the lockdown by ordering the shops to close in all such states.

It said that as a part of "break the chain", the state governments



have banned the sale and delivery of non-essential goods and services. The business community across the country has implemented these orders in letter and spirit even though it has caused severe economic hardship to the traders.

It is a matter of great astonishment that some multinational behemoths, in blatant violation of Government instructions/orders, are selling non-essential goods under the garb of essential goods and are putting at risk, the lives of a large number of people engaged in selling, warehousing, transportation, last mile delivery and of customers to whom deliveries are being made.

Such e-commerce sale and delivery defeats the very purpose of the lockdown and increases exposure to the virus manifold.

## BIZ BUZZ

### World Nursing Day observed at OPTCL

**Bhubaneswar:** World Nursing Day was observed at Odisha Power Transmission Corporation Limited (OPTCL) recently at its corporate office. On the eve of this occasion, a felicitation ceremony was held adhering to the government's Covid guidelines where OPTCL felicitated the nurses of Power Hospital for their outstanding selfless efforts towards healthcare during this crucial juncture when the entire world is grappling with Covid. Senior GM (HRD) Chandra Sekhar Pradhan said, "We really appreciate the dedication and the contributions of our sister nurses towards the healthcare of our employees. This felicitation is just a token of recognition of their selfless efforts and we hope this will certainly motivate them to work with great vigour."



### Senco Gold encourages online purchase of gold

**Bhubaneswar:** On the occasion of Akshay Tritiya, Senco Gold and Diamonds is encouraging customers to mark these auspicious occasions by buying jewellery from the safety of their homes. Suvankar Sen, CEO, Senco Gold and Diamonds said, "We are giving ₹200 off per gram of gold on advance booking and up to 100% off on the making charges of diamond jewellery. We ensure to provide lowest rate for gold on the day of buying for advance booking. One can also buy gold coins, bars and jewellery through our website sencogoldanddiamonds.com." The company is also offering shopping through video calling facility, browsing through e-catalogues, virtual trial rooms and home delivery.



## JOB SCENARIO WORSENS

## UNEMPLOYMENT RATE SHOOTS UP TO 8% IN APRIL

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, May 13:** As the severe second wave of Covid-19 and the resultant lockdowns bring economic activities to a halt, India's job scenario worsened in April 2021. As per data published by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), India's unemployment rate rose 8% in April, against 6.5% in March. "April 2021 turned out to be worse than expectations. We had expected labour participation rate to stabilise at its March 2021 level. The LPR had dropped sharply in March already after a modest fall in February. But, the LPR fell for a third consecutive month in April," CMIE's CEO Mahesh Vyas said.

It fell to 39.98%, the lowest LPR since May 2020, the month of a



stringent nation-wide lockdown. The LPR in April 2021 is therefore the worst since the national lockdown, the CMIE said.

It attributed this fall is the result of the local lockdowns in several states. In Maharashtra, a state that imposed partial lockdowns, saw its LPR fall sharply from 44.2% in March to 40.6% in April.

The labour force shrank by 1.1 million in April 2021 to 424.6 million compared to 425.8 million in March. In spite of this smaller labour force looking for employment, a greater proportion failed to find employment.

The employment rate fell from 37.6% in March to 36.8% in April.

Vyas noted that the lockdowns could have denied people from seeking employment and caused a fall in labour participation, but, the economy also could not provide adequate jobs to those who sought jobs.

"So, the strain in the labour markets was not entirely because of the partial lockdowns. It was largely because the economy simply could not provide employment to large numbers who sought work," he added.

## Demand for luxury homes remains sluggish since April

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, May 13:** The demand for luxury homes has slowed down during the last one-and-a-half months due to the second wave of Covid-19 but real estate developers and consultants are hopeful that sales will pick up once situation normalises as it happened last year.

Prices of luxury residential properties are likely to remain stable and may even rise slightly due to limited supply, they said.

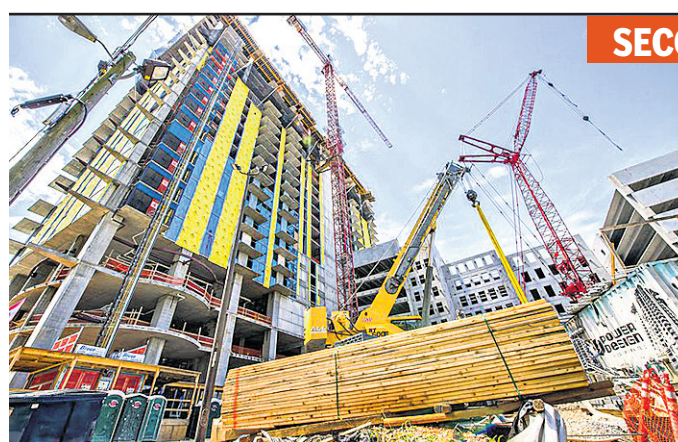
Amit Diwan, MD and Country Head, Hines India, said, "All our residential projects have seen strong velocity and price performance during January-March 2021." Residential buyers want good-quality

larger units from reputed developers, he said.

"We expect that with a hybrid work model here to stay, these trends will continue. Going forward we remain optimistic that the uptick in demand will continue once the second wave settles down," Diwan said.

Amit Goyal, CEO, India Sotheby's International Realty, said the demand for luxury and spacious homes went up significantly across the country post the first phase of Covid-19.

Goyal said the January-March 2021 quarter at India Sotheby's International Realty, one of the leading brokerage firms in luxury segment, was the strongest both in demand and transaction closures.



"With the current lockdown, yes there's a short pause, but we believe that the buying momentum will

make a big comeback, just as it did last year when the Covid situation normalised," he said.

## SECOND WAVE'S IMPACT

Prices of luxury residential properties are likely to remain stable and may even rise slightly due to limited supply

Housing sales across 7-8 major cities fell by 40-50% during the 2020 even as the demand revived significantly during H2 on pent up and festive demand

Given the limited supply in this segment, he said property prices rose in some pockets, if not all, last year. Goyal does not expect sharp rise in prices but some firming up in price could be seen.

Reeza Sebastian, President -

Residential Business, Embassy Group, noted that real estate has evolved as a preferred investment class in 2020, with growing interest towards the luxury housing segment not just from Indians but also from NRIs.

"Luxury residential prices across key markets have remained stable, witnessing a steady recovery path. There have been no new launches in the ₹3 crore plus category in the last couple of years, contributing to the stability in prices through sustained demand," she said.

Sebastian said luxury home buyers today prefer projects by branded developers and ready-to-move-in properties where quality can be assessed first hand.



# Atletico move closer to title

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Madrid, May 13:** With the Spanish league title in sight, Atletico Madrid made sure it didn't falter. Gritty and determined, Diego Simeone's team moved closer to ending its title drought in Spain with a 2-1 home win against Real Sociedad Wednesday, taking a major step toward securing their first league trophy since 2014.

Simeone punched the air as he raced from the bench to the tunnel after the final whistle, and some of the hundreds of fans who supported the team from outside the Wanda Metropolitano Stadium set off fireworks to celebrate the crucial win.

"We could hear them," said Atletico captain Koke Resurrección, who played his 500th match for the club. "There are two games left but that's a lot. Everyone is losing points in this league. We have two finals ahead of us."

Yannick Carrasco and Angel Correa scored a goal each in the first half and Atletico held on after conceding late to open a four-point lead over Barcelona with two rounds to go. The Catalan club had stumbled again Tuesday, being held to a 3-3 draw at Levante to see its title chances dwindle.

Atletico are five points ahead of Real Madrid, who can get back within two points if it wins at Granada Thursday. If Madrid draw or lose, a home victory Sunday against 11th-place Osasuna will be enough to give Atletico the league title after a seven-year wait.

Atletico supporters will have to remain outside the Metropolitano for the possible title-clincher Sunday as only some regions in Spain will be allowed to have limited crowds in stadiums, the government said



**HIGH IN CONFIDENCE:** Atletico Madrid players celebrate after Yannick Carrasco's (L) goal against Real Sociedad, Wednesday

earlier Wednesday. "I know it's difficult for everyone, but football needs the fans," Simeone said. Fourth-place Sevilla were

dropped from title contention despite a 1-0 win against Valencia at home earlier Wednesday. They were six points from Atletico, who

have the edge in the head-to-head tie-breaker. Madrid have the tie-breaker advantage over both of their rivals,

while Atletico has the edge in case of a tie with Barcelona.

The match against fifth-place Sociedad was perhaps Atletico's most difficult challenge in the last few rounds. After hosting Osasuna, they will finish campaign at relegation-threatened Valladolid.

Atletico has been in the lead for most of the season. It got off to a fast start and was on pace for a 100-point campaign before faltering toward the end and allowing Barcelona, Madrid and Sevilla to move closer.

Atletico came out attacking from the start at the Metropolitano, giving little space for Sociedad. Luis Suarez and Marcos Llorente both missed clear chances early before Carrasco opened the scoring with a 16th-minute shot from inside the area that went between the legs of Sociedad goalkeeper Alex Remiro. Suarez, who has been key for Atletico after being let go by Barcelona last season, set up Correa's 28th-minute goal from inside the area with a nice through ball past defenders.

Sociedad, still fighting for a Europa League spot, pulled closer through Igor Zubeldia from close range after a corner in the 83rd and pressed for an equalizer until the end. The Basque Country club had already hit the post twice.

**OTHER RESULTS**

Celta Vigo defeated Getafe 1-0 to stay in eighth place and maintain a shot at qualifying for the Europa League next season. Getafe remained in danger of demotion, sitting three points from the relegation zone.

Huesca, meanwhile, moved out of the relegation zone with a 1-0 win over Athletic Bilbao, staying two points clear of danger.

# Gunners breach Chelsea fortress

**SMITH ROWE PONCES ON JORGINHO HOWLER TO HELP ARSENAL STUN THE HOSTS 1-0 AT STAMFORD BRIDGE**



**THE OPPORTUNIST:** Emile Smith Rowe (R) is delighted after capitalising a Chelsea error to help Arsenal score at Stamford Bridge, Wednesday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**London, May 13:** Emile Smith Rowe took advantage of a defensive howler to score the winner as Arsenal beat Chelsea 1-0 at Stamford Bridge to stop the hosts from moving third in the Premier League.

Italy midfielder Jorginho's attempted back pass Wednesday left out-of-position goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga scrambling to prevent an own goal, diving to palm the ball away just before it crossed the line.

But Arsenal striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang was on hand to collect the ball and square it for Smith Rowe, who slotted home just inside the post. It was Arsenal's third straight Premier League victory and a much-needed morale booster after its loss in the Europa League semifinals left the Gunners without a chance of qualifying for the Champions League.

Chelsea's loss means Thomas Tuchel's side remained fourth and gave renewed hope to chasing teams West Ham and Liverpool, who are

hoping to overtake the final Champions League spot.

Chelsea dominated possession on the second half and Christian Pulisic saw a second-half equaliser chalked off for offside after a video assistant referee review. Kurt Zouma and Olivier Giroud then struck the crossbar within mere seconds of each other in the 90th minute as Chelsea wasted a host of chances in a dominant but disjointed performance.

Tuchel made seven changes to keep his players fresh, with Saturday's FA Cup final against Leicester clearly in mind.

Kai Havertz missed a great chance to put Chelsea ahead when he dispossessed Pablo Mari just inside his own half, raced in on goal and came one-on-one with Bernd Leno — only to blaze his effort over the bar.

Shortly afterward, Arsenal were ahead after Jorginho didn't realise that Kepa had moved off to the side and gifted the visitors their only real scoring chance of the game.

# Powar back as Indian women's team coach

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 13:** Former spinner Ramesh Powar Thursday replaced WV Raman as the Indian women's cricket team's head coach, regaining the position more than two years after he was sacked owing to a bitter fallout with ODI captain Mithali Raj.

The 42-year-old was recommended by the Madan Lal-led Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) after interviewing eight candidates, including Raman.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announces the appointment of Mr Ramesh Powar as the Head Coach of Team India (Senior Women). The BCCI had advertised for the post and received over 35 applications," a BCCI statement read.

The others in fray were former India wicketkeeper Ajay Ratna and four female candidates including former chief selector Hemlata Kala. "Looking forward to take India women's cricket ahead. Thanks a lot CAC & BCCI for this opportunity," Powar tweeted after his appointment.

The CAC chose Powar for his clear vision for the team, said Lal. "He has been coaching for a while. His vision for the team impressed us the most. He has a clear cut plan for the team, what he wants to do with it to take it to the next level. He also has full clarity on all aspects of the game. Now he needs to deliver on that," Lal told



this agency.

It remains to be seen how Powar works alongside Mithali, who had accused him of bias after the Harmanpreet Kaur-led T20 team dropped the veteran batter for the all-important World Cup semi-final against England.

Mithali, in a letter to the BCCI after the event, had alleged that Powar "was out to destroy and humiliate" her. Powar had hit back asserting that Mithali "threw a lot of tantrums and created chaos in the team".

After being removed from his position in the women's team, Powar proved himself as a coach and earlier this year, led Mumbai to the Vijay Hazare Trophy after the domestic giants failed miserably in the T20 competition. He has also worked at the National Cricket Academy as a bowling coach.

Asked whether his acrimonious exit from the team and relationship with Mithali was discussed during Powar's interview, Lal said: "We did ask him about it and he said he wasn't at fault. He is okay working with all the players."

# PSG reach French Cup final

*Mbappe scores brace, but Parisians needed penalties to beat Montpellier*

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Paris, May 13:** Paris Saint-Germain led twice through goals by Kylian Mbappe but needed penalty kicks to beat Montpellier and reach the French Cup final.

Although PSG's league title defense is hanging by a thread, it remains on course for a record-extending 14th cup win. PSG plays the winner of Thursday's match between high-flying Monaco and fourth-tier Rumilly-Vallieres.

Mbappe put PSG ahead in the 10th minute Wednesday, but the visitors were punished for wasting chances when striker Gaetan Laborde equalised on the stroke of halftime with a superb shot into the top right corner.

Five minutes after the break, Mbappe was given far too much space on the left to cut inside for his 39th goal of another prolific season.

Poor defending cost PSG again, just like last Sunday against Rennes, and Montpellier sliced through midfield on a swift counterattack that concluded with lively striker Andy Delort turning in Laborde's cross at the back post.

Montpellier coach Michel Der Zakarian was angry his side was not awarded a penalty near the end for an apparent push in the back on a corner. "If that's PSG, then it's a penalty," he shouted. "It's scandalous."

Yet he was indebted to center half Vitorino Hilton for clearing Mauro Icardi's shot off the line in



**IN FINE TOUCH:** Kylian Mbappe about to score one of his goals as Montpellier players look on haplessly, Wednesday

the third minute of stoppage time, and to goalkeeper Dimitry Bertaud for a save seconds later.

The first five Montpellier penalty takers all scored, leaving Neymar at the ramshackle Stade des Grangettes, which only has one stand and where attendance normally costs five euros (USD 6).

But fans are still not allowed to attend amid coronavirus restrictions. Monaco last won the cup in 1991 and lost the 2010 final to PSG.

# REBIC TREBLE HELPS MILAN ROUT TORINO

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Milan, May 13:** Ante Rebic netted a 12-minute hat-trick in the second half to help AC Milan rout Torino 7-0 in Serie A and strengthen their chances to qualify for the Champions League.

Theo Hernandez also scored twice Wednesday as Milan remained level on points with second-place Atalanta, which beat Benevento 2-0.

The two are two points above Napoli and three above fifth-place Juventus, which won 3-1 at Sassuolo. There are two rounds remaining in Serie A and the top four qualify for next season's Champions League.

Milan was without star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic but Hernandez gave it the lead in the 19th minute and Samu Castillejo hit the woodwork before Franck Kessie converted a penalty in the 26th.

It took until early in the second half before Milan extended its advantage through Brahim Diaz and the floodgates then opened. Hernandez doubled his tally in the 62nd and Rebic netted his first five minutes later.

**BUFFON TO THE RESCUE**

World Cup-winning goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon announced Tuesday that he will leave Juventus at the end of the season. Until then, the 43-year-old Buffon is still rescuing his side.

Buffon saved an early penalty



**NIGHT TO REMEMBER:** Ante Rebic (No.12) is all smiles along with his teammates after scoring one of his three goals against Torino, Wednesday

from Domenico Berardi before goals from Adrien Rabiot, Cristiano Ronaldo and Paulo Dybala secured the win for Juventus.

Lazio also still has a chance of qualifying for the Champions League after Ciro Immobile scored in stoppage time to help it to a 1-0 win against already-relegated Parma. Lazio is five points behind fourth-place Napoli but has a match in hand.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## Olympic-bound race walker Irfan tests +ve

**NEW DELHI:** Olympic-bound race walker KT Irfan is among five elite track-and-field athletes who have tested positive for COVID-19 at the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) Centre of Excellence in Bangalore. The tests were conducted last Friday and those who returned positive have been kept under quarantine. A source said another male race walker also tested positive but his name could not be confirmed. "Four male players and one female player and four support staff tested positive for COVID-19," a SAI source stated. It is learnt that none of the female race walkers are among those who returned positive. The 31-year-old Irfan had qualified for the Tokyo Olympics way back in early 2019 after finishing fourth in the 20 km event of the Asian Race Walking Championships in Nomi, Japan. The SAI source said the whole hockey team training at the Centre other than one player has tested negative.

## India retain top spot in Test Team rankings

**DUBAI:** India remained the No.1 Test side after the annual update of the ICC team rankings, released Thursday. India head the table after gaining one rating point for an aggregate of 121, having accumulated 2914 points from 24 matches. They are closely followed by their World Test Championship final opponents, New Zealand (120). The Kiwis have garnered 2166 points from 18 Tests. England (109 rating) have climbed a place to third at the expense of Australia (108 rating), down to fourth now. Pakistan (94) remained at fifth spot, while West Indies (84) have jumped to sixth. South Africa (80) and Sri Lanka (78) have dropped a rung each to seventh and eighth positions respectively, followed by Bangladesh (46) and Zimbabwe (35).

# Djokovic cruises into quarters

AGENCIES

**Rome, May 13:** The fans were back at the Foro Italico, the sun was out, and Novak Djokovic's game was clicking. The top-ranked Serb seemed to enjoy every moment of his 6-2, 6-1 win over Spanish qualifier Alejandro Davidovich Fokina that put him in the Italian Open quarterfinals.

After spectators were banned from the opening rounds of the Rome tournament because of the coronavirus pandemic, capacity was at 25 per cent Thursday as part of the Italian government's re-opening plan.

"It was not good, it was great," Djokovic said. "I missed the crowd as much as anybody else — one of the biggest reasons why I keep on playing. So it was nice to see them back and hopefully I can stay in this tournament an extra day to experience the crowd more and more. They definitely gave me great sensations today on the court and I enjoyed it."

Djokovic often trains with Davidovich Fokina in Marbella,



**CRUISING HIS GAME:** Novak Djokovic plays a backhand during his match at Italian Open

Spain. Perhaps that familiarity helped Davidovich Fokina break the top-ranked Djokovic in the opening game.

But Djokovic broke right back and quickly took control. A five-time

champion in Rome — with his last title coming in September when the tournament was moved amid the pandemic — Djokovic is looking to boost his clay-court game before the French Open starts at the end of the month.

It's been a rough start to the clay season for Djokovic with a third-round loss to Daniel Evans at the Monte Carlo Masters followed by a defeat to Aslan Karatsev in the semifinals of his home tournament, the Belgrade Open.

Djokovic will next face either Monte Carlo champion Stefanos Tsitsipas or Madrid Open finalist Matteo Berrettini — both top 10 players. "It's going to be a battle," Djokovic said. "Both of these guys are in great form."

Also reaching the quarterfinals was 6-foot-11 (2.11-meter) American Reilly Opelka, who eliminated Karatsev, an Australian Open semi-

finalist, 7-6(8-6), 6-4.

Opelka served 18 aces and won 52 of 69 points on his serve to record his third consecutive straight-set win this week — after entering Rome on a six-match losing streak that included dealing with a bout of COVID-19.

In the women's tournament, top-ranked Ash Barty beat Veronika Kudermetova 6-3, 6-3 and will next face American teenager Coco Gauff, who defeated Aryna Sabalenka 7-5, 6-3.

Sabalenka, who overcame Barty in the Madrid Open final Saturday, committed more than twice as many unforced errors as Gauff — 36 to 17. It's the fourth time this season that the 17-year-old Gauff has reached the quarterfinals.

Jessica Pegula, another American, followed up her victory over Naomi Osaka by eliminating Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-2, 6-4.