



CANDID ADMISSION

Actor Gul Panag says her acting career enabled her to do things that are important in life

LEISURE P2



GLOBAL BIDDING FOR VAX

Odisha govt decides to conduct global bidding for procurement of Covid-19 vaccines May 28

DOWNTOWN P3



JUNTA FIGHTS REBELS

Myanmar's army battled local fighters in Mindat to quell a rebellion that has escalated to oppose the junta

INTERNATIONAL P10

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Sir, please allow us to develop a vaccine to boost immunity between the two doses of your vaccine

Expert help to boost healthcare

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: State Chief Secretary Suresh Mohapatra Saturday said that the Odisha government has formed an expert advisory committee to recommend ways and means to bolster the healthcare system and help in preparedness to tackle any future Covid waves.

Mohapatra said that the panel comprises reputed doctors and scientists who would recommend ways to perk up the state healthcare system to combat the emerging threats to people's health due the pandemic.

"We have decided to form a high-level committee which will have renowned doctors and researchers. The panel formed Friday is headed by Dr Srinath Reddy. It will advise the government on the matters related to anti-Covid vaccination and prepare the state for future waves of the pandemic, if any," Mohapatra said.

The Chief Secretary added, "This committee will advise the state government on various important issues. The panel comprises experts like Dr Devi Shetty, Dr Ramakant Panda and others. They will keep us abreast about the best global practices, ways to improve our present healthcare system and ways to protect children from the pandemic. We will implement their recommendations promptly."

The top bureaucrat also urged the people not to take Covid cases lightly. He said that compared to the first wave of the pandemic, more Covid patients are undergoing treatment at hospitals and more patients are admitted to ICUs due to the viral infection this time.



The panel comprises reputed doctors and scientists who would recommend the best ways to perk up the state healthcare system to combat the emerging threats to people's health

The advisory panel comprising Dr Devi Shetty, Dr Ramakant Panda and others will keep the govt abreast about the best global practices, ways to improve the healthcare system and protect children from the pandemic

Covid cases cross 6L, 21 more fatalities

BHUBANESWAR: The Covid-19 tally in Odisha crossed the six-lakh mark Saturday as 11,805 more people tested positive for the infection, while 21 fresh fatalities pushed the state's death toll to 2,294, a health department official said. With these new infections, the caseload of coronavirus disease reached 6,00,492 in this coastal state, he said. At least 6,611 fresh cases were reported from quarantine centres and 5,194 detected during contact tracing. Khurda district, which comprises the state capital Bhubaneswar, reported the highest number of new cases at 1,414, followed by Sundargarh (1,209) and Cuttack (1,197). **MORE P4**

"Many people are not aware about the seriousness of the issue. When Covid was at its peak during the first wave, around 8,000 people were receiving treatment daily. Presently, we are treating 15,000 patients every day and around 3,000 are in ICUs. I would expect that people comply with the Covid norms to remain safe," Mohapatra said.

Citing the relatively higher rate of infections this time compared to the first wave, Mohapatra urged people to comply with the Covid-19 safety protocols. "There are cases where an entire village got infected after one person from the area tested positive. If we can comply with the safety norms for 15 days, we can surely bring down the cases and control the disease. However, the condition in Odisha is better compared to many other states."

2,000 BODIES UNDER SAND

AGENCIES

Lucknow, May 16: It's a ghastly sight for people living near the banks of the Ganga river in Uttar Pradesh as more and more dead bodies are washing up on the ghats of the river.

So far, more than 2,000 bodies have been found along a stretch of 1,140 kms on the bank of Ganga, spread across several districts in Uttar Pradesh. In fact, the Ganga flows 1,140 kms in UP and then enters Bihar.

According to reports, 350 bodies were found buried near Mahadevi Ganga Ghat in Kannauj and the administration is allegedly covering up the bodies with soil on them. In Kanpur, 400 corpses were buried near Sherreshwar Ghat and a report in Dainik Bhaskar said the police covered them with soil.

Amid the pandemic, Unnao



has become one of the largest crematoriums on river banks with as many as 900 bodies found buried on the banks of Ganga. Bodies were buried near Shuklaganj and Buxar Ghats. As per the report, human organs were seen at the site and in a few instances, dogs were seen nibbling and lurking around the bodies.

About 20 bodies in Fatehpur and 50 in Prayagraj, Varanasi, Chandauli, Bhadohi and Mirzapur were found, while 280 carcasses were found in Ghazipur. The vernacular daily reported that in Puravanchal district, 110 bodies were found.

THREE KILLED AS CAR FALLS OFF BRIDGE

BALASORE: Three persons were killed and two others injured when a car in which they were travelling fell off a bridge on the National Highway 16 near Balasore in the early hours of Saturday, police said. Five persons were travelling in the vehicle from Baripada in neighbouring Mayurbhanj district to Bhubaneswar when at about 3 am in the morning the driver lost control of the car and it fell down from the bridge, the police said. Balasore industrial police reached the accident spot and sent the five persons to Balasore headquarter hospital where doctors declared three of them brought dead. The deceased persons are Rabindra Sahu, Santosh Panda both from Takatpur area in Baripada and Debasis Panda from Kuamara area.

GST COUNCIL MEETING MAY 28

NEW DELHI: Amid a growing chorus over the GST Council meeting not being convened for over seven months, the Union Finance Ministry Saturday announced that the next meeting of the panel that decides on taxes on goods and services will be held May 28. After over a dozen Central and state levies such as excise duty, service tax and VAT were subsumed in a nationwide Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017, the Council, headed by Union Finance Minister and including representatives of all states and union territories, was mandated to meet every quarter to deliberate on issues at hand. The GST Council last met October 5, 2020.

WEATHER	
	BHUB CTK
TEMP MAX	36.0°C 37.0°C
TEMP MIN	27.0°C 27.0°C
Humidity	87% 80%
Rainfall	19.2mm Nil
Forecast	Partly cloudy sky

Cairn sues AI to enforce \$1.2bn arbitration award

REUTERS

New Delhi, May 15: Cairn Energy has sued India's flagship carrier Air India to enforce a \$1.2 billion arbitration award that it won in a tax dispute against India, according to a US District Court filing reviewed by Reuters.

The move ratchets up pressure on India's government to pay the sum of \$1.2 billion plus interest and costs that the British firm Cairn was awarded by an arbitration tribunal in December. The body ruled India breached an investment treaty with Britain and said New Delhi was liable to pay.

Cairn filed the lawsuit Friday in the US District Court for the Southern District of New York, seeking to make Air India liable for the judgement that was awarded to Cairn. The lawsuit argued that the carrier as a state-owned company is "legally indistinct from the state itself."

"The nominal distinction between India and Air India is illusory and serves only to aid India in improperly shielding its assets from



The move ratchets up pressure on the Centre to pay the sum of \$1.2 billion plus interest and costs that the British firm Cairn was awarded by an arbitration tribunal in December

creditors like (Cairn)," the filing said. Air India and the Indian government did not immediately respond to requests seeking comment.

In February, Cairn filed a separate case in a US court to recognise and confirm the arbitration award, including payments due since 2014 and interest compounded semi-annually.

YATRA SANS DEVOTEES



The Chandan Yatra of Srimandir deities commences at Narendra pond in Puri on the occasion of Akshaya Trutiya, Saturday. The summer ritual is being organised without the devotees in accordance with the Covid-19 protocol

Doorstep Covid testing for 60+ in City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: Senior citizens in Bhubaneswar can now avail Covid-19 testing facility at their doorstep from Monday by just making a call to 1929, commissioner of Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Sanjay Singh said here Saturday.

He said the BMC will make all arrangements to collect the samples from the doorstep of citizens above the age of 60 years, especially those who are staying alone and are unable to visit Covid testing centres, Singh said.

Similarly, the municipal corporation is also taking steps to facilitate the anti-Covid vaccination of such senior citizens. The BMC will ensure to and fro journey of senior citizens to the vaccination centre, he stated.

Steps are being taken to enhance the number of vaccination centre in the city, he said, adding, the ongoing drive-in vaccination will resume from Monday for which slot booking will be opened soon.



As the number of Covid cases go on increasing in the capital city, the BMC has prepared an action plan to increase the number of beds in various Covid hospitals, the commissioner said.

In fact, BMC signed an agreement with a number of hotels to use their rooms for housing Covid patients. Singh appealed people to take the help of call centre (No. 1929) which is functioning 24x7 to serve people with any Covid-related complicity. He also thanked all for their cooperation in implementing the measures to contain the spread of coronavirus in the city.

Perseverance, hope and a fire god: A history of Mars rovers

CHINA'S TIANWEN-1 PROBE SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHED LAST JULY AND ENTERED MARS' ORBIT IN FEBRUARY - A MAJOR MILESTONE FOR BEIJING'S AMBITIOUS SPACE PROGRAMME

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Beijing, May 15: China's probe to Mars touched down on the Red Planet Saturday to deploy its Zhurong rover, during a busy time for Martian exploration. China, the US and hitherto space minnows the UAE have sent probes to the treacherous planet, where failure to land safely is more frequent than success.

China's Tianwen-1 probe successfully launched last July and entered Mars' orbit in February - a major milestone for Beijing's ambitious space programme. The six-wheeled, solar-powered Zhurong - named after the god of fire in ancient Chinese mythology - is on a mission to collect rocks and data, and scan the surface.

Here is a look at how China's efforts to reach the red planet com-



pare with those of other countries throughout history. NASA's Perseverance earlier this year became the fifth rover to successfully land on Mars since 1997, launching shortly after China's Tianwen-1. It has a remit to hunt for signs of ancient microbial life on the red planet and in April flew

a helicopter-drone on another world for the first time.

About the size of a small SUV, it weighs a metric ton and has 19 cameras and two microphones - which scientists hope will be the first to record sound on Mars. Scientists hope the rover, equipped with its own oxygen-producing fa-

cilities, can help pave the way for future manned missions.

The Arab world's first mission to another planet successfully arrived in Mars' orbit in February, after it was launched by the United Arab Emirates last July. The spacecraft, which will remain high above the surface in orbit, is designed to further study Mars' atmosphere and how its climate has changed over time. The European Space Agency and Russian space agency's ExoMars joint mission got off to a rocky start when its first phase, the Schiaparelli lander, spun out of control and crashed on Mars' surface in October 2016.

Named after a 19th-century Italian astronomer, the failed mission will pave the way for the second part of the ExoMars programme - the Rosalind Franklin

rover, set to launch in 2022. NASA's flagship Curiosity rover - of which Perseverance is an updated version - remains active on Mars' surface after landing in 2012 in a spectacle watched by millions.

Charged with finding out whether Mars could have once supported life, the sophisticated car-sized rover has built on the work of its NASA predecessors and discovered further evidence of water previously on the planet's surface. It is now studying Mars' geology and the history of its environment. To do this, it is climbing a five-kilometre-tall mountain in an ancient lakebed.

NASA's Opportunity, the longest-running Mars rover, reached the surface of the Red Planet in 2004, staying operational until 2018 when it was hit by a dust storm. It and its twin rover, Spirit, confirmed that

there was once liquid water on Mars' arid surface. After several failed Mars flyby and orbiter attempts between 1960 and 1971, two identical Soviet Union spacecraft finally reached the Red Planet in November and December 1971 - only to both get swept up in a huge dust storm. This occurred at the height of the Space Race, when the US and Soviet Union were competing to demonstrate superior spaceflight ability amid Cold War hostilities.

The earlier spacecraft, Mars 2, crashed upon landing after orbiting successfully for 18 hours, but Mars 3 landed successfully and operated for 20 seconds on the surface before it fell over. Both spacecraft sent images, temperature readings and information about Mars' gravity and magnetic fields back to the Soviet Union.

leisure



PERRY REGRETS BEING OBSESSED WITH BOYS IN YOUNGER DAYS

Pop star Katy Perry, who revisits her teenage years in her new *Electric* video, says she would have liked her early life to have been less about the opposite sex. "I was pretty boy crazy. I think I was always searching for real love and true love," Perry said.

MINDY KALING LEARNT A LOT FROM PREGNANCY

Actress Mindy Kaling has talked about hiding her pregnancy during the Covid-19 pandemic, saying although she learned a lot from the experience. "I don't know if I recommend everyone having a secret pregnancy during a worldwide pandemic, but I will say I learnt a lot from it." Kaling said.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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accuracy • reliability • trust
FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES
A tough, action-packed day ahead! There may be difference of opinions with friends over trivial matters, but you will thrive on it. But all pending work will be completed, much to your relief. It's a promising and optimistic day, says Ganesha!

TAURUS
Today, you may have something at the back of your mind that will grip you with its complexity, says Ganesha. Speak freely as your words are capable of making a great impact on others. You may not be willing to confront unpleasant situations today. Don't worry, the stars seem in your favour, predicts Ganesha.

GEMINI
You are extremely competitive. And it doesn't matter how far behind the competition is. So today, you will continue your usual quest for getting better. You won't have it any other way as you despise mediocrity.

CANCER
Your business acquaintances will come forward in the manner that may seem nothing short of some divine intervention. This means that they will virtually save your neck from the guillotine, predicts Ganesha. You will grow wiser in your spending ways, as you will know what to buy and what not to buy.

LEO
Che Guevara may not hold the beacon any more, and the best of the Beatles are long gone. But your desire to revolutionise the world is as strong as ever, sees Ganesha. The best ideas are the ones that come suddenly and subconsciously.

VIRGO
Ganesha says don't let setbacks cow you down today as you will emerge stronger from each one of them. It will be your logic and reasoning abilities that will aid you in gaining the perfection in completing your work. You may look forward to spending the evening with your beloved or a special friend.

LIBRA
Gear up to play the peace maker today! Your ability to handle a 'Brady Bunch' hasn't gone unnoticed. So expect to be put in charge of handling disputes among your subordinates at work today, hints Ganesha. Research work may slow to a crawl today, but the offshoot is that it's an auspicious day to enter into new contracts.

SCORPIO
Work pressure will keep on mounting today, predicts Ganesha. But you shall handle it with great style, all thanks to your patience. But keep a watch on the radar and learn how to spot stress early and then act on it as quickly as you can.

SAGITTARIUS
Look before you leap, says Ganesha. Cupid has strung his bow and aimed an arrow at you. Love's labour will easily aid you to woo a young, tender heart. But don't be swept away by easy prospects and guard your reputation at all costs.

CAPRICORN
You will starve for some free time, but will find it difficult to steal even a minute from your busy schedule, even if it is for unwinding your overworked soul, says Ganesha. In times like these, one can hardly think straight, let alone be innovative. You will, however, work your way out by prioritising matters.

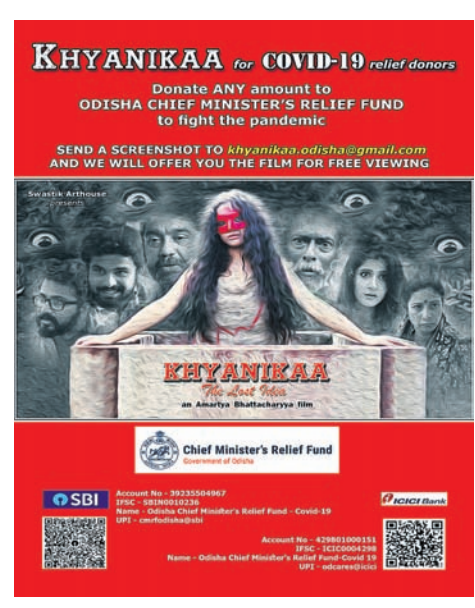
AQUARIUS
Your ideas are bang on target today! Everything you touch turns into gold. You have it in you to make it big, and the time is now. When the going gets tough, the tough get going — you've heard this before, now it's time for some action, says Ganesha.

PISCES
Stabbing with a pen is so much more satisfying than slicing with a sword. With these lofty ideals in mind, you will launch an assault upon your unsuspecting prey with your lethal presentation skills, eliciting cries of sheer ecstasy and tremendous applause. Don't get carried away though, says Ganesha.

Free Khyanikaa show for CMRF donors

WHILE PEOPLE FIND SEVERAL WAYS TO HELP THE NEEDY DURING SUCH TORRID TIMES, AS FILMMAKERS, ALL WE HAVE IS OUR FILM TO CASH IN, SAYS DIRECTOR AMARTYA BHATTACHARYYA

POST NEWS NETWORK
Bhubaneswar: The makers of award winning Odia film *Khyanikaa - The Lost Idea* have launched 'Khyanikaa for COVID-19 relief donors' campaign to encourage volunteers to help fight the pandemic. One can donate any amount to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) of Odisha and mail a screenshot of the evidence to khyanikaa.odisha@gmail.com. In return, they will get to see the movie



free of cost. Written and directed by Amartya Bhattacharyya and produced by Swastik Choudhury, the film stars Amrita Choudhury, Susant Misra, Choudhury Bikash Das, Bhaswati Basu and Anu Choudhury among others.
"People working in the health sector are helping the needy directly while others are finding different ways to chip in. But as filmmakers, all we have is our film. I approached my producer Swastik and asked if we can donate the film for the cause. I'm glad that he was more than happy to accept my proposal. I urge everyone to come forward and donate as per their capacity," said Amartya.
Swastik said that people across the spectrum are doing their bit to support the Covid victims.
"As artistes the best we could do is to offer our art. And as they say, 'Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable'. Thanks to Amartya for initiating this idea of offering *Khyanikaa* to the generous viewers. We will be really happy if people come forward and donate, no matter the amount, to the CMRF and watch the movie in return," he added.

Acting enabled Gul to do other things in life

New Delhi: Gul Panag has been in the Hindi film industry for almost 18 years now, and she says her acting career enabled her to do other things that are important to her.

Gul began her career with the 2003 film *Dhoop*. Since then, she has worked in films like *Jurm*, *Dor*, *Manorama Six Feet Under* and *Ab Tak Chhappan 2*, besides the TV series *Kashmeer*. She was last seen in the 2019 film *Bypass Road*.
"I have always done films that spoke to me and I was able to leverage my film career to do many other things. So, I made my film career an enabler of doing other things such as being a producer, entrepreneur, public speaker, motivational speaker," Gul said.
"I have to say clearly that while acting remains something I am very deeply grateful to, it is one of the things I do in my life and because it is one of the things I do in life it is the enabler of everything else I do, and it's important for me," she added.



'My content has found resonance with the masses'

New Delhi: YouTube star and digital creator CarryMinati, whose real name is Ajey Nagar, attributes garnering 30 million subscribers to his fans, saying the figures indicate his content is loved by most viewers despite criticism.
"These increasing numbers are indicative that despite the criticism, my content has found resonance with the majority of the masses. I hope I can continue to entertain people with the same zest and zeal while also creating an impact socially," he said.

He looks back at his journey with pride: "This is such an emotional and overwhelming moment for me. My journey from a humble 50 views for my first video to 30-40 million per video now, it's been an eventful journey with a fair share of hard work and struggles."
The 21-yr-old digital creator will be seen facing the camera in the Amitabh Bachchan-Ajay Devgn starrer thriller *Mayday*. Earlier this year, he made his musical foray into film writing and singing the song *Yalgaar* in the film *The Big Bull*.
He was also listed in Time Magazine's 'Top 10 Next Generation Leaders Of 2019'.



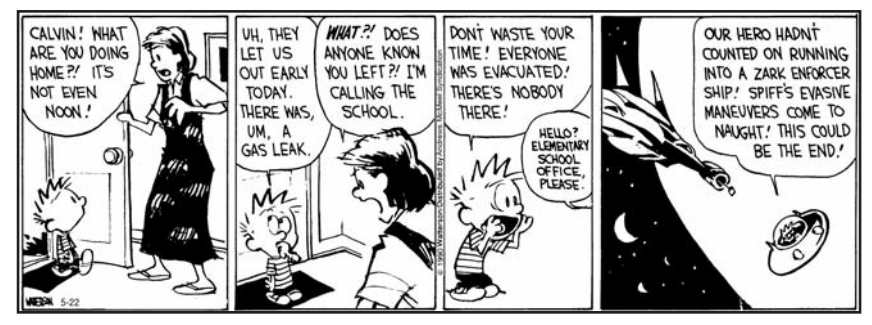
Krystle spreads eco-friendly optimism

Mumbai: Actress Krystle D'souza spread a bit of environment-friendly optimism amidst all the Covid gloom in her new Instagram post Saturday.
"If there is a future it will be green," she wrote with a green heart emoji, alongside an image that shows her amidst greenery, in a gown that she stylishly wears over denim shorts.
The actress was recently seen in the recreated version of the song *Ek Bewafaa* by Bharat Goel. The number was originally sung by Sonu Nigam in the 2005 Akshay Kumar-Kareena Kapoor film *Bewafaa*. In the music video of the recreated song, she features with Siddharthh Gupta and Akshay Kharodia.

PEANUTS



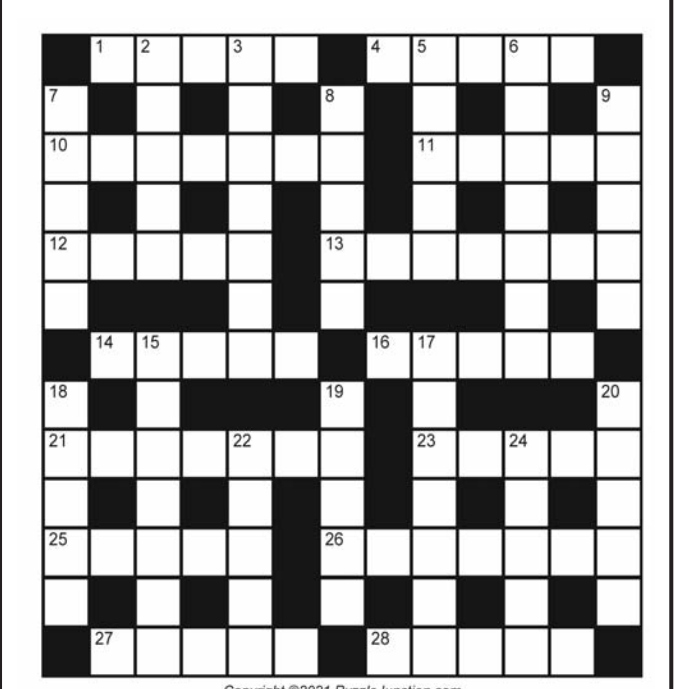
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



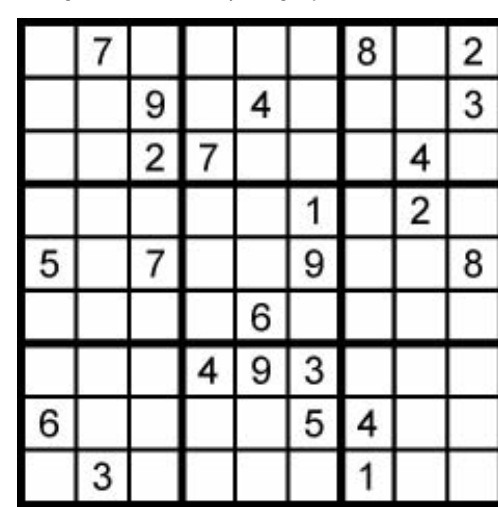
FUN post CROSSWORD



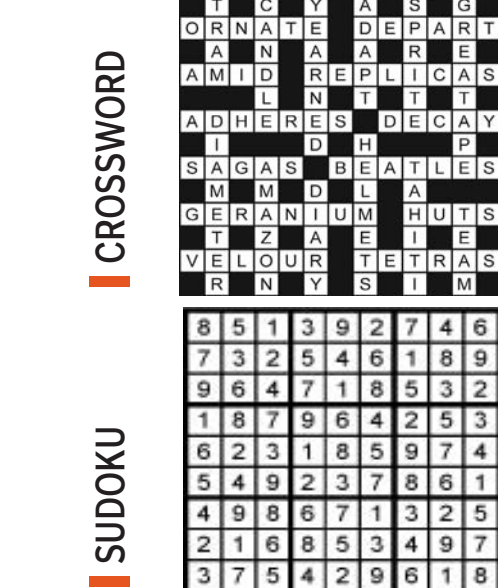
- Across
1 Take a powder
4 Garbage
10 Height
11 Court mallet
12 Bonus
13 Séance holders
14 Kind of limit or skater
16 Hesitation
21 My car for yours? (5-2)
23 Forbidden
25 Hot coal
26 Cork's palce
27 Marble material
28 Line to the audience
7 Theatre worker
8 ___ fatale
9 Bored
15 Quagmire (4,3)
17 Moose toppers
18 Catchall category
19 Symbol of slowness
20 Dutch cheese
22 White heron
24 Stigmatise

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



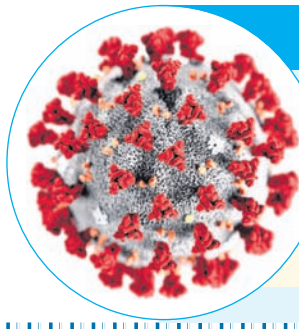
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



SOWING SEASON

A farmer performs puja on his farmland at Kanasa in Puri before sowing paddy seeds on the occasion of Akshaya Trutiya, Saturday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	16,26,14,477	14,05,21,291	33,73,561
India	2,43,72,907	2,04,32,898	2,66,207
Odisha	6,00,492	5,02,455	2,294

Global bidding for nCoV jabs May 28

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: The state government Saturday decided to conduct the global bidding for procurement of Covid-19 vaccines May 28 to ensure timely supply of the jabs to the state.

Chief Secretary Suresh Mahapatra Saturday said that the pre-bidding consultation on the same has been planned for May 19. The government plans to procure around 3.80 crore vaccine doses through the tender process, he added.

"The state Cabinet had earlier decided to issue global tender for procurement of vaccines from across the world. We have done the work and the same has been uploaded on the website of Odisha State Medical Corporation Limited (OSMCL). Odisha is the first Indian state to issue a global tender on the issue in a very short period of time. We



Tender has been floated to procure a total of 3.80 crore vaccines and the govt will have a pre-bidding consultation May 19 and 28

Indian and foreign manufacturers of Covid vaccines could take part in the tender

want to provide vaccination to the people as early as possible," he said.

He also added, "We have issued the tender to procure a total of 3.80 crore vaccines and have asked for the same within four months. We have a pre-bidding consultation May 19 and 28. Indian and foreign manufacturers of Covid vaccines could take part in the tender. We can start procuring the vaccines in good numbers as soon as the tender is submitted."

Mahapatra said that Covid cases

in the state have been stagnant and the positivity rate in many regions of the state is either declining or stagnant.

"The positivity rate is either stagnant or decreasing in districts like Bhadrak, Bolangir, Jharsuguda, Nabarangpur, Nuapada, Sambalpur, Sundargarh. This has given us some relief. We can see better results of the lockdown in coming days. The infections in the state have been between 10,000-12,000 everyday," he said.

CHARIOT WORK BEGINS



Srimandir priests consecrate three logs on the occasion of Akshaya Trutiya for construction of chariots ahead of this year's Rath Yatra in Puri, Saturday OP PHOTO

Covid positivity rate of Khurda highest in state

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: Khurda has recorded the coastal state's highest test positivity rate at 37.5 per cent during last week (May 8 to 14), as per a list published by Union Health Ministry.

At least 20 out of the 30 districts of the state recorded a test positivity rate above 20 per cent in last week. While Khurda was on top position in the list, Kalahandi was in second position with 34.9 per cent, followed by Angul (34.3%), Boudh (29.9%), Balasore (29%), Bargarh & Bhadrak (28.9% each), Sundargarh (28.2%), Cuttack (27.6%), Nuapada (27.3%) and Puri (26.1%).

Similarly, Dhenkanal district witnessed a positivity rate of 24.9 per cent while it was 24.2 per cent in Nabarangpur, 24 per cent in Bolangir, 23.8 per cent in Sonepur, 23.2 per cent in Jajpur, 22.1 per cent in Jagatsinghpur, 21.6 per cent in Keonjhar and 20.4 per cent in Jharsuguda district, the data shared by Ministry said.

Apart from the above list, eight



The Union Health Ministry has stated that 504 districts in the country have recorded positivity rates above 10% during the last week

other districts of Odisha recorded test positivity rates beyond 10 per cent. These districts are—Nayagarh (18.8%), Mayurbhanj (16.6%), Deogarh (16.4%), Rayagada (16.1%), Gajapati (15.1%), Ganjam (14.3%), Koraput (12.4%) and Kendrapara (10.5%).

The Health Ministry, in its list, stated that 504 districts in the country have recorded positivity rates above 10 per cent during the week, of which, 28 are from Odisha.

Include all eligible farmers under PM Kisan: Oppn

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: A day after the Centre and the state disbursed fresh instalment of assistance to farmers, Opposition BJP and Congress Saturday targeted the state government over non-inclusion of all eligible farmers under PM Kisan scheme.

State BJP framers' wing president Pradip Purohit alleged that lakhs of small and marginal farmers of Odisha are being deprived of the advantages of PM Kisan scheme as the state government is not providing the beneficiaries' list to the Centre.

"The Union government has enough money to provide assistance to all eligible farmers of



Odisha under the scheme. However, the state government is not providing

The Union government has enough money to provide assistance to all eligible farmers of Odisha under the scheme. However, the state government is not providing the list of eligible farmers to the Centre

PRADIP PUROHIT | BJP LEADER

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has sanctioned an assistance of ₹920 crore to 42 lakh farmers. The farmers are happy with the disbursement of the assistance

AMAR SATPATHY | BJD LEADER

the list of eligible farmers to the Centre. As a result, the poor farmers are deprived of the annual assistance of ₹6,000 from the Centre," he said.

Even, the state government doesn't know how many sharecroppers and landless farmers are in Odisha, Purohit added.

Congress leader Santosh Singh Saluja too urged the state government to provide the list of all left out farmers to the Centre for their inclusion under the PM

Kisan scheme. The state government had earlier claimed that a total of 51 lakh beneficiaries have been covered under the Kalia scheme and now the number has come down to 42 lakh, Saluja claimed.

"The state government should provide the list of all eligible farmers to the Centre. And at the same time, the Centre should also include all kinds of farmers including sharecroppers and landless agricultural labourers under its scheme. The issue is related to farmers' interest. So, it should not be politicised," said the Congress leader.

In his reaction, BJD legislator Amar Satpathy said, "In a mark of respect to the farmers, we have been organising 'Krushak Diwas' since 2000. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has sanctioned an assistance of ₹920 crore to 42 lakh farmers. The farmers are happy with the disbursement of the assistance."

Notably, the Centre and the state government Friday released financial assistance to the farmers under PM Kisan and Kalia schemes respectively.

TWO ARRESTED FOR KILLING CARPENTER OVER BIZ RIVALRY

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: The Commissionerate Police Saturday arrested two persons on charges of killing a carpenter whose mutilated body was found in Saradeipur area under Dhauli police limits.

The accused were identified as Anup Baruha and Ajay Kumar Maharana, who is the main conspirator while prime accused Muna is still on the run. Police Saturday claimed that the deceased Jagannath Maharana was working as an assistant to accused Ajay's father in Surat for last seven years. However, the duo returned to Odisha during lockdown last year. Jagannath and Ajay's father had decided to start carpentry work in partnership.

However, they developed differences over payment of money. Later, Jagannath restarted carpentry work in Badagada area of the city. Ajay harboured a grudge against Jagannath and hatched a plan to kill the latter. He hired mason Muna and his aide Anup to eliminate Jagannath.

BMC starts sanitisation drive in high-caseload areas

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), Saturday, began a massive sanitisation drive deploying three dedicated vehicles in each of its administrative zones.

As per sources, the three dedicated vehicles will focus on areas that are reporting higher caseload and major public places like Unit I and Unit IV along with areas near hospitals and crematoriums. The civic body is presently engaging nine vehicles for sanitisation activities which are managed by three staffers and sanitation ex-

pects of the BMC under the respective Zonal Deputy Commissioners (ZDCs).

"Zones have been divided for sanitisation during first and second half of the day. The vehicles are then deployed accordingly to sanitise areas which experience large foot-fall every day. Today, under the South East Zone, Satya Nagar crematorium and many places in Old Town were sanitised," a BMC official said.

"With areas like Patia, Rasulgarh and Damana reporting high positive cases, the North Zone of the BMC carried out disinfection drive in these areas on priority basis.



Meanwhile, in the South West Zone, the sanitisation work was carried out in various locations of Nayapalli, Surya Nagar, IRC Village, Jagamara

and Dumduma," the official added. According to the information provided by the BMC, the chemical used for sanitising the area is

1 per cent solution of sodium hypochlorite. Sodium hypochlorite, commonly known as bleach, is most frequently used as a disinfecting agent. It is a broad-spectrum disinfectant that is effective for the disinfection of viruses, bacteria, fungi and mycobacterium.

It can be mentioned here that the move was taken in a bid to lessen the burden on the vehicles of the Odisha Fire Service (OFS).

Earlier, during the first wave of Covid-19 between September and November, OFS vehicles were used during the pandemic for sanitisation activities and the services continue even now.

RENOVATED SWARGADWAR THROWN OPEN TO PUBLIC

PNN/AGENCIES

Puri, May 15: The renovated Swargadwar crematorium ground in the Holy city here was inaugurated by district Collector Samarth Verma, Saturday.

According to sources, the Swargadwar crematorium has been made of precast concrete. Twenty-eight cremations can be carried out simultaneously at the revamped crematorium, an official said.

Notably, the state government has spent around ₹6.3 crore for the renovation and beautification of Swargadwar and its adjoining

areas. The district administration hopes that people coming here from far-off places for cremation of their near and dear ones would not take any bitter experience with them while returning back to their homes.

The government had chalked out plans to renovate the Swargadwar in lines with the Vaikuntha Mahaprasthanam crematorium in Telangana. The ambitious renovation plan also includes construction of a road over bridge (ROB) from Swargadwar side to seashore in order to facilitate hassle-free movement of people.

SUMMER RITUAL



The Chandan Yatra of Lord Lingaraj being organised at Bindusagar Lake in Bhubaneswar with strict adherence to the Covid-19 norms, Saturday OP PHOTO

Infected moms can breastfeed: Govt

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: With the Covid-19 cases showing no signs of abating, the state government has issued an advisory for safety of children, pregnant women and mothers. The government, in its advisory, said that lactating mothers can continue breastfeeding, with precautions, even if they are found positive for Covid-19.

The Women & Child Development and Mission Shakti department has issued the advisory and directed the district Collectors to ensure strict adherence to it for smooth implementation of various Anganwadi services under ICDS programmes catering to the needs of children, pregnant and lactating women, adolescents in the state.

Department secretary Anu Garg has also reviewed the current Covid situation and measures taken through a virtual meeting with



district social welfare officers (DSWOs) and functionaries of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).

"Since many children are getting affected by the virus during the second wave, children must always wear masks when they move out of their homes. Parents must ensure that children above two years must always mandatorily wear face masks when they step out of their houses," the government advisory said.

A majority of children with Covid-19 infection may be asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic. In case of cold, cough, fever, diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pain, loss of smell/taste, poor feeding

FOCUS WOMEN & CHILDCARE

The Collectors were asked for counselling of pregnant and nursing women and children to avail optimal nutrition for improved immunity

The food ration meant for pregnant women must not be shared by other family members

Pregnant women should consume nutritious food, take adequate rest and follow all Covid protocols

in infants, and other medically indicated conditions, children, pregnant & nursing women must go for testing, treatment, isolation, and medical advice. Children with underlying co-

morbid condition may also be managed at home, if they have features of mild disease and there is easy access to health facility in case of any deterioration, it said.

The Collectors were asked for counselling of pregnant and nursing women and children to avail optimal nutrition for improved immunity.

The food ration meant for pregnant women must not be shared by other family members. Pregnant women should consume nutritious food, take adequate rest and follow all Covid protocols.

In case a nursing mother or the child (0-2 years) is found positive, the government has advised to continue the breastfeeding as breast milk strengthens the immune system by directly transferring antibodies from the mother.

However, appropriate precautions are to be followed during breastfeeding and handling of the child, it said.

21 deaths take state toll to 2,294

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, May 15: The Covid-19 tally in Odisha crossed the 6-lakh mark Saturday as 11,805 more people tested positive for the infection, while 21 fresh fatalities pushed the state's death toll to 2,294, a Health and Family Welfare department official said.

With these new infections, the caseload of coronavirus disease reached 6,00,492 in the coastal state, he said.

At least 6,611 fresh cases were reported from quarantine centres and 5,194 detected during contact tracing.

Khurda district, which comprises the state capital Bhubaneswar, reported the highest number of new cases at 1,414, followed by Sundargarh (1,209) and Cuttack (1197).

Taking to Twitter, the Health and Family Welfare department

HIGHLIGHTS



THE STATE HAS CONDUCTED OVER 1.08 CRORE SAMPLE TESTS FOR COVID-19 THUS FAR, INCLUDING 57,002 FRIDAY

FOUR NEW FATALITIES WERE RECORDED IN KHURDA, THREE IN ANGUL, TWO EACH IN KALAHANDI, KENDRAPARA, PURI, RAYAGADA AND SUNDARGARH AND ONE EACH IN BOUDH, GAJAPATI, KORAPUT AND NUAPADA

THE STATE'S DAILY TPR HAS BEEN OVER 20 PER CENT FOR THE LAST NINE DAYS

said, "Regret to inform the demise of twenty-one Covid positive patients while under treatment in hospitals."

Four new fatalities were recorded in Khurda, three in Angul, two each in Kalahandi, Kendrapara, Puri, Rayagada and Sundargarh and one

each in Boudh, Gajapati, Koraput and Nuapada, the official said.

Fifty-three other Covid patients have also died due to comorbidities.

Odisha now has 1,06,471 active cases, and 4,91,674 patients have so far recovered from the disease. The state has conducted over

1.08 crore sample tests for Covid-19 thus far, including 57,002 Friday, and the positivity rate stands at 5.55 per cent.

However, the state's daily test positivity rate (TPR) has been over 20 per cent for the last nine days, the official added.

RESTRICTIONS IN FORCE



The Bhubaneswar-Puri bypass looks empty, Saturday, as weekend shutdown was imposed on the urban areas of state to check the second wave of Covid-19

e-Pass system for IT, ITes, pvt firms

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: The Commissionerate Police Saturday launched a system through which the IT, ITes and private firms will self generate e-passes for unhindered movement of their staff during the lockdown and weekend shutdowns in the twin city.

Speaking on the issue, Commissioner of police Saumendra Priyadarshi said that the state government has made no provisions for the issuance of passes to employees engaged in the sectors including the IT and ITes which are exempted to function during the statewide lockdown and shutdown. The workers in such sectors have been allowed to work in their offices under some restrictions.

The companies were recently instructed to deposit the list of

workers at the offices of respective DCPs. They were also asked to issue authorization letters to the staff for hassle free movement to their offices and residents.

So, the Commissionerate Police started a system to simplify the process for the IT and ITes firms. The authorities of the IT and ITes companies can generate e-passes by visiting the website: <https://cp.erp.quocent.com/>.

A copy of the e-pass generated through the system will reach at the DCP's office. Sources also revealed that in case the firms fail to generate the e-passes through site due to some technical glitches, the staff can show the manual authorization letter of the firm at the police check points. Commissionerate police launched the system with the technical help of Quocent private limited.

Cops in soup for brutality; NHRC intervention sought

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 15: A rights activist Saturday filed a plea before the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) seeking its intervention into an alleged police torture of a traffic violator in Keonjhar in April. The activist demanded ₹5 lakh compensation to the victim's family and direction to the police for independent enquiry into the issue.

The family members of a youth, who was mercilessly beaten by some cops in Keonjhar, have sought justice from Director General of Police.

A case has also been registered against the accused police officials in this regard on the basis of the complaint lodged by the victim's mother Kanak Patra.

According to sources, the vic-



tim identified as Jashobanta Patra has been working as an attendant in computer section of the Dharani Dhara College in Keonjhar. SI Biswajit Behera, who was in charge of traffic control near College square, intercepted Patra while on his way to college along with food parcel from a nearby hotel 28 April.

Behera snatched away the motorcycle keys of Patra and asked him to pay fine for not wearing helmet. Sources claimed that Patra

accosted Behera for taking away his vehicle keys.

The victim's mother alleged that the accused cop forcefully took him to the reserve line and beat him mercilessly with the help of four other cops. The victim reportedly lost consciousness due to the inhuman torture by Behera and other cops.

Patra called his mother after he gained sense few hours later. His mother spotted wound marks on the body of her son and took her to hospital for treatment.

When she was going to police station along with her son to register the complaint 9 May, Behera again stopped them midway and threatened of dire consequences.

An officer of Keonjhar town police station looking into the case said that an investigation is on the matter.

No vax in 8 districts today

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: The state Health department Saturday said that there would be no vaccination sessions in eight districts of Odisha Sunday owing to shortage of Covishield doses.

The districts where vaccination sessions cannot be conducted are: Bargarh, Dhenkanal, Ganjam, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Koraput, Malkangiri and Rayagada. The government, however, said that it has received a total of 1,88,010 doses of Covishield from the Centre Saturday evening.

The Health department vaccinated a total of 33,845 persons Saturday taking the total number of people inoculated in the state to 65,67,429 till now. Vaccination was undertaken at 210 active sites across the state out of which 47 sites were of Covaxin alone. The highest vaccination coverage Saturday was for the second dose of persons above 45 years as 8,234 persons got the jabs while altogether 6,921 persons in the same age group received their maiden dose of the vaccine in the day.

Hotel-hosp tie-up to tackle bed crunch in Capital city

Interested hotel owners can approach the private hospitals of their choice for the tie-up arrangement and intimate BMC of the same

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: Amidst rising number of critical Covid patients and requirement of beds for them at different hospitals, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Saturday decided to rope in city hotels that will cater to patients having mild infections.

BMC Commissioner Sanjay Kumar Singh chaired a virtual meeting with the owners of major hotels, representatives of the hotel and restaurant association and private hospital authorities to discuss the plan in details. Ideas were exchanged on hospital-hotel tie-up arrangement for isolation beds in hotel rooms having oxygen facility.

"We have discussed the idea of creation of isolation beds with



oxygen facility for treatment of mild Covid positive cases (those can be managed on normal oxygen mask or nasal cannula) at different hotels. In case a patient needs special medical attention which cannot be managed at the hotel facility, they can be transferred to a proper hospital. Interested hotel owners can approach the private hospitals of their choice for the tie-up arrangement and intimate BMC of the same," Singh said.

He also assured that the civic

body will play the role of a facilitator for the hospital-hotel tie-up. Meanwhile, all hotel association members appreciated the idea and requested the Commissioner for facilitating the tie-up where their logistics including rooms, beds, house-keeping, food and sanitation can be leveraged with expert medical services of the tied-up hospitals.

Similarly, while showing their interest for such tie-up arrangements, corporate hospital facilities like Apollo hospitals informed that they have already initiated the idea of joining hands with hotels in other states which can be replicated here.

However, this will be a purely paid facility, and patients will have to pay as per their choice of properties selected and as what would be fixed by the tie-up agreement.

Xavier Univ now XIM University



BHUBANESWAR: The Xavier University, Odisha (Amendment) Bill 2021 was passed in the Assembly March 13, 2021 renaming Xavier University as XIM University. The university here Friday hosted an online launching ceremony to commemorate this remarkable event. "This Amendment has now received the consent of the Governor of Odisha and a Gazette notification has been published to this effect. With this, Xavier University has been renamed as XIM University. We are deeply thankful to the Hon'ble Governor of Odisha, Chief Minister of Odisha, MLAs, the Odisha government, the people of Odisha and all stakeholders who played an instrumental role in this transformation," said a release issued by the institution.

Pradhan supports state's demand for 19 more O2 plants

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: Supporting the State government's demand, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan sought personal intervention of his Cabinet colleague and Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan for setting up of 19 Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) medical oxygen plants in Odisha.

The demand for 19 new medical oxygen plants of PSA technology is in addition to the 21 PSA plants being set up across the state by Centre.

In a letter to the Health Minister, Pradhan said, "In view of the widespread impact of Covid-19 second wave in Odisha, more districts need to be covered and supported further. In this context, I request your personal intervention in setting up of additional 19 PSA medical oxygen plants in 15 districts as proposed by the state Government."

He proposed to set up two units each in Balasore, Ganjam, Bolangir and Mayurbhanj districts while one plant each in Cuttack, Deogarh, Dhenkanal, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Khurda, Koraput, Puri, Rayagada, Sambalpur, and Sonepur.

The setting up of these plants on a war-footing mode will go a long way in supporting the Covid-19 treatment in the state, he said.

The Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) has taken up the responsibility to set up seven such plants in the

The Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) has taken up the responsibility to set up 7 such plants in the state

7 other PSA plants are in the process of installation by the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas. Similarly, the Central government will establish 7 other plants in the state

The PM had earlier declared setting up of 551 dedicated PSA medical oxygen plants in public health facilities across the country from PM Cares Fund

The setting up of these plants on a war-footing mode will go a long way in supporting the Covid-19 treatment in the state

state while seven others are in the process of installation by the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas. Similarly, the Central government will establish seven other plants in the state, Pradhan mentioned in his letter.

The Minister also expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the Ministry of Health for extending all support to Odisha in Covid-19 management and preparedness.

Notably, the Prime Minister had earlier declared setting up of 551 dedicated PSA medical oxygen plants in public health facilities across the country from PM Cares Fund.

210 cops in twin city Covid +ve

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: As many as 210 police personnel working under Commissionerate Police have been infected with the novel coronavirus. Police Commissioner Saumendra Priyadarshi Saturday revealed the spread of virus among the personnel in the twin city.

He also informed the media that 14 officers were infected with the highly infectious virus. Meanwhile, 63 out of the 210 infected cops have reportedly been recovered fully. Most of the police officials in the city have already received both the doses of Covid vaccine. This apart, at least 71 fire services personnel have contracted the virus.

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit sworn in the Court of Executive Magistrate, Bissam Cuttack, I Smt. Bullbull Priya Munda, W/o. Sri Raju Saraka of Vill - Jugapadar, P.S.- Bissam Cuttack, Dist.- Rayagada, PIN - 765019, Odisha have changed my surname from 'Munda' to 'Saraka'. Henceforth, I shall be known as Bullbull Priya Saraka for all purposes.

Odisha supplies 13,305.8 MT medical oxygen to 13 states

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, May 15: The coastal state continues to deliver medical oxygen to the states in dire need. A total of 726 containers carrying 13,305.864 MT medical oxygen have been dispatched from Rourkela, Jajpur, Dhenkanal and Angul districts to 13 states in the country under the supervision of Odisha Police.

Odisha has dispatched as many as 70 tankers from Angul with 1,142.662 MT, 196 from Dhenkanal with 3,124.67 MT, 185 from Jajpur with 3,782.947 MT and 275 from Rourkela with 5,255.585 MT of the life-saving gas during last 23 days. A total of 223 tankers with



4,386.679 MT of oxygen have been sent to Andhra Pradesh and 181 tankers with 3,053.149 MT of oxygen to Telangana. Tamil Nadu has received 16 tankers filled with 312.36 MT of medical oxygen.

Similarly, Haryana has received 109 tankers filled with 2,015.812 MT of oxygen while 34 tankers with 566.671 MT of oxygen have been sent to Maharashtra. Likewise, 399.282 MT of oxygen filled in 26 tankers have been dispatched to Chhattisgarh. As many as 46 tankers have carried around 897.991 MT of oxygen to Uttar Pradesh and 56 tankers with 981.66 MT of oxygen have been sent to Madhya Pradesh till date. Moreover, 21

Odisha has dispatched as many as 70 tankers from Angul with 1,142.662 MT, 196 from Dhenkanal with 3,124.67 MT, 185 from Jajpur with 3,782.947 MT and 275 from Rourkela with 5,255.585 MT of the life-saving gas during last 23 days

A Special Cell has been formed under Y K Jethwa, ADG (Law & Order) as the nodal officer for coordinated action for loading and transportation of medical oxygen

A dedicated corridor has been set up with round-the-clock monitoring of the life-saving gas

tankers with 392.76 MT of oxygen to Delhi, 4 tankers with 107.89 MT to Punjab, 6 tankers with 120.96 MT to Karnataka, 2 tankers with 31.29 MT to Bihar and 2 tankers with 39.42 MT to Rajasthan have been delivered in last 23 days.

Based on the directive of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, a Special Cell was formed under Y K Jethwa, ADG (Law and Order) as the nodal officer for coordinated action for loading and transportation of medical oxygen. A dedicated corridor has been set up with round-the-clock monitoring. District SSP/DCSP and Range DIG/IG/CP are supervising the movement personally within their jurisdictions.

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Ethanol bio refinery project hits road block

LOCAL PEOPLE OPPOSE THE PROJECT, APPREHENDING POLLUTION IN SAMBALPUR

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, May 15: An ethanol bio refinery plant will be set up at Deogan under Maneswar tehsil in Sambalpur district. However, the project faced hurdles in the beginning as locals have opposed it. Its Delhi-based promoter has applied at Maneswar tehsil office for land measurement, a report said.

Notably, a similar plant has been proposed at Balusingha under Bhatli tehsil in Bargarh district. According to the report, a private company based in Delhi has proposed the plant, which will manufacture bio fuel from paddy straw. A patch of 40 acres of land has been identified. The company has, meanwhile, applied at the tehsil office for land measurement and acquisition. But, the process has slowed down due to Covid-19 situation.

After people came to know about the development of the project, they expressed their displeasure and warned of an agitation.

Local farmers accused the company of setting its eyes on agriculture



Maneswar tehsildar Birasen Behera said that the company has identified the land and planned to buy it. It has applied at the tehsil office for the land measurement, but a final decision about the project is yet to be taken

FACT FILE

- A private company based in Delhi has planned to manufacture bio fuel from paddy straw in Maneswar area. It has identified a patch of 40 acres of land in the area
- Local farmers accused the company of setting its eyes on agriculture land. "Most people in the region depend on farming. Agriculture will be finished in the area where the refinery is proposed. People will be at the receiving end of the pollution, leading to various diseases in the region," they lamented

culture land in the area. "Most people in the region depend on farming. Agriculture will be finished in the area where the refinery is proposed. People will be at the receiving end of the pollution, leading to various diseases in the region," the locals lamented.

They alleged, the administration is helping the company set up the plant, but the former will not pay

heed when people will be suffering due to pollution.

They urged the tehsil administration to refrain from helping the company in the matter and demanded that the plant be scrapped.

When contacted, Maneswar tehsildar Birasen Behera said that the company has identified the land and planned to buy it.

"The company has applied at

the tehsil office for the land measurement, but it has not taken any final decision about the project," he added.

It is said that huge quantities of paddy straw are burned in the district after harvest of the crops. It causes severe air pollution. The government stresses use of paddy straw for preparing bio fuel which will be mixed with petrol.

IFFCO O2 factory to function by June 15

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jagatsinghpur, May 15: The district administration has granted approval to an oxygen plant proposed by the IFFCO at Paradip. The company has set a target to commission the plant by June 15. The plant capable of producing 700 cylinders per day will come in handy while meeting the need of oxygen for Covid-19 patients.

According to report, the district level single window clearance authority gave the go-ahead to the plant which will be built at a cost of ₹7.2 crore.

Meanwhile, IFFCO has obtained drugs licence, explosive licence and permission of the factory and boiler department for the plant.

The oxygen plant will produce 520 cylinders (46.7 litre each) and 200 cylinders (10 litre each) per day. Various hospitals will be provided oxygen cylinders from the plant.

Reports from Keonjhar said, the district administration has installed a dedicated oxygen supply unit at the dedicated Covid hospital at Ranki.

The district administration had earlier decided to purchase a dedicated 'Oxygen Generator Machine' based on Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) technology with the DMF funds for overcoming the short supply of medical grade oxygen in the district in October 2020.

The Oxygen Generator Machine was delivered in January 2021 to the district and the installation started towards the last week of April 2021.

DGP urges Covid-hit Maoists to surrender, assures all assistance

POST NEWS NETWORK

Malkangiri/Kalimela, May 15: Amid reports that many Maoists operating in Malkangiri and Chhattisgarh borders are hit by Covid-19, Director General of Police (DGP) Abhay called upon the Left wing extremists (LWE) to surrender before police for their treatment.

The DGP, who visited Motu in Malkangiri Saturday, also assured the ultras of all necessary medical assistance with empathy and financial assistance as per government guidelines.

The DGP accompanied by Director of Intelligence RP Sharma, Malkangiri Superintendent of Police (SP) and senior BSF officials, visited Motu, MV 88 and Kaleru bridge in Malkangiri district and reviewed the anti-Maoist operations in the regions. He also visited various Maoist-affected areas in Koraput and Nabarangpur districts.

The DGP inaugurated a new police outpost at MV-88 before leaving for Motu check point on the Odisha-Andhra border where he reviewed arrangements on Covid-19 enforcement. He talked to officials at the border check points regarding enforcement of Covid guidelines for the migrants returning from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.



The state government has made 14-day mandatory quarantine for the returnees from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana after a lethal variant of the virus was detected in the neighbouring states.

Earlier in the day, the DGP visited Koraput district and discussed the Covid-19 situation and the anti-Maoist operations with the SP.

Laying stress on setting up of more camps for security forces to expedite the operations against the rebels, the DGP urged people to help in curbing the Maoist menace which has posed a serious challenge before the security forces in taking up welfare activities in the region.

During his visit to Nabarangpur district, the top cop directed police officials to strictly enforce the lockdown protocols laid down by the state government so that the chain of the coronavirus can be broken.

Jumbo death in Kapilas Zoo sparks concern

POST NEWS NETWORK

Dhenkanal, May 15: The death of a male pachyderm 'Hero' under unnatural circumstances at Kapilas Elephant Rescue centre has sparked concern on spread of herpes virus among the animals in the zoo, a report said.

This has left the forest officials worried over the safety of the remaining four elephants in the zoo. The zoo has been left with four elephants Kartik, Uma, Chandu and Padma after the death of the male jumbo Hero. The spread of herpes virus in the zoo despite a series of safety measures and restrictions has sparked concerns among the residents in the locality.

The matter came to the fore after veterinarians conducted a post-mortem of the animal carcass and sent its samples to Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) in

IN ANTICIPATION



A vendor selling bamboo wares eagerly wait for customers despite a shutdown in Rambha in Ganjam district

HERPES SCARE



Forest officials are worried over the safety of the remaining four elephants in the zoo - Kartik, Uma, Chandu and Padma after the death of 'Hero'

An examination at the OUAT laboratory confirmed the presence of herpes virus in the carcass of 'Hero' which died in the zoo

DFO, Prakash Chand Gogineni, said that Padma is in isolation while other elephants were given anti-viral treatment

Bhubaneswar. An examination at OUAT laboratory confirmed the presence of herpes virus in the animal carcass which died in the

zoo. The examination report stated that young pachyderms are likely to get infected with Herpes virus more than their aged counterparts.

On receipt of the report, the forest department has become more concerned about the safety of the female jumbo 'Padma', 18 months, which was rescued from Berhampur forest region and rehabilitated in the Kapilas zoo. Padma has been kept in isolation while the rest of the elephants were given anti-viral treatment.

When contacted, Prakash Chand Gogineni, divisional forest officer (DFO) said the report has confirmed the death of 'Hero' due to herpes virus. He said they are now concerned about Padma and the rest of the jumbos.

Notably, an examination of all the elephants in the zoo regarding the presence of herpes virus in January had come out negative. However, the sudden death of Hero due to herpes virus has left them worried. He added that a close watch is being kept on all the jumbos in the zoo.

Power grid project hangs fire

Low voltage and unscheduled power cuts have become routine in Maneswar and 10 other peripheral villages under Sambalpur Municipal Corporation

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, May 15: The state government aims at providing quality electricity service to customers, but low voltage and erratic power supply are routine in over 10 villages under Sambalpur Municipal Corporation. It is alleged that power supply is often disrupted for hours.

This has caused resentment among people in Maneswar and 10 other peripheral villages. Locals pointed out that from Thursday evening, power transmission was hit for 15 hours.

Power is supplied from Putibandh grid, 20 km from Maneswar area. On the other hand, a 33KV power grid has been set up at Rasanpur Banki-Tikiri four years ago. However, it is yet to be fully functional. The work of



Maneswar grid is getting delayed owing to alleged negligence of the contractor.

"The work of the grid at Maneswar is inordinately delayed. As long as the proposed grid is not workable, we will be facing regular erratic power supply. If the grid is commissioned, people will avail of quality power supply," locals said.

It was alleged that the unscheduled power cuts are routine in the transmission lines being looked after by Dhanupalli SDO. Some ancillary works on the grid premises are yet to be completed, said an employee of the electric-

ity sub-division.

It is said that after the Maneswar grid is commissioned, low voltage and power cuts can be sorted out in over 20 villages including Halipalli, Brahmanipalli, Mirgamunda, Rasanpur, Chandamunda, Bhoipalli, Dalpalli, Talpalli, Gurupalli, Jhakaripalli, Sudunga, Rankia and Tikra.

SDO (Electricity) Manas Chandra Das said that the work of the grid is yet to be completed. "The contractor concerned is being reminded to finish the grid work, but he is not paying heed. The grid will sort out transmission problems," he added.

BeMC to launch doorstep vaccination for senior citizens

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur, May 15: In a first of its kind move in the state, the Berhampur Municipal Corporation (BeMC) has decided to launch Covid vaccination for senior citizens at their doorsteps in Berhampur from Monday, a report said.

District Collector Vijay Amruta Kulange informed this while talking to mediapersons here Saturday. The commissioner of the civic body will release an SOP in this regard. The exercise is being done to provide hassle free vaccination to senior citizens in the comforts of their homes. Recently, the treatment of Covid patients was included in the 'Mo Sarkar' initiatives of the state government.

Meanwhile, the 20,000-litre oxygen plant built on the premises of MKCG Medical College and Hospital will become operational from Wednesday. The plant, once operational, will remove oxygen scarcity in the hospital. Notably, two Covid hospitals function from the MKCG premises while two others are Tata Hitach and Aswini Covid Hospital.

Admin performs last rites of Covid-19 victim

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sonepur, May 15: At a time when family members and relatives abandon their loved ones losing their lives to Covid-19, the local administration in Biramaharajpur block of Subarnapur district has set an example by performing the last rites of a woman Covid victim.

According to sources, the case was reported from Adal village under Khandahota panchayat in the district. A woman identified as Bhama Jal of Adal village had tested positive for Covid-19 three days ago.



Kin of the deceased did not turn up to perform her last rites fearing infection of the lethal virus in Sonepur

After battling against the virus, she succumbed to the deadly disease Saturday morning. However, the deceased woman's relatives did not turn up to perform her last rites fearing that they might get infected by the deadly virus.

Later, on being informed by the local Dedicated Covid Health Centre (DCHC) that the body had been

lying at the facility for hours together, Biramaharajpur Block Development Officer (BDO) Motilal Sulia, Junior Engineer Binit Lakra, block office staff Sriram Mishra, Sanjay Das and Khandahota's former sarpanch Nityananda Sahoo made necessary arrangements for the final rites and cremated the body.



Members of a voluntary outfit feeding monkeys starving since closure of Maa Chandi temple at Chandikhole due to Covid-19 pandemic

68 prisoners test Covid-19 positive, trigger panic in Jharsuguda sub-jail

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jharsuguda, May 15: As many as 68 undertrial prisoners (UTPs) who were earlier lodged at Jharsuguda sub-jail at OMP area in this town have tested positive for Covid-19, an official of the jail informed Saturday.

According to a source, 182 swab samples in four phases had been collected from the inmates and sent for RT-PCR testing after some of the UTPs developed Covid symptoms a few days ago.

However, 68 of them were found positive Saturday morning after the reports came in. The Covid-19 infected inmates have been kept in separate wards to prevent further spread of the infection inside the sub-jail, the official expressed.

"Swabs from 182 prisoners had been collected May 1 and 2 and

5 INMATES SENT ON PAROLE IN KEONJHAR

KEONJHAR: Amid a spread of Covid-19, the authorities of Keonjhar district jail have sent five inmates on parole so as to ease overcrowding and maintain social distancing inside the jail. The move has come following an order from the Supreme Court to all the state governments. According to reports, the jail authorities have decided to send 36 inmates on parole in a phased manner. Following a directive from DG (Prisons) Santosh Upadhyay, five inmates were sent home for 90-day parole. The families of the inmates have signed on security bond papers and taken them home. Due to transportation inconvenience, families of other inmates could not turn up for signing on bond papers. A few days ago, the jail authorities were panicked when nine inmates tested positive for Covid-19. The jail is can accommodate 608 inmates. Currently, 565 inmates are lodged there.

again May 5 and 6. Out of them 68 were found infected with the virus. They have been kept under isolation in separate wards in the jail. Necessary medical assistance is being provided to them," jailor Debendra Tharty said.

Contact tracing of the infected

is underway. More RT-PCR testing would be carried out if required, he added.

Presently, the sub-jail has a total of 280 prisoners. Following detection of the 68 cases, the jail premises have been sanitised, the jailor added.

FOCUS THE MIDDLE EAST

END OF ISRAEL'S ILLUSION



The prevailing consensus among Israelis that Palestinian nationalism had been defeated – and thus that a political solution to the conflict was no longer necessary – lies in tatters

militia across the border in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah has an arsenal of 150,000 missiles many times more lethal than Hamas'.

To make its case, Hamas was willing to pay a high price. Israel's punitive airstrikes on Gaza have been devastating, targeting Hamas military commanders with brutal efficiency. But Hamas knows that in the asymmetric wars of this era, a militia hidden among two million civilians in one of the world's most densely populated areas has practical immunity from defeat. Hamas also knows that the war's reverberation throughout the region will force neighbours like Egypt and Hamas' patron, Qatar, to mediate a ceasefire.

From the debris of Gaza, Hamas will then claim victory, not necessarily on the battlefield, but in the minds of its people. At that point, Hamas will have achieved its main objectives: an utterly discredited PA and heightened prestige as the ultimate protector of Islam's holy shrines in Jerusalem.

Paradoxically Netanyahu has no interest in destroying Hamas. Quite the contrary: he has struck an unwritten deal with it against Abbas PA, which his governments have consistently done all they could to weaken and humiliate. A Hamas Islamic state in Gaza offers Netanyahu the ideal pretext to reject peace negotiations and a two-state solution. Netanyahu even allowed Qatar to keep Gaza functioning by paying the salaries of Hamas' functionaries.

Israel certainly cannot claim victory. The fragile coexistence between Jews and Arabs within its borders has been shaken. The prevailing consensus among Israelis that Palestinian nationalism had been defeated – and thus that a political solution to the conflict was no longer necessary – lies in tatters. And even as the violence escalates, it has become clear to both sides that the era of glorious wars and victories is over.

The writer, a former Israeli foreign minister, is Vice President of the Toledo International Center for Peace.

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The sudden eruption of war outside and inside Israel's borders has shocked a complacent nation. Throughout Benjamin Netanyahu's 12-year premiership, the Palestinian problem was buried and forgotten. The recent Abraham Accords, establishing diplomatic relations with four Arab states, seemed to weaken the Palestinian cause further. Now it has re-emerged with a vengeance.

Wars can be triggered by an isolated incident, but their cause is always deeper. In this case, the trigger, the eviction of Palestinians in favour of Israeli nationalists in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, touched all the sensitive nerves of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, its humiliating control of access to the Al-Aqsa mosque, the ever-present memory of the 1948 Nakba (the displacement of 700,000 Palestinians when Israel was founded), and the grievances of Israel's Arab minority are all fueling the current flare-up. It may be true that the contested real estate in Sheikh Jarrah did belong to a Jewish family before 1948. But Palestinians saw the incident as part of Israel's unrelenting drive to 'Judaize' Jerusalem, and a striking injustice, because Israel was built partly on abandoned properties of Palestinian refugees. While Jews are entitled to reclaim property they owned before Israel's founding, Palestinians may not. Those facing eviction in Sheikh Jarrah cannot recover homes in Jaffa and Haifa that they once owned.

On the face of it, the latest escalation of violence is following the template of all inter-ethnic wars. Muslims observing Ramadan shouted nationalist slogans and clashed with Israeli right-wing groups chanting "Death to the Arabs." The Israelis haughtily marched with their national flag on Jerusalem Day, marking Israel's capture in 1967 of East Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, the site of the biblical Second Temple, and of Al-Aqsa, completed in the year 705. Battles in and around

the Al-Aqsa compound erupted, with worshippers inside throwing stones at the Israeli police, who responded by firing rubber-tipped bullets and other projectiles, wounding hundreds. But the young Arab protesters could claim victory, for they forced the postponement of an Israeli Supreme Court ruling on the evictions in Sheikh Jarrah. They also forced the police to change the route of the Jerusalem Day march away from the Muslim Quarter in the Old City.

The flare-up spilled over into pre-1967 Israel, where Islamist groups incited young Israeli Arabs. Mixed Jewish-Arab cities that were supposed to be exemplars of co-existence, such as Acre, Ramla, Jaffa, and Lod, erupted in an orgy of violence and vandalism. Lod was practically taken over by gangs of young Arabs. This was a pogrom, said Jewish residents. An old Jewish woman spoke of memories of Kristallnacht. The mayor of Lod drew the same comparison.

But Jerusalem has emerged as the crucible of conflict. It offered Hamas a golden opportunity to assert its predominance over Israel's collaborators in the West Bank's Palestinian Authority and sweep away PA President Mahmoud Abbas' moribund leadership. Under Israeli pressure, Abbas had just canceled legislative

elections for fear that Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2006, would win and extend its control to the West Bank.

Abbas framed his decision as a protest against Israel's refusal to allow the Palestinians in East Jerusalem to participate in the elections. But the truth is that the PA's presence in East Jerusalem had practically vanished, with the vacuum filled by a mostly secular young Palestinian generation that turned the Temple Mount (Haram Al-Sharif to Muslims) into the symbol of their resistance to Israeli occupation. In the current eruption of violence, Hamas connected all the dots needed to gain primacy in the Palestinian national movement. It positioned itself as the protector of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa, as the spearhead of the Palestinians' national and religious struggle against the Israeli Jewish occupier, and also as the voice of the Arab minority in Israel proper.

Israelis and their complacent government were caught off guard. Hamas conducted an unprecedentedly massive missile attack on Israeli cities. They even launched salvos at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, sending half the country's population to shelters. Israelis were left to wonder how their vulnerable home front could withstand a war with Hezbollah, the Iran-backed



Shlomo Ben-Ami

EVEN AS THE VIOLENCE ESCALATES, IT HAS BECOME CLEAR TO BOTH SIDES THAT THE ERA OF GLORIOUS WARS AND VICTORIES IS OVER



Aakar Patel

The question is why we did not anticipate a second wave or a wave of such destructive power. The answer is that if leadership must take full control over situations then it must have grip rather than genius strokes

Leading Sans Grip

We must watch over our thoughts. A bad thought is the most dangerous of thieves.

THE MOTHER



He is a famous name in war but Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery does not have many battlefield victories to his name. In fact his most famous engagement, called Operation Market Garden (after which the Hollywood movie 'A Bridge Too Far' was made) was a disaster. But historians agree that Montgomery had something that all generals should have and this is 'grip'. This is the faculty of being aware of the situation, being knowledgeable about what resources are at hand and what may be required in future, and being conscious of what events to anticipate.

These are not qualities we associate with our prime minister. His interest is not in the details but in the broad scheme. In a famous interview just before the 2014 elections he said to the journalist Madhu Kishwar: "Even today if my officers show me some paper, I say: 'Tell me what's in it in two minutes. For me two minutes is sufficient for a 10-page document. This skill is something I have developed.'"

But while he has no interest in details, his preference is not to stand aloof from operations but to insert himself through the bold and imaginative stroke. For instance, the BBC reported at the end of March this year that before the lockdown last year not a single ministry was consulted about what the consequences would be.

The BBC filed 240 Right to Information applications with various Indian government departments - health, finance, disaster management - to find out if and how much they were consulted ahead of the lockdown. The responses revealed that no experts or government departments were consulted. The government denied to give the BBC a statement explaining why concerned departments were not consulted ahead of time. A second example of the prime minister's style of functioning is the famous demonetisation. Here also only a handful of people knew that this was about to happen. As a parliamentary democracy India follows the principle of collective responsibility. But even the Cabinet was not told till the day of demonetisation, Tuesday, 8 November, that India's 1000 rupee and 500 rupee notes, 86 per cent of all currency by value, would be wiped out that evening. The government was not only unprepared for Modi's move; it was deliberately kept hidden from the government.

My point is not to say that this style is good or bad or whether it has advantages or disadvantages. The evidence is clear and there is no point in discussing that here. The point is to examine whether it works in situations such as the one we find ourselves in. The problem of the pandemic cannot be approached through the single brilliant stroke. It needs the State to be aware of the situation, be knowledgeable about what resources are at hand and what may be required in future, and being conscious of what events to anticipate. In a centralised State, where decision making is often the purview of a few people and sometimes that only of one man, this may be harder to do as we are discovering.

The official position of our government in response to a shortage of vaccines and a shortage of oxygen and of ventilators is that nobody could have anticipated this. But the fact is that the rest of the world anticipated it. What we are receiving today as aid is not new material manufactured yesterday around the world. It is the surplus that was produced by nations which had anticipated the crisis we are going through today. They dealt with it because of their preparedness and that is the reason this material became surplus. No nation keeps useless stocks of expensive things lying around in case India will urgently need them. The reason we don't have enough vaccines is that we did not order them at the right time because we didn't think we needed them. As the Prime Minister said to the World Economic Forum in late January, "India is among those countries which have succeeded in saving the lives of the maximum number of its citizens and the number of people infected with corona is rapidly decreasing." He added that "it would not be advisable to judge India's success with that of another country. In a country which is home to 18 per cent of the world population, that country has saved humanity from a big disaster by containing corona effectively."

We had decided based on the evidence we saw that India was unique and had overcome Covid. Other nations thought of the issue as a longer problem not limited to the first wave. They ordered vaccines on time and received them. They let their scientists determine whether the battle against the pandemic was won instead of a divinely inspired leadership. Once the science revealed that only precaution, healthcare preparation and vaccination could stop the pandemic, that is where their execution capacities were deployed.

The question is why we did not anticipate a second wave or a wave of such destructive power. The answer is that if leadership must take full control over situations then it must have grip rather than genius strokes. There may be theoretically be times when the latter style is advantageous but this era is not among them.

WISDOM CORNER

- Have patience. All things are difficult before they become easy. SAADI
- It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves. EDMUND HILLARY
- If you do not think about your future, you cannot have one. JOHN GALSWORTHY

WORDSWORTH

Mutoscope

In the 1890s, something like a technological gold rush took place to find a practical way of presenting moving pictures. In the US, for example, Edison demonstrated his kinoscope in 1894. Alongside considerable mechanical ingenuity lay great linguistic creativity, as a little squib that appeared in the Chicago Record in early 1898 will demonstrate: The single invention of throwing moving pictures on screen, variously known as the vitascope or kinoscope, has added dozens of new words to the language within the last year or two. Here is a list of the various names for "movement photography": Phantoscope, criterioscope, vitascope, cinematograph, biograph, kinematograph, wonderscope, animatoscope, vitagraph, panoramograph, cosmoscope, anarithmoscope, katoptikum, magniscope, zoeoptrotrope, variscope, phantasmagoria, projectoscope, cinograph, hypnoscope, centograph, X-graph, electroscope, cinegraphoscope, craboscope, vitaletiscope, cinematoscope, mutoscope, cinnoscope, animaloscope, theatograph, chronophotographoscope, cinematograph, motograph, kinetograph, rayoscope, motorscope, kinetophone, throtrotrope, phenakistoscope, venetrope, vitrescope, zinematograph, vitopticon, stinnetoscope, vivrescope, diaramiscope, lobsteroscope, corminograph, kineoptoscope or any other old scope. Lobsterscope? Craboscope? Was this some joke of the writer's? Buried in that list was one that was certainly real, mutoscope, a device created by the American inventor Herman Casler and patented in 1894. The word is assumed to be from Latin mutare, to change. Both the kinoscope and the mutoscope required the viewer to peer into a viewing slot while turning a handle. But whereas Edison's device used a strip of film, Casler's was very close in idea to the flip-book, in which riffling through a sequence of still pictures seems to create a moving image. In the mutoscope the pictures were arranged around a drum; turning a handle caused them to appear one after the other at about 16 frames a second, the minimum needed to give an illusion of movement.

SPECTRUM PANDEMIC

Aren't postal employees Covid warriors?

The Government of Odisha released a fresh list of frontline workers for Covid-19 vaccinations on May 13, 2021. The list includes forest department staff, bank/insurance staff, ATM maintenance staff, staff of logistic companies, railway staff, child care institutions' staff, oxygen plant employees, filling station and call centre employees. However, postal employees have been excluded from this list. The decision of the government has disheartened about 25,000 postal employees and workers of 8,164 post offices in the Odisha Postal Circle.

During this national crisis, India Post, the largest postal network in the world, as one of the essential service providers, has come forward to stand with the government, the administration and the common citizens. It has kept opened all its 1.56 lakh post offices including 1.30 lakh post offices in rural areas to cater to the needs of both urban and rural people through its 5 lakh-strong workforce.

Last year, especially during the lockdown period, India Post ensured emergency mail services and financial transactions even through Mobile Post Offices wherever necessary. Working till midnight daily, it delivered hope and essential items to far flung areas. The Department

of Posts has become a lifesaver guaranteeing supplies of essential items including medicines, testing kits, masks, sanitizers, PPEs and medical equipment like ventilators and defibrillators to all corners of the country. The department has also been delivering cash at the doorsteps of the old, the handicapped, and pensioners through Aadhaar Enrolled Payment System (AePS). The red motor van of India Post is a beacon of hope for the homeless and the needy in slums, migrant labourers and daily wage earners. For its significant role during COVID, the Department of Posts won the excellence in Digital Governance Award in Digital India Award in 2020 and Healthgiri Award, 2020 for Best Logistic Service Provider. During the second wave, India Post and its employees are moving ahead with the same temperament as before.

While a key section of these employees especially the delivery staff (postmen) and Gramin Dak Sewaks (GDS) are moving from door to door with biometric/handheld devices for delivery of letters and payment of money through AePS, another section (counter and frontline staff) is directly dealing with customers in vulnerable conditions. Biometric transactions and direct door delivery of mails make the staff vul-

nerable to the virus. Besides, post offices are remaining functional with full working strength.

While the activities of banking sector are limited to financial transactions, insurance sector are limited to insurance businesses and private courier services/logistics companies are meant for mail/parcel business only, India Post alone delivers all such services. Besides, the department has also facilitated the customers with 111 additional services across the nation under one platform - Common Service Centre.

How can these employees be treated inferior to others during this pandemic? Most regrettably, there is gross disparity between the employees of India Post and that of other departments. While the banking and insurance sectors availed reduced working hours with Saturday leave, employees of India Post are treated with step-motherly attitude both by the Union and the state governments during the pandemic.

Even for vaccination, postal employees are kept outside the priority list. Despite the Health Ministry's direction to organise vaccination sessions at workplaces (both public & private) which are having about 100 eligible and willing beneficiaries by tagging these workplaces with an existing Covid Vaccination

Centre (CVC), no such step has yet been taken either by the department or by the state government. These employees are finding out ways and means to be vaccinated on their own. Adding salt to injury, the death claim compensation of ₹10 lakh due to Covid, which was initially declared by the Central government to postal employees, including the GDS, was subsequently withdrawn. Though India Post has witnessed more than 250 deaths, including nearly 15 in Odisha till now, neither any compensation nor employment to one of the eligible family members of the deceased employee is considered.

Managing new risk and balancing ambition with capacity, the postal employees are playing a key role in fighting poverty and inequality, supporting the ageing population, meeting the needs of an increasingly mobile society in every manner.

Against this backdrop, there is an urgent need to identify the dedicated workforce of India Post as Covid Warriors and provide all facilities, including priority in vaccination, as given to frontline workers.

The writer is Organising General Secretary, National Federation of Postal Employees.



Bruhaspati Samal

BIOMETRIC TRANSACTIONS AND DIRECT DOOR DELIVERY OF MAILS MAKE THE STAFF VULNERABLE TO THE VIRUS

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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Death of vaccines

Sir, The rollout of Sputnik V vaccine must ease the vaccine crunch in India to some extent. Use of the vaccine follows clearance for imported doses from the Central Drugs Laboratory in Kasauli. The vaccine will be available in private hospitals this month at a steep ₹995 per dose, which is higher than the \$10 (Rs 732) per dose indicated by the RDIF, but prices could fall once local production kicks in. Sputnik V joins Covishield and the indigenous Covaxin in the vaccination programme, hamstrung by a dearth of vaccines.

NJ Ravi Chander, BANGALORE

Maintain peace

Sir, In my opinion the present Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the brain child of PM Netanyahu to divert the attention of the people of Israel from the domestic politics. It's an easy way to gain popularity. Start a war and unite the country. Deliberate occupation of Gaza strip has always been a tool for Israeli politicians. Blind support for Israel by the US gives extra strength to the Jewish country. Iran-backed Hamas is also responsible for the attacks against Israel. Both Israel and Palestine will have to understand that maintaining peace in the region is important.

Sunil Pradhan, KHARIAR

Origin of virus

Sir, It has been over one year that the deadly pandemic is residing with us and has killed over 3.3 million people worldwide. Amid various revelations about its origin, a new development came in that US' National Institutes of Health (NIH) might be partly behind the origin of the virus. In a recent US congressional hearing, there was a heated exchange between a Republican senator and Dr Anthony Fauci, chief medical advisor to the President, in which the Senator levelled allegations pointing at Dr Fauci that NIH was funding "gain of function" research of SARS-CoV-2 virus to EcoHealth Alliance, which was, in turn, funding the Wuhan Institute of Virology to study the infectiousness of the virus. It is argued that the virus might have escaped from the lab during its experiment. Funding was being made since 2014 even after the Obama administration put restrictions on it. Even, a few days back, an Australian report revealed that Chinese military scientists were experimenting this virus to use it as a weapon. Amid all these reports, there has been no consistent result on its origin. And, instead of playing the blame game, all the countries should come unitedly to conduct a thorough investigation into its origin.

Sambit Palei, BHUBANESWAR

Lockdown leads to fall in Delhi's Covid cases, say experts



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 15: The national capital recorded 6,430 new COVID-19 cases and 337 fatalities Saturday while the positivity rate dipped to 11.32 per cent. This is the second consecutive day when Delhi has recorded less than 10,000 cases in a day.

Delhi Friday recorded 8,506 COVID-19 cases, the daily count dipping to below the 10,000-mark again after a month, with medical experts believing the lockdown to be the main factor behind the dip amid the second wave of the pandemic.

Doctors at leading government and private hospitals in Delhi said there is a relative fall in the number of cases and 'still a long way to go' before the daily count falls below the 2,000-mark, as it was a few months earlier.

"Lockdown, I would say is the biggest factor in arriving at a situation where we are now, when daily cases from 28,000 have come down to about 8,500. However, it is still a huge figure, and there should be no room for complacency, on any front," Medical Director of Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital (RGSSH), B.L. Sherwal, told PTI.

"While daily cases have come down, the severity of infection is still the same, and new patients are being brought to our hospital in the same condition as before. Many of them are brought dead or die shortly after being brought to emergency. So, we must understand the gravity of the situation," he added.

Delhi had been reeling under a brutal second wave of the pandemic that is sweeping the country, claiming a massive number of lives daily, with the recent oxygen supply shortage issue at various hospitals adding to the woes.

This year, the lockdown here was first imposed April 19, amid a steep rise in COVID-19 cases, and has been extended thrice so far. May 9, it was extended by another week by Chief Minister Kejriwal, till May 17 morning.

Dr Richa Sareen, consultant, pulmonology at Fortis hospital

Doctors at leading government and private hospitals in Delhi said there is a relative fall in the number of cases and 'still a long way to go' before the daily count falls below the 2,000-mark

here, echoed Sherwal and said the prime factor behind, a relatively improved situation, is that a lockdown was imposed.

She argued that had the lockdown been imposed a week earlier in April, the situation wouldn't have become this worse, but then it's a difficult decision by any government.

"Besides lockdown, another factor is that a large number of the population has got infected by the virus, so they have developed immunity, and hence, in a way, herd immunity has been attained, which helps in breaking the chain of transmission," Sareen said.

RGSSH's Sherwal also attributed the ongoing vaccination drive as a contributing factor for slowing down of the daily cases. Sareen, however, said, the efficacy of the vaccination will be seen in the coming weeks and months, and "too early to factor in for the dip in daily cases".

"But, yes, the maniacal and distressful scenes at the hospital have reduced a bit. However, the severity of cases is still there and we must not lower our guards. We hope, people will learn lessons from this tragedy and horrific deaths and continue to follow COVID-appropriate behaviours," she said.

Dr Suranjit Chatterjee, a senior consultant at Apollo Hospitals here, agreed with Sareen, that the situation at hospitals has improved a bit.

"We are getting less SOS calls, my phone's ringing less number of times, the daily routine at work is not that stressful as it was few weeks ago. So, things seem a bit better, but again we have to be watchful," he added.

'Yogi trying to incite hatred in Punjab'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, May 15: Chief Minister Amarinder Singh Saturday criticised his Uttar Pradesh counterpart Yogi Adityanath over his 'inflammatory' tweet on the declaration of Malerkotla as the 23rd district of Punjab, terming it an attempt to incite 'communal hatred' in the peaceful state.

Contrasting the communal harmony in Punjab with the 'divisiveness' being promoted by the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh, Singh asked the former to stay out of his state's affairs as they are in much better shape than those in UP.

"Any distinction on the basis of belief and religion is contrary to the basic spirit of the Constitution of India. Presently, the formation of Malerkotla (Punjab) is a reflection of the divisive policy of the Congress," Adityanath had tweeted earlier in Hindi.

The UP chief minister's tweet came a day after Singh announced the only Muslim majority town in Punjab to be the state's 23rd district on the occasion of Eid.

"What does he (Yogi Adityanath) know of Punjab's ethos or the his-



The whole world knows of the communally divisive policies of the BJP, and particularly the Yogi Adityanath government in UP

Any distinction on the basis of belief and religion is contrary to the basic spirit of the Constitution of India. Presently, the formation of Malerkotla (Punjab) is a reflection of the divisive policy of the Congress

AMARINDER SINGH | PUNJAB CM

YOGI, ADITYANATH | UP CM

tory of Malerkotla, whose relationship with Sikhism and its Gurus was known to every Punjabi? And what does he understand of the Indian Constitution, which is being brazenly trampled every day by his own government in UP?" asked

the Punjab chief minister, in a strong reaction to his UP counterpart's tweet.

Mocking the UP chief minister's comment, Singh said given the Yogi Adityanath government and the BJP's track record of spreading "communal hate", such a re-

Delhi to have O₂ concentrator bank for home isolation patients



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 15: Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Saturday announced the launch of an oxygen concentrator bank for COVID patients requiring oxygen support in home isolation or those recuperating after discharge from hospital.

He said despite declining cases and positivity rate in the national capital, there would be no laxity in the fight against the virus.

Each district in Delhi will have a stock of 200 concentrators that will be rushed to the doorsteps of the patients requiring oxygen within two hours, Kejriwal said at an online briefing.

Those requiring oxygen concentrators can call on the helpline number - 1031 - and it will be provided free of cost after it is recommended by the doctors, he said.

"The oxygen bank will have 200 oxygen concentrators in each of the 11 districts for COVID patients under home isolation and for patients who have returned home

after recovery from hospital but require oxygen support as recommended by the doctors," said the chief minister.

The COVID patients who are not enrolled under home isolation protocol of the Delhi government may call 1031 and avail of the oxygen concentrator facility, he said.

Delhi Health minister Satyendar Jain in a tweet said the COVID patients under home isolation or those discharged from the hospital can avail the facility of the first oxygen concentrator bank in Delhi, after it is prescribed by the doctors.

Oxygen concentrators are portable devices that enrich oxygen content in the air breathed by a person.

According to the Delhi government's health bulletin Saturday, there are 42,482 COVID patients under home isolation out of 66,295 active cases. Kejriwal said often oxygen level drops in COVID patients and they can be saved from further deterioration if oxygen is

given immediately.

"If patients under home isolation require oxygen, our team will ensure the oxygen concentrator reaches them within two hours. A technician will also accompany the team to explain to the family members how to use the device."

Delhi government doctors will stay in touch with all those who are being given oxygen concentrators. If the need arises to send them to a hospital, it will be taken care of, he said.

The oxygen concentrators will be returned after the patients do not need it. The devices will be sanitised, and given to other patients in need, he added.

A team of Delhi government doctors will first ensure whether a person needs an oxygen concentrator or not. It will be provided after they give their recommendation, Kejriwal said.

The oxygen concentrators will be delivered at the doorstep of patients by OLA Foundation and Give India, he said, thanking the two organisations.

Atul Satija, GiveIndia CEO and founder said, "Through this initiative, we will provide oxygen concentrators to those who are in home-isolation or in recovery right at their doorstep."

The chief operating officer of Ola Gaurav Porwal said, "As part of the O2forIndia initiative, we will provide free and easy access to oxygen concentrators to home isolation patients via the Ola app, and Ola cabs will provide free doorstep delivery and pick up."

The chief minister hoped that the COVID cases and positivity rate will gradually decline.

40 pc of Punjab's Covid deaths in last 44 days



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, May 15: Around 40 per cent of the total Covid-19-related fatalities in Punjab took place in the last forty-four days, indicating the severity of the second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Punjab had reported a total of 6,868 deaths due to the infection as on March 31.

The death toll rose to 11,477 as on May 14, showing 4,609 more people succumbing to the disease since April 1 this year, the state Health Department's data revealed.

The health officials had earlier pointed out that the delay in approaching hospitals for treatment by patients with severe symptoms and comorbidities were the main reasons behind fatalities.

Punjab witnessed a record 217 deaths because of the contagion in a single day May 11. The state has been seeing more than 100 fatalities daily for the past several days.

Ludhiana is one of the worst-af-

fectected districts in Punjab as it has registered 538 deaths between April 1 and May 14, 2021, as per the data.

Besides, Amritsar reported 515 more deaths due to the contagion between April 1 and May 14.

During the same period, Patiala saw 396 deaths, Bathinda 349, Mohali 307 and Jalandhar 301, as per the data.

The case fatality rate in rural areas is 2.6 per cent as against 0.8 per cent in urban areas, officials said.

Apart from this, Punjab has added 2,44,250 fresh cases of infection in the last 44 days.

The state had a total of 2,39,734 cases as on March 31. It went up to 4,83,984 between April 1 and May 14, as per the Health Department data.

Ludhiana, Mohali, Bathinda, Patiala, Jalandhar and some other districts have witnessed a sharp rise in infections.

Punjab's positive rate Friday stood at around 11 per cent.

Delhi's 'ambulance couple' goes the extra mile

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 15: Profiles of humanness in the time of Covid, Himanshu and Twinkle Kalia spend their days helping the ill get a fighting chance at life and ensuring dignity in death for those who don't make it.

As the second COVID-19 wave ravages large parts of India - including the national capital that has seen thousands scramble for oxygen, hospital beds and crematorium spots - the Kalias, Delhi's 'ambulance couple', ferry the ill to hospital, fetch medicines, arrange funerals and sometimes step in to perform last rites too.

Cloaked in PPE suits, face shields and masks, the Kalias go where even close relatives fear to tread, spending their days tending to people suffering from Covid or those who have died of it and making sure their fleet of 12 ambulances are road ready to tackle any emergency.

"We don't put it in records but in the second wave of coronavirus we have been helping almost 20-25 patients daily reach hospitals. We have performed cremations of 80 people who have died of COVID-19 and helped over 1,000 people in arranging for cremations," Himanshu told PTI.

It's all free of course, the 42-year-old hastened to add. A few days ago, they got a call from Mayur Vihar in east Delhi about a patient who had died in an auto-rickshaw on the way to hospital, said Twinkle.

The Kalias, who live in Pratap Nagar in north Delhi, reached there quickly, got the body verified by a doctor and helped in the last rites.

"We got a call from Sandeep Mitra whose wife Madhura had collapsed in an auto-rickshaw while he was taking her to a hospital. He was not getting any help from his society or elsewhere. We reached there, got a doctor to the spot and performed her cremation at the Sarai Kale Khan crematorium," Twinkle said.

The 39-year-old is a cancer survivor and the couple has two daughters, Japji (13) and Riddhi (7). But personal commitments don't come in the way of their zeal to help others in these days of India's most se-

rious health crisis.

At a time ambulances are in short supply and stories of ambulance drivers and owners fleeing those in need make the rounds, the Kalias have publicised the free services of their fleet. Himanshu's mobile number has been pasted at various places across the city.

As a result, he said, distress calls come in from all over Delhi and also from Ghaziabad and Noida. The word has spread and some hospitals have also started reaching out.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

work as insurance agents and said they spend their earnings in serving humanity.

The ambulance service started in 2002 when his parents-in-law gifted him an ambulance, said Himanshu. It has built up steadily since with the Kalias adding vehicles over the years.

Six of the ambulances are parked at their residence and six elsewhere. The couple was doing charitable work even before the pandemic struck and has received several awards.

In 2019, Twinkle was awarded the Nari Shakti Puruskar by President Ram Nath Kovind. Four years before that, in 2015, an organisation in Dubai honoured her as the 'First Woman Ambulance Driver'. In 2016, Himanshu got the 'Ambulance Man' award in Malaysia. Hoping to ramp up their work of facilitating hospital admissions, blood donations and arranging funerals, Himanshu and Twinkle said they have expanded their team.

As millions of Indians battle infection and death, there are many more miles to go and hurdles to cross for this intrepid couple.

'Centre should be lone agency for procurement of vaccines'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, May 15: Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh Saturday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make the Union government as the single agency for the procurement and distribution of COVID vaccine for people in the age group of 18-44.

"Vaccination of the entire eligible population, especially in a pandemic situation, is the responsibility of the central government as any non-inclusion can undermine the rest of the collective effort," the chief minister said in a letter to the PM.

Citing the experience of the past three weeks when various states "have been making their individual efforts to source the vaccine from domestic producers as well as from abroad", the CM said the Centre should immediately undertake sourcing of all vaccines as a single agency for those in the age group of 18-44.

The Centre should ensure vaccine distribution across all states and union territories through clin-



ical establishment for proper vaccination of the age group, a statement quoting Amarinder said here.

The Punjab CM said he had even earlier suggested that in view of the modalities of the supply chain management, it would be operationally and financially most expedient if the entire procurement and supply of vaccine is done through the Union government for all age groups.

national

of the day quote

We have a strong suspicion that the Government of India, in conjunction with some state governments, is suppressing the true numbers of new infections and Covid-related deaths. If our suspicions are true, this is a grave misdeed apart from being a national shame and a national tragedy

P CHIDAMBARAM | SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER

We are facing this situation because, whether it was the government, administration or public, everyone dropped their guard after the first wave despite indications from doctors

MOHAN BHAGWAT | RSS CHIEF

We have asked for 67 lakh doses each of Covishield and Covaxin and have written to Dr Reddy's who are dealers of Sputnik in India for nearly the same quantity

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | DELHI CM

SHORT TAKES

IMA recommends digital swearing in

Thiruvananthapuram: The Kerala unit of the Indian Medical Association Saturday recommended that in the wake of the massive Covid surge, it would be best if the swearing in of the second Pinarayi Vijayan government is done virtually. Vijayan Friday said the swearing in has been fixed for May 20 and would be held at the Central Stadium. The preparations are going at a fast pace to erect a temporary space. According to sources, around 750 to 800 people will be allowed to grace the occasion.

2-time Guv Bhatia passed away at 100

Chandigarh: Six-time Congress MP and two-time Governor R L Bhatia passed away in Amritsar Saturday, his family members said. Former Minister of State for External Affairs, Bhatia was 100 years old. He represented the Amritsar parliamentary constituency six times from 1972, and was the Governor of Kerala from 2004 to 2008 and of Bihar from 2008 to 2009. He was admitted to Fortis Hospital a day earlier after he complained of uneasiness.

Father hacks girl, her lover to death

Kanpur: In a shocking incident, a man hacked his teenage daughter and her minor lover to death in a village near here, police said Saturday. The incident occurred in a village under the Ghatampur police circle of the district late Friday night, Circle Officer Pawan Gautam said. The police have arrested the accused father, a truck driver by profession, he said, adding the axe with which the father hacked the two teenagers to death too has been recovered.

Four arrested for 'sacrilegious act'

Jammu: Four persons were arrested Saturday in connection with a case related to a 'sacrilegious act' in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir, police said. The case under sections 295A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs) and 429 (mischief by killing or maiming cattle, etc) of the Indian Penal Code was registered at Police station Budhal Thursday following a 'sacrilegious act' committed in the Khwas area, Rajouri Police said in a statement.



The 'Mumbai model' of handling the pandemic, which has won praise from the courts as well as the Centre, was only 'about doing more rapid antigen tests' against RT-PCR tests, while reducing overall testing

DEVENDRA FADNAVIS | BJP LEADER

BLACK FUNGUS: NOTIFIED DISEASE

After the surfacing of 27 cases of black fungus, Haryana Health Minister Anil Vij Saturday said black fungus has been declared a notified disease in the state. Now, if a patient of black fungus is diagnosed, it will have to be reported to the Chief Medical Officer of the local district so that appropriate steps can be taken



PLASMA THERAPY

'Not effective, likely to be dropped from COVID guidelines'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 15: Plasma therapy on COVID-19 patients has not been found effective in reducing the progression to severe disease or death and is likely to be dropped from the clinical management guidelines, sources said.

In a meeting of the ICMR-National Task Force for COVID-19 Friday, all members were in favour of removing the use of convalescent plasma from the Clinical Guidance for Management of Adult COVID-19 Patients citing its ineffectiveness and inappropriate use in several cases, they said.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) will issue an advisory on the matter soon, they

said. The present guidelines allow off label use of plasma therapy at the stage of early moderate disease, that is, within seven days of the onset of symptoms and if there is availability of a high titre donor plasma.

The decision to remove it from the guidelines comes in the backdrop of some clinicians and scientists writing to Principal Scientific Advisor K VijayRaghavan cautioning against the irrational and non-scientific use of convalescent plasma for COVID-19 in the country. In the letter, which was also marked to ICMR chief Balram Bhargava and AIIMS Director Randeep Guleria, public health professionals alleged that the current guidelines on plasma therapy

are not based on existing evidence and pointed out some very early evidence that indicates a possible association between emergence of variants with "lower susceptibility to neutralising antibodies in immunosuppressed people given plasma therapy.

This raises the possibility of more virulent strains developing due to irrational use of plasma therapy which can fuel the pandemic, according to the letter signed by vaccinologist Gagandeep Kang, surgeon Pramesh C S and others.

We are writing to you as concerned clinicians, public health professionals and scientists from India about the irrational and non-scientific use of convalescent plasma for COVID-19 in the country.



This has stemmed from guidelines issued by government agencies, and we request your urgent in-

tervention to address the issue which can prevent harassment of COVID-19 patients, their families,

their clinicians and COVID-19 survivors," said the letter.

The current research evidence unanimously indicates that there is no benefit offered by convalescent plasma for treatment of COVID-19. However, it continues to be prescribed rampantly in hospitals across India," the letter said.

Families of patients run from pillar-to-post for getting plasma, which is in short supply. The desperation of patients and their families is understandable because they like to try the best for their loved ones, when a doctor has prescribed this, the public health professionals said.

In the plasma therapy, antibodies from the blood of a patient who has recovered from COVID-19 are used to treat serious patients.

States, Forces prepare for Tauktae

Prime Minister Modi reviewed the preparedness of states, central ministries and agencies concerned to deal with the situation arising out of cyclone Tauktae and asked them to take every possible measure to ensure that people are safely evacuated

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 15: Indian Air Force, Navy and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) are making preparations for Cyclone Tauktae, which is expected to cause 'very heavy' to 'extremely heavy' rainfall along the western coast of India in the next few days.

Further, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) has suspended all scheduled flights to the Agatti Airport in Lakshadweep due to heavy rain projections till 10am Sunday.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has kept 16 transport aircraft and 18 helicopters on operation readiness in peninsular India. One IL-76 aircraft has airlifted 127 personnel and 11 tonnes of cargo from Bhatinda to Jamnagar, the force said in a statement.

The IAF also stated that a C-130 aircraft has airlifted 25 personnel and 12.3 tonnes cargo from Bhatinda to Rajkot. Two C-130 aircraft have airlifted 126 personnel and 14 tonnes cargo from Bhubaneswar to Jamnagar, it added.

Additionally, IAF's Covid relief operations have been focused in these coastal areas for the coming few days, as bad weather might affect air operations later.

The cyclone relief operations are in addition to those underway for Covid relief, the force added. The Indian Navy stated that its



Fishermen carry their boats away from the shore due to formation of Cyclone Tauktae in the Arabian Sea, in Mangaluru, Saturday

Stalin orders to bring 82 fishing boats ashore

CHENNAI: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin Saturday ordered officials to take steps to bring back 82 fishing boats in deep sea at the earliest. Chairing a meeting of various department officials here Stalin took stock of the readiness to meet any contingencies that may arise due to cyclone Tauktae in the Arabian Sea. Stalin also told the officials to keep ready the rescue equipment in case of landslides in hill regions. Stalin also said the four teams of National Disaster Response Force stationed in Madurai (2 teams) and one each in Coimbatore and Nilgiris and the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) should be ready to carry out rescue work in rain affected areas.

cyclonic storm Tauktae approaches the western coast of India.

With early warnings of the cyclone for the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the NDRF has mobilised adequate resources and self-contained rescue and relief teams in the coastal districts of these states which are likely to be affected by the cyclonic storm.

The NDRF teams are keeping a close watch on the development of the situation which is being monitored 24x7 from the control room.

A total of 48 NDRF teams have been deployed at the coastal areas.

CYCLONE INTENSIFYING: IMD

Mumbai/Ahmedabad: Cyclonic storm Tauktae had intensified and was heading towards the coast of Gujarat and the Union Territory of Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said Saturday evening. The storm is very likely to intensify further into a very severe cyclonic storm by late Saturday night, the IMD said, adding it was very likely to move north-northwestwards and cross Gujarat coast between Porbandar and Naliya around May 18 afternoon. As it would bring very heavy rainfall in that region, cities like Mumbai would not be affected much, the IMD added. There will be strong winds and heavy rainfall at isolated places May 17 over north Konkan, including Mumbai, the IMD said. The Maharashtra capital can expect showers from Sunday afternoon, said Shubhani Bhute, senior director (weather) IMD, Mumbai. The storm is currently 250 km southwest of Goa, she added. Goa alongwith Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri districts of Maharashtra would be mostly affected in terms of showers and gusty winds, Bhute said, adding the wind speeds would be around 60 to 70 kmph. The IMD has issued an 'orange alert' which means heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely over entire Konkan and hilly areas of western Maharashtra, mainly Kolhapur and Satara Sunday and Monday, she said.

ships, aircraft, helicopters, and diving and disaster relief teams are on standby for rendering full support to the state administrations as the

Scribe, activist held over FB posts on BJP

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Imphal, May 15: The Manipur police have arrested a journalist and a political activist over their Facebook posts reportedly criticising the ruling BJP leaders, police said Saturday.

A police official said that Imphal-based journalist Kishorechandra Wangkhem and political activist Erendro Leichombam were arrested Thursday evening from their homes on the basis of a complaint filed against the duo by Manipur state BJP Vice-President Usham Deban party General Secretary P

Premananda Meetei. The complaint said that Wangkhem and Leichombam have posted offensive comments referring to the death of state BJP President Saikhom Tikendra Singh, who fell prey to Covid-19 at a hospital in Imphal Thursday. Referring to Singh's death, the detainees in Manipuri language had posted comments saying "cow dung and cow urine do not work". Wangkhem and Leichombam, both around 40-years, had been arrested twice earlier on charges of sedition and for making various posts on social media against the government.

GLOOMY OVERCAST



Clouds hover over walled city during a rainy day at Badli Chaupar in Jaipur, Saturday

Stricter action needed as WhatsApp privacy policy goes live

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 15: With the controversial WhatsApp privacy policy coming into effect from Saturday for its over 2 billion users including more than 400 million in India, industry experts emphasised that the government must implement stricter data privacy rules and restrain the Facebook-owned app as was done while banning Chinese apps to protect the sovereignty of the country.

Giving an interim solace for those who do not accept the new policy, WhatsApp has said that its users will not immediately lose their accounts or face curtailed functionalities on the platform May 15, but they will have to eventually go through limited functionalities if they fail to accept the new



norms in the due course of time. Thursday, a senior Ministry of Electronics and IT official said during an ASSOCHAM event that the government is pro-actively

looking at a best possible action over the new WhatsApp privacy policy. MeitY Special Secretary and Financial Advisor Jyoti Arora stated that the ministry is aware

about the fact that Germany has banned the privacy policy of WhatsApp.

There is no judicial order in favour of WhatsApp. In view of the unlawful nature of this privacy policy, the government should restrain WhatsApp as was done while banning Chinese apps to protect sovereignty of India, said Advocate Virag Gupta, who is arguing K N Govindacharya's matter before the Delhi High Court for disclosure of details of designated officers of social media companies.

WhatsApp has said that after giving everyone time to review the privacy policy from May 15, after a period of several weeks, the reminder people receive will eventually become persistent.

After persistent reminders, the users will encounter limited functionality on WhatsApp until they

accept the updates.

The users won't be able to access chat list. After a few weeks of limited functionality, they won't be able to receive incoming calls or notifications and WhatsApp will stop sending messages and calls to their phones.

WhatsApp's new terms requiring users to accept them by a cut-off date to continue to avail full functionality has brought click wrap contracts and their intended manner of operation under the glare. Click wrap contracts require a user to click 'yes' or 'ok' to the terms, which constitutes legal consent for availing a service, said Raj Ramachandran, Partner, J Sagar Associates.

Given the substantial user base and the apparent network effect, it literally leaves little room for users to make a choice.

CHITRAKOOT JAIL SHOOTOUT

5 OFFICIALS SUSPENDED

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, May 15: The UP Government has taken serious note of the shootout in Chitrakoot jail in which at least three under-trials were killed Friday. On the instructions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, five personnel including Chitrakoot Jail Superintendent S P Tripathi and jailer Mahendra Pal have been suspended.

Director General Jail (DG) Anand Kumar said that five personnel including Jail Superintendent Tripathi and jailer Mahendra Pal have been suspended. A new superintendent and jailor have been posted in their place.

Shok Kumar Sagar has been appointed as Jail Superintendent and C P Tripathi as the new Jailor.

Officials say how the pistol reached the jail is not yet clear. There will be a judicial inquiry into the incident, the process of which has been started.

Chitrakoot police has registered an FIR and a thorough and detailed investigation will be carried out into the incident.

Among the suspended personnel are the head warden of the jail and a PAC soldier posted in security arrangements. DG Jail Anand Kumar said that investigations will be conducted from all possible angles.

To investigate the incident, a team comprising Commissioner Chitrakoot D K Singh, IG Chitrakoot, K Satyanarayana and DIG Prison Headquarters Sanjeev Tripathi has been constituted. The report will be submitted directly to the Chief Minister.

national

of the day quote

Lockdowns have been successful and have yielded results; cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Karnataka's Bengaluru are examples. After May 24 if there is a need for it to be extended, it has to be done. We have to save lives, leading life may become difficult, governments will have to take steps to improve it



SADANANDA GOWDA | UNION MINISTER

I have directed to the police department to take stringent action under the Goondas Act against those who hoard Remdesivir and sell oxygen cylinders at inflated price



M K STALIN | TAMIL NADU CM

BlackFungus is a new disease happening in Rajasthan. Liposomal Amphotericin B 50mg injections and Posaconazole 300mg tablets are needed to treat this



VASUNDHARA RAJE | FORMER RAJASTHAN CM

SHORT TAKES

Ch'garh to extend lockdown till 31

Raipur: The Chhattisgarh government has asked authorities in all the 28 districts to extend the COVID-19 lockdown till May 31 even as it granted more relaxations in economic and other activities, an official said Saturday. The lockdown, currently in force in all districts of the state, was set to end in most regions at May 15 midnight. The restrictions and relaxations will be applicable till May 31, the official from the public relations department said.

Tiger found dead, third in a week

Bhopal: A tiger was found dead in the buffer zone of the Bandhavgarh reserve in Madhya Pradesh, which took the number of tiger fatalities reported in the state to three within a week, an official said Saturday. The decomposed carcass of the tiger was found near a drain in the buffer area Friday, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve's field director Vincent Raheem told PTI over phone. "As the carcass was highly decomposed, the tiger's tongue and an internal organ were sent for testing to ascertain the cause of the death. The report is awaited," Raheem added.

Farmer killed in elephant attack

Mahasamund: A man was trampled to death by a wild elephant in Chhattisgarh's Mahasamund district, a forest official said Saturday. Maniram Yadav, a native of Parsadih village in Sirpur area, was attacked by the jumbo Friday night when he was spraying pesticides in his paddy field, he said. Yadav's 15-year-old son Jaial, who was also at the spot, climbed a tree and saved himself from the attack, he added.

COVID +ve woman bears healthy baby

Shahjahanpur (UP): A COVID-19 infected woman gave birth to a healthy baby girl at a hospital here, officials said Saturday. Sarladevi, 30, a resident of the Tilhar area, was admitted to the ICU unit of the Medical College in the city, after she complained of labour pain. Subsequently, she gave birth to the baby, Public Relations Officer of Medical College Dr Pooja Tripathi said, adding it was a normal delivery. Two other babies, whose mothers were coronavirus positive, were born at the ICU of the hospital. However, one of the babies died, she said.



The one who said Ganga has called him, has made the Mother Ganga cry. The Government of India's disastrous vaccine strategy will ensure a devastating third wave. It can't be repeated enough - India needs a proper vaccine strategy

RAHUL GANDHI | FORMER CONG PRESIDENT

PM stresses on door-to-door testing, localised containment



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 15: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Saturday emphasised on localised containment strategies in states where Test Positive Rate (TPR) in districts is high and adopting door to door testing and surveillance in rural India to contain the spread of Covid-19. The Prime Minister gave the direction while chairing a high-level meeting to discuss the Covid-19 and vaccination related situation in the country which is passing through the second wave of the deadly disease.

Localised containment strategies are the need of the hour specially for states where TPR in districts is high, said the Prime Minister, instructing that testing needs to be scaled up further, with use of both RT PCR and Rapid Tests, especially in areas with high test positivity rates. Modi said that states should be encouraged to report their num-

bers transparently without any pressure of high numbers showing adversely on their efforts and asked for augmentation of health care resources in rural areas to focus on door-to-door testing and surveillance. He also spoke about empowering ASHA and Anganwadi workers with all necessary tools. The Prime Minister asked for guidelines to be made available in easy language along with illustrations for home isolation and treatment in rural areas. Considering the need for oxy-

gen, Modi directed that a distribution plan for ensuring oxygen supply in rural areas must be worked out, including provision of oxygen concentrators. The Prime Minister also stressed on the need to provide necessary training to health workers in the operation of equipment like oxygen concentrators, and that there should be proper power supply to ensure smooth operation of such medical devices. The Prime Minister took serious note of some reports about ventilators lying unutilised in storage in some states and directed that an immediate audit of installation and operation of ventilators provided by the Central government should be carried out. He added that refresher training for properly operating ventilators should be provided to health care workers if necessary. Modi assured that India's fight against Covid has been guided throughout by scientists and subject experts and will continue being guided by them.

25 arrests, 25 FIRs over posters critical of Modi

New Delhi: The Delhi Police has registered 25 FIRs and arrested as many people for allegedly pasting posters critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in connection with the vaccination drive against COVID-19, officials said Saturday. The posters reading "Modiji humare bachon ki vaccine videsh kyu bhej diya" (PM why did you send vaccines of our children to foreign countries) were plastered in several parts of the city, they said. Thursday, police received information about the posters following which senior officers of the districts were alerted. Based on further complaints, 25 FIRs were registered under sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code and other relevant sections, including section 3 of the Prevention of Defacement of Property Act, across various districts of the Delhi Police, officials said.

India remains hugely concerning: WHO



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Geneva/New Delhi, May 15: India remains hugely concerning, with several states continuing to see a worrying number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has said. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director General said in a briefing that WHO is responding and has shipped thousands of oxygen concentrators, tents for mobile field hospitals, masks and other medical supplies. And we thank all the stakeholders who are supporting India, he said. COVID-19 has already cost more than 3.3 million lives and we're on track for the second year of this pandemic to be far more deadly than the first, Tedros said. However, it's not only India that has emergency needs, he added. Nepal, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Egypt are just some of the countries that are dealing with spikes in cases and

hospitalizations. He added that the fact that so many are still not protected is a sad reflection on the gross distortion in access to vaccines across the globe. In January, I spoke about the potential unfolding of a moral catastrophe. Unfortunately, we are now witnessing this play out. In a handful of rich countries, which bought up the majority of the vaccine supply, lower risk groups are now being vaccinated, he said. I understand why some countries want to vaccinate their children and adolescents, but right now I urge them to reconsider and to instead donate vaccines to COVAX, WHO said. Because in low and lower-middle income countries, vaccine supply has not been enough to even immunize health and care workers, and hospitals are being inundated with people that need lifesaving care urgently. At present, only 0.3 per cent of vaccine supply is going to low-income countries, he added.

Commonwealth nations target inclusive shift to clean energy

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 15: The Second Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Forum concluded with strong recommendations for member countries to work together to fast-track an inclusive, just and equitable transition to low-carbon energy systems across the Commonwealth. The biennial gathering, held virtually over May 12-14, explored practical solutions to help meet global commitments on energy made under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Participants discussed new low-carbon technologies, addressing the high cost of technology and need for better access to finance, as well as policy recommendations

that promote sustainability in the electricity, transport, cooling and cooking sectors. Opening at the event, Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland said: "We must urgently step up our action to implement the Paris Agreement and achieve our commitments on sustainable energy. While the transition pathways may differ across Commonwealth countries, the move to clean energy systems is a common goal." "The pace of the energy transition needs urgent acceleration for which strong political will and ambition by Commonwealth member countries is required. Governments need to establish the enabling frameworks to attract finance, scale up technology and lower costs for energy transitions."

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Guwahati, May 15: Days after Himanta Biswa Sarma, the new Assam Chief Minister, appealed to militant outfits to shun violence and join the mainstream, the outlawed The United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I) Saturday announced a unilateral ceasefire for three months with immediate effect. ULFA-I, led by self-styled commander-in-chief Paresh Barua, in a statement, said that in view of the Covid-19 pandemic, the outfit has unilaterally suspended all kind of military operations in Assam for three months from May 15. The statement, in Assamese language, also alleged that the security forces had hatched a clandestine plan to malign the ULFA-I. After 2006, this is the second time the anti-talk banned outfit has announced a unilateral ceasefire in the state. The ULFA-I announcement came five days after Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma appealed to ULFA-I supreme Barua and other extremist outfits to come forward for peace talks. After taking oath as the 15th Chief Minister of Assam, Sarma Monday had urged ULFA-I led by Paresh Barua and other militant groups to shun the path of violence and join the mainstream. Through negotiations and talks



all problems are expected to be solved. Killings and abduction turn the situation more complicated, he had said. Sarma Thursday said that the state government is taking all possible steps to rescue ONGC engineer Rital Saikia from the captivity of the outlawed ULFA-I. Sarma, who also holds the home portfolio, met Saikia's wife and younger brother during his visit to Majuli Thursday. The ULFA-I April 21 had kidnapped three engineers of the state owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation from a drilling site at Lakwa in eastern Assam's Sibsagar district. The Army, along with Assam Rifles troopers rescued two hostages from captivity following a fierce encounter with militants April 23 night, but Saikia (the third engineer)

is still missing. The anti-talk outlawed ULFA-I had recently released radio operator Ram Kumar, a resident of Bihar, and drilling superintendent Pranab Kumar Gogoi of Sivasagar district, more than 100 days after the two employees of Delhi-based private oil and gas exploration company Quippo Oil and Gas Infrastructure Ltd were abducted from Arunachal Pradesh last year. Demanding a sovereign Assam, ULFA was formed in 1979 and has been carrying out insurgency in the northeastern state since then. In 2011, another faction of ULFA, under Arabinda Rajkhowa, had announced a unilateral ceasefire for political negotiation and joined the peace process but the move was strongly opposed by Paresh Barua.



She encouraged a "people-centred" approach that is inclusive and leaves no one behind. Countries were invited to lead 'action groups' focused on three key pillars, which make up the

Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Transition agenda: Inclusive Energy Transitions; Technology and Innovation; and Enabling Frameworks.

Countries also called for more collaboration on sharing knowledge, technologies and innovative solutions, including best practices on research, development and deployment of clean energy technologies in critical sectors, such as clean cooking and cooling. The event featured presentations by experts in the field as well as in-depth country presentations from Australia, Barbados, Botswana, Canada, Ghana, Kenya, Singapore, Trinidad and Tobago,

CHHATRASAL STADIUM BRAWL

A Delhi Court Saturday issued non-bailable warrants against two-time Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar and six others in connection with the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of a wrestler here, police said. This comes days after a lookout notice was issued against Kumar in the same case



SIGH OF RELIEF



An old woman smiles after receiving first installment of the Corona Relief fund by Tamil Nadu govt, at Nagercoil in Kanyakumari district, Saturday

O2 CONCENTRATOR RACKET

BJP alleges link between Kalra, Congress

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 15: The BJP Saturday alleged links between businessman Navneet Kalra, who is accused of hoarding and selling oxygen concentrators in the black market, and the Congress. BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi said Kalra was given the membership of Golf Club, one of the most premium clubs in the national capital, by Congress leader Ajay Maken when he was the urban development minister in the UPA-I government. The businessman has also

Congress MP Abhishek Manu Singhvi is lawyer of all such "criminals" and black-marketeers, she said, hitting out at the opposition party. Kalra and officials of Matrix Cellular had hoarded about 7,500 concentrators, she said, alleging their links with the Congress. She claimed that an artificial shortage of oxygen was created and exploited by those close to the party. Lekhi said Kalra's Facebook page shows his pictures with Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

claimed in his page that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic, she added. The chef who works at Kalra's restaurant had described Gandhis as the first family of the country, she said. "The Congress' hand is always with black marketeers and hoarders, and this is evident from the events which have unfolded themselves. These people are directly in links with the Congress. The Congress has encouraged such people when it was in power," she alleged.

Mamata Banerjee's brother dies of Covid

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, May 15: On a day when the state announced a nearly-lockdown condition to fight the spike in covid cases in the state for the next 15 days, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee lost her younger brother who was battling for life in a private hospital for the last one month. Ashim Banerjee, the chief minister's younger brother, died Saturday morning after being detected with Covid-19 last month, the hospital said in a statement. Banerjee, 62, was undergoing treatment at the hospital for the past one month, sources in the hospital said. He was detected with Covid-19 last month and was undergoing treatment for almost a month now. He had certain comorbidities such as hypertension. He died at 9.20 am in the morning, a doctor in the hospital said. His last rites will be performed at Nimtala cremation ground Sunday following Covid protocols. Not only Ashim Banerjee but on the same day the pandemic took the lives of five doctors across the state. The doctors who lost their lives are well-known pathologist Dr Subir Kumar Dutta (90), renowned physician from Barasat, Dr Utpal Sengupta (in his 70s), surgeon Dr Satish Ghata (late 70s), Dr Sandipan Mandal (37) of Murshidabad Medical College and Hospital, and gynecologist Dr Dilip Chakraborty.

international



Now, it is our turn to step up and help India in its moment of crisis. We are sending vital medical equipment to India to send a clear message: nobody is in the fight against Covid-19 alone. Together, we can save lives and beat back the pandemic
BILL DE BLASIO | MAYOR, NEW YORK

4.5 BN-YEAR-OLD METEORITE TO GO ON PUBLIC DISPLAY

An over 4.5 billion-year-old meteorite that fell in Gloucestershire in February is going on public display at London's Natural History Museum. It is an 'extremely rare' meteorite recovered from the UK in 30 years



of the day quote

We have said with all clarity that we are ready to meet with the members of the Strike Committee to advance in negotiations and forge agreements. That message has been transmitted in a transparent way
IVAN DUQUE | PRESIDENT, COLOMBIA

Anyone who uses such protests to shout out their hatred of Jews is abusing the right to protest. Anti-Semitic rallies will not be tolerated by our democracy. We oppose this with all the strength of a democratic constitutional state
STEFFEN SEIBERT | GOVERNMENT SPOKESPERSON, GERMANY

It's dangerous to host the big international event from all over the world. So, the risk is too big and... I'm against having the Tokyo Olympics this year. It is a suicide mission
HIROSHI MIKITANI | CEO OF RAKUTEN, JAPAN

SHORT TAKES

China approves inactivated vax

Beijing: China has approved one more inactivated Covid-19 vaccine for emergency use, according to an announcement by the developer of the job. Shenzhen Kangtai Biological Products Co. Ltd., the developer, said Friday that the vaccine it developed has started related work for Phase III clinical trial. The vaccine reported no adverse events with an intensity of grade 3 or above in the first two phases of its clinical trials.

Revoking steps issued by Trump

Washington: US President Joe Biden signed an executive order that will revoke several measures issued by his predecessor Donald Trump. The order signed Friday will revoke the measure to establish a "National Garden of American Heroes" that called for erecting statues of hundreds of prominent Americans though some of them are controversial over their racial records. The order also revoked Trump's another action which prioritised punishment for those caught vandalising statues or monuments.

1st repatriation flight lands in Oz

Canberra: The first repatriation flight from India landed in Australia Saturday after the government's controversial travel ban to the Covid-battered country ended. The Qantas jet carrying approximately 80 Australians, who were stranded in India, touched down at a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) base in Darwin earlier in the day. The flight was scheduled to carry about 150 passengers but dozens were blocked from boarding after 40-tested positive for Covid-19 and 30 were deemed close contacts of the positive cases.

Two tornadoes kill 12 in China

Beijing: Twelve people were killed and over 300 injured when two powerful tornadoes walloped Chinese cities of Wuhan and Suzhou Friday night, leaving a trail of destruction of houses and factories. Eight people were killed and over 230 injured when a tornado, packing winds of 23.9 meters per second, ripped through the Caidian District of Wuhan Friday night. Four people were killed and 19 others injured after a tornado hit the city of Suzhou in east China's Jiangsu Province.

Vax less effective against B1.617.2 transmission

The government's Scientific Group for Emergencies (SAGE) believes B.1.617.2 VOC could be up to 50 per cent more transmissible than one first recorded in the southeast England region of Kent last year, which is the UK's dominant strain



London, May 15: The vaccines being administered to protect against Covid-19 are "almost certainly less effective" against preventing the transmission of the B.1.617.2 variant first identified in India, a leading UK scientist who advises the country's vaccination programme said Saturday. Professor Anthony Harnden, from the University of Oxford who is the deputy chair of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), said it was important to approach the easing of lockdown in England with "utmost caution" as it remains unclear exactly how much more transmissible the variant detected in India is. But he reiterated that there is no evidence so far of increased sever-

ity of illness or that the particular mutation of the coronavirus evades the vaccine. "The vaccines may be less effective against mild disease but we don't think they're less effective against severe disease. But in combination with being less effective against mild disease, they're almost certainly less effective against transmission," Prof. Harnden told the BBC. "We don't know how much more transmissible it is yet. All the evidence so far suggests there is no evidence of increased severity of illness or that it evades the vaccine. So, at the moment, on the basis of the evidence we are doing the right thing, coolly, calmly continuing with Monday, but keeping everything under review," he said, in reference to the next stage in

the easing of lockdown that begins in England from Monday. Under the UK's action plan laid out to tackle the B.1.617.2 variant of concern (VOC) first identified in India, all over-50s and the most vulnerable groups are to be offered their second Covid-19 vaccine dose earlier than scheduled. "We have implemented measures at record pace to get on top of this new variant and control the spread. Everyone has a role to play in this effort - accept the invitation to get a jab when it comes, and if you live in one of the areas where we've introduced surge testing, get your free PCR test. Let's work to fight this together," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock. The latest data on the B.1.617.2 variant, published by Public Health England (PHE) Thursday, shows

UK PM speeds up 2nd dose for 50+

A rise in cases of the coronavirus variant dominant in India could "pose serious disruption" to Britain's reopening plans, Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned Friday. England will take the next step of reopening Monday as planned, but the final stage, currently scheduled for June 21, could be in doubt. "I do not believe we need to delay our roadmap," said Johnson. But, "this new variant could pose a serious disruption to our progress," he said, adding "We will do whatever it takes to keep the public safe." Second doses of vaccines will be accelerated for the over-50 and the clinically vulnerable in a bid to keep the strain at bay, Johnson told the press briefing.

The number of cases across the UK has risen from 520 last week to 1,313 cases this week. Most cases are in the north west of England, with some in London. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are also following similar patterns, though the Scottish government has kept the city of Glasgow and the northern area of Moray under restrictions because of rising case numbers of the B.1.617.2 VOC.

MINDAT RESISTANCE

Military battles anti-coup rebels

AGENCIES

Yangon, May 15: Myanmar's army battled local militia fighters in the northwestern town of Mindat Saturday, residents said, to try to quell a rebellion that has sprung up to oppose the junta that seized power in the Southeast Asian country in February.

The junta imposed martial law in Mindat Thursday and then stepped up attacks on what it called "armed terrorists". A spokesman did not answer calls requesting comment on the fighting Saturday. Residents taking cover in the town said fighting raged Saturday. The Irrawaddy news service said some homes had been destroyed as the army resumed artillery bombardment Saturday.

Myanmar already had some two dozen ethnic armed groups, who have waged war for decades against an army dominated by the Bamar majority. The Chinland Defence Force was set up in response to the coup.

The junta-controlled Myanmar News Agency said fighting



The fighting in Mindat, Chin state, underlines the growing chaos in Myanmar as the junta struggles to impose authority in the face of daily protests, strikes and sabotage attacks

Wednesday and Thursday in Mindat involved 100 people who attacked a police station and about 50 targeting the state-run Myanmar Economic Bank.

At least 788 people have been killed by the junta's security forces in crackdowns on protests against its rule, according to an advocacy group.

BLACK LIVES MATTER



A Black Movement activist holds a candle and a cross during a protest against racism and police violence, on the day that marks 133 years since the abolition of Slavery in the country, in Brasilia, Brazil

Kremlin bemoans Ukraine's crackdown on pro-Russia Oppn

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Moscow, May 15: Russian President Vladimir Putin Friday harshly criticized Ukrainian authorities for what he described as their crackdown on the Moscow-friendly opposition amid simmering tensions between the two neighbors.

Putin's statement comes a day after Viktor Medvedchuk, who heads the Opposition Platform for Life party, the largest opposition force in parliament, was placed under house arrest on treason charges that he denied. Medvedchuk has close personal ties with Putin, the godfather of his daughter.

"Those selective, politically motivated decisions are aimed at cleansing the political field from those



US, Czech added in 'unfriendly countries' list

Russia has included the US and the Czech Republic in a list of countries that have been classified as "unfriendly", according to a document published on the nation's official legal information portal. "To approve the attached list of foreign states committing unfriendly actions against Russia, citizens of Russia or Russian legal entities, against which counter measures established by the decree of Russian President dated April 23, 2021, No. 243 ... shall be applied," the document published Friday read.

Ukrainian authorities in February, when his financial assets were frozen for three years.

US joins global push against violent extremism online

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Wellington, May 15: Two years after a white supremacist in New Zealand live streamed the slaughter of 51 Muslim worshippers on Facebook, French President Emmanuel Macron says the internet continues to be used by terrorists as a weapon to propagate hate.

Macron and other leaders from tech giants and governments around the world including the US for the first time gathered virtually Saturday to find better ways to stop extremist violence from spreading online, while also respecting freedom of expression.

It was part of a global effort started by Macron and New Zealand PM



Jacinda Ardern after deadly attacks in their countries were streamed or shared on social networks.

The US government and four other countries joined the effort, known as the Christchurch Call, for the first time this year. It involves some 50 nations plus tech companies including Google, Facebook, Twitter and Amazon, and is named for the NZ city where the slaughter at the two mosques took place.

WEST BANK ERUPTS IN PROTEST

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Gaza City, May 15: Turmoil from the battle between Israel and Hamas spilled over into the West Bank, sparking the most widespread Palestinian protests in years as hundreds of young demonstrators in multiple towns clashed with Israeli troops, who shot and killed at least 11 people.

Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip continued into early Saturday, when an airstrike on a house in Gaza City killed at least seven Palestinians - the highest number of fatalities in a single hit. That strike came a day after a furious overnight barrage of tank fire and airstrikes that wreaked destruction in some towns, killed a family of six in their house and sent thousands fleeing their homes.

6TH DAY OF CONSECUTIVE CLASHES



The Israeli military said the operation involved 160 warplanes dropping some 80 tons of explosives over the course of 40 minutes and succeeded in destroying a network of tunnels used by Hamas to elude airstrikes and surveillance.

Israel appeared determined to inflict as much damage as possible on Gaza's Hamas rulers before in-

Israel strikes Gaza tower housing media offices

Israel destroyed a 12-storey tower block in Gaza housing the offices of the US-based Associated Press and other news media Saturday, saying the building was also used by the Islamist militant group Hamas. The al-Jalaa building in Gaza City, which also houses the offices of Qatar-based broadcaster Al Jazeera as well as other offices and apartments, had been evacuated after the owner received advanced warning of the impending strike. "We are shocked and horrified that the Israeli military would target and destroy the building housing AP's bureau and other news organizations in Gaza," AP President and CEO Gary Pruitt said in a statement. "The world will know less about what is happening in Gaza because of what happened today." Gary called the strike "an incredibly disturbing development".

ternational efforts for a cease-fire accelerated. Since Monday night, Hamas has fired hundreds of rockets into Israel, which has pounded the Gaza Strip with strikes.

In Gaza, at least 126 people have been killed, including 31 children and 20 women; in Israel, seven people have

been killed, including a 6-year-old boy and a soldier.

In the occupied West Bank, on the outskirts of Ramallah, Nablus and other towns and cities, hundreds of Palestinians protested against the Gaza campaign and Israeli actions in Jerusalem.

Google leads efforts for H-1B spouses to get to work

An H-4 visa is issued by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services to immediate family members (spouse and children under 21 years of age) of the H-1B visa holders

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, May 15: Google is leading a determined effort by US tech giants to support a programme that gives work authorisation for spouses of those possessing H-1B foreign work visas, the most sought after among Indian IT professionals.

Google is joined by 30 other companies to support the H-4 EAD



(Employment Authorisation Document) programme.

An H-4 visa is issued by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to immediate

family members (spouse and children under 21 years of age) of the H-1B visa holders.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US compa-

Google is proud to support our nation's immigrants. We joined 30 other companies to protect the H-4 EAD programme which spurs innovation, creates jobs and opportunities, and helps families
SUNDAR PICHAI | CEO, GOOGLE

nies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

"Google is proud to support our nation's immigrants. We joined 30 other companies to protect the H-4 EAD programme which spurs

innovation, creates jobs and opportunities, and helps families," Google CEO Sundar Pichai tweeted.

Google Friday filed a legal brief in a lawsuit called Save Jobs USA vs US Department of Homeland Security. Tech companies that signed onto the amicus brief include Adobe, Amazon, Apple, eBay, IBM, Intel, Microsoft, PayPal and Twitter.

"To support this important programme, we are leading an amicus brief with over 40 companies and organisations to preserve and protect the H-4 EAD programme," Catherine Lacavera, Vice President, Legal, Google, said in a blog post.

"This builds on an amicus brief we recently joined in support of a lawsuit filed by the American Immigration Lawyers Association to expedite the delayed processing time of H-4 work authorisations," she said. In the amicus brief, Google

said: "The regulation at issue here the H-4 Rule, US Department of Homeland Security, Employment Authorization for Certain H-4 Dependent Spouses, 80 Fed. Reg. 10,284 (Feb. 25, 2015) provides work authorization to more than 90,000 H-4 visa holders (spouses of certain H-1B visa holders), more than 90 per cent of whom are women."

"Invalidation of this rule would result in these talented individuals being barred from the workplace, forcibly severing tens of thousands of employment relationships across the country," it said.

The results would be utterly destructive for the families impacted; by just one measure, about 87 per cent of these families have made crucial life decisions on the promise of H-4 employment, including whether to have a child and whether to buy a house, it said.

business



The vaccine situation in India is like arranged marriage. First you are not ready, then you don't like any, then you don't get any!! Those who got are unhappy thinking may be the other one would have been better. Those who did not get any are willing to get any one

KIRAN MAZUMDAR-SHAW | BIOCON CHIEF

NO DENIAL OF VAX FOR LACK OF AADHAAR

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) Saturday asserted that no one should be denied vaccine, medicine, hospitalisation or treatment just because they do not have an Aadhaar.



of the day quote

We were pleased with our performance this quarter, achieving a 38.9 per cent increase in revenue and a 51.1 per cent increase in PBT year-over-year

MANISH BHATNAGAR | MD, SKF INDIA

We are reinforcing our strategic growth charter with the acquisition of M3bi. Our acquisitions in recent years have enhanced our competitiveness, bringing value to our customers

HARSH GOENKA | CHAIRMAN, RPG ENTERPRISES

We at ICEA believes that the PLI scheme would give thrust to 'Make in India' initiative and will attract huge investments of ₹45,000 crore plus in the coming years

PANKAJ MOHINDROO | CHAIRMAN, ICEA

Govt mulls sops to offset spike in fert input prices

International prices of raw materials of Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP) and other P&K fertilisers have increased sharply



AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 15: The Centre Saturday said it is considering subsidies to offset rise in global prices of raw materials of phosphatic and potassic (P&K) fertilisers in a bid to ensure their availability to farmers at subsidised rates across the country. The government is taking all necessary steps to safeguard the interests of farmers during the COVID-19 crisis, it said.

Unlike urea, P&K fertilisers are decontrolled products. The prices are fixed by the manufacturers and the government gives them fixed subsidies each year. For the current fiscal year, subsidies for

P&K fertilisers have been kept unchanged.

In a statement, the Fertiliser Ministry said in the last few months, the international prices of raw materials of Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP) and other P&K fertilisers have increased sharply. Prices of finished DAP, etc in the international market have also risen proportionately.

"Despite this sharp increase, DAP prices in India were not increased by the companies till last month. However, some companies have now increased the DAP price," it said.

However, the government is fully sensitive to the concerns of farm-

ers and is already taking steps to tackle the situation so that the farming community can be saved from the effects of this price rise of P&K fertilisers (including DAP), it said.

On the pricing front of DAP, the government has already asked all the fertiliser companies to sell their old stocks of DAP, etc at old prices only, it said.

"Additionally, the Government of India is also considering the subsidy rates to offset the rise in international prices of raw materials of P&K fertilisers and DAP in order to support the farmers' cause and lessen the financial burden on them," the ministry noted.

The government is fully aware of the situation, and it is being closely monitored at a very high level in the government, it said. In accordance with its farmer-friendly approach, the ministry said the government is committed to ensuring the availability of P&K fertilisers to farmers at affordable prices, it added.

Fertiliser companies had raised the retail prices of P&K fertilisers like DAP in line with the global market effective from April 1. But they were directed not to increase the rates for the time being.

GST COUNCIL TO MEET MAY 28

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 15: The GST Council will meet May 28 and is likely to discuss tax rates on COVID-related drugs, oxygen equipment and vaccines. The meeting among other things is also likely to discuss the compensation mechanism for states' GST revenue shortfall for the on-going fiscal which began April 1.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will chair the 43rd GST Council meeting via video conferencing on May 28, 2021. "The meeting will be attended by MOS Shri @ianuragthakur besides Finance Ministers of States & UTs and Senior officers from Union Government & States," Office of Nirmala Sitharaman tweeted.

Earlier this month, West Bengal Finance Minister Amit Mitra and Punjab Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal had demanded that a virtual GST Council meeting be held.

The meeting of the Council is supposed to take place at least once every quarter of a financial year. However, the panel has not met since October 5 last year.

Congress working president Sonia Gandhi had last month demanded that all life-saving drugs, equipment and instruments required to treat COVID-19 patients must be exempted from GST. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress has also made a similar demand.



Sitharaman had, however, ruled out exempting COVID vaccines, medicines and oxygen concentrators from GST saying such an exemption will make the life-saving items costlier for consumers as manufacturers will not be able to offset the taxes paid on inputs.

Currently, domestic supplies and commercial imports of vaccines attract 5 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST), while COVID drugs and oxygen concentrators attract 12 per cent levy.

The Centre had last fiscal year released ₹70,000 crore to states on account of GST compensation. This is over and above the ₹1.10 lakh crore released to states under the special borrowing mechanism to compensate them for shortfall in the GST collection this financial year.

As much as ₹63,000 crore worth compensation is still due to be paid for 2020-21 fiscal year which ended March 31, 2021.

PPL face masks, sanitiser for cops

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: Paradeep Phosphates Saturday donated sanitiser and face masks worth ₹1 lakh to the Commissionerate Police to help them keep away from Covid-19. Sudhi Ranjan Mishra, head of corporate affairs, PPL, handed over the items to Police Commissioner Soumendra Kumar Priyadarshi at the Police Seva Bhavan Saturday.

Priyadarshi thanked the PPL management for its noble gesture. PPL, during this pandemic, has extended a helping hand to the community.



The Commissionerate Police is implementing government guidelines during the lock down and shutdown. Most police personnel find themselves outside their homes. They get exposed to dangers posed by the deadly virus. Sanitizer and face masks can provide them basic security against the coronavirus.

Vaccine drive cheapest cost to economic normalisation

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 15: Stepping up the vaccination drive is the cheapest as well as the most viable policy path to economic normalisation, as per a research report by Emkay Global Financial Services.

Accordingly, the report cited that this policy path was the best suited one given the strong positive externalities. "The overall estimated welfare cost of vaccinating universal population would be 0.6-0.7 per cent of GDP, assuming no wastage and optimal distribution," Emkay's Lead Economist Madhavi Arora said.

"This is much lower than the current 0.9-1 per cent loss of monthly output amid existing soft local lockdowns, clearly implying a successful vaccine strategy is the cheapest optimal policy path to economic normalisation."



According to the report, there exists an average monthly supply gap of 170 million jabs to cover universal population by CY21 end.

"The vaccination drive is skewed state-wise and has overall slowed substantially, with current 7 dma below the peak of 3.7mm in March 21."

India's pharma industry grows to 59 pc in April

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 15: The fresh wave of Covid-19 in the country has pushed up sales of medicines and resulted in exponential growth for the pharmaceutical sector.

According to total sales audit data from world's largest pharmaceutical market research firm IMS Health, the Indian Pharma Market (IPM) grew 59 per cent yoy in April, 2021 vs 16 per cent yoy in March, 2021 due to the low base effect in April, 2020 and sharp surge in Covid-19-related sales.

On the MAT (moving annual turnover) basis, IPM grew 9.6 per cent, primarily driven by pricing growth of 4.3 per cent and new product launch growth of 4.6 per cent. Volume growth was muted at 0.8 per cent.

According to a report from Emkay Global Financial Services, all major therapies posted high double-digit growth in April 21. Within Chronic therapies, Cardiac therapy grew 22 per cent. Similarly Anti-diabetic therapy grew 10 per cent. VMS (vitamins, minerals and supplements) posted record growth of 80 per cent in April 21 vs 27 per cent in March 21.

SHORT TAKES

Hyundai extends free service

New Delhi: Hyundai Motor India Saturday said it has extended warranty, extended warranty and free service timelines by two months for its customers who are unable to avail services due to lockdown conditions in their cities or states. The initiative has been taken in line with the automaker's support to customers across the country during these challenging times, the company said in a statement. "During these challenging times, the company has initiated multiple programs to expedite relief to people across the country by delivering lifesaving equipment. Also, we have announced the extension of warranty, extended warranty and free service to our customers by 2 months to ensure adequate support during these challenging time," Hyundai Motor India Director Tarun Garg said.

Penna Cement files ₹1,550-cr IPO

New Delhi: Penna Cement has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise ₹1,550 crore through an initial share-sale. The initial public offer (IPO) comprises fresh issue of equity shares worth ₹1,300 crore and an offer for sale of up to ₹250 crore by the promoter, according to draft red herring prospectus. Proceeds from fresh issue will be used to pay debts of ₹550 crore. Besides, ₹105 crore will be utilised for funding capital expenditure requirements for its KP Line II Project and ₹80 crore towards upgrading its raw grinding and cement mill in Talaricheruvu. In addition, the company will use ₹130 crore and ₹110 crore towards setting up a waste heat recovery plant in Tandur and Talaricheruvu respectively.

Trident plans to raise ₹1,100 cr

New Delhi: Textiles and paper maker Trident Ltd is planning to raise up to ₹1,100 crore from the market by issuing NCDs and equity shares in tranches. The company's board on Saturday approved raising up to ₹600 crore by issuing Non-Convertible Debentures (NCDs) and up to ₹500 crore through equity shares, Trident said in a regulatory filing. The board also recommended the fund raising resolution to be approved by the shareholders in the next meeting, it added. Besides, it okayed the appointment of Naveet Jindal as CEO for Paper, Chemicals and Energy Business of the company and Swapna Nath as CEO for Budhni Location.

Khimji goes online for Akshaya Tritiya buys

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 15: Khimji Jewellers has brought an exclusive offer of online gold booking on the auspicious occasion of Akshaya Tritiya. Under the offer, customers can pre-book their choice of gold at today's rate online on Khimji's website khimjionline.in and redeem their booking against 22K hallmarked gold jewellery to be purchased post lockdown.

Khimji has announced Odia film actress Elina Samantaryay as its brand ambassador.

Welcoming Elina on the board, Mitesh Khimji, Director of Khimji Jewellers, said, "Khimji is happy and proud to introduce the beautiful, gracious and talented actress, Elina Samantaryay as its brand ambassador. We are looking forward to a long term association with her keeping in mind her representation of millennial Odias".

"At this time of the pandemic, customer's safety is the foremost concern for Khimji. We want our customers to stay home and stay safe. Also we do understand the sentiments of our customers for the auspicious occasion Akshaya Tritiya which is believed to bring good luck. The offer of online pre-booking would allow our customers



to buy gold on this auspicious occasion staying safe at home," he added. "Akshaya Tritiya is one of the biggest occasions for Odias and I know what Khimji means to people in Odisha in such an occasion where gold buying is a tradition of fortune" Elina said.

She also said, "This Akshaya Tritiya offer of Khimji is well aligned with the sentiments of Odia people. Hence customers should not wait and book their gold of fortune online from the website and get them after lockdown."

Power consumption up 19 pc in first half of May

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 15: Power consumption in the country grew by around 19 per cent in the first fortnight of May to 51.67 billion units (BU) over the same period last year, showing recovery in industrial and commercial demand of electricity, according to the power ministry data.

Power consumption in the first fortnight of May 2020 was 43.55 BU. The power consumption in the entire month of May last year was 102.08 BU.

During the first fortnight of May this year (from May 1 to 14), peak power demand met or the highest supply in a day touched the highest level of 168.78 GW (on May 6, 2021) and recorded growth of over 15 per cent over 146.54 GW (peak met) recorded in the same period in 2020 (on May 13, 2020).

The power consumption in April grew nearly 40 per cent to 118.08 BU. Power consumption in April 2020 had dropped to 84.55 BU from 110.11 BU in the same month in 2019, mainly because of fewer economic activities following the imposition of lockdown by the government in the last week of March 2020 to contain the spread of deadly



COVID-19.

The power consumption also fell in May 2020 to 102.08 BU from 120.02 BU in May 2019. Similarly, peak power demand met or the highest power supply in a day also slumped to 132.73 GW in April last year from 176.81 GW in the same month in 2019, showing the impact of lockdown on economic activities.

The fewer economic activities also resulted in a fall of peak power demand in May 2020 to 166.22 GW from 182.53 GW in May 2019.

Taking to PTI, Davinder Sandhu, Advisor Primus Partners said, "Energy is derived demand, and

with onset of summer and the productive pre-monsoon cycle of the Indian economy, an uptick is always expected."

Sandhu who is also a former Advisor at World Bank said, "Both energy demand and supply have risen by 25-40 per cent over March-May 2021, with thermal PLFs (plant load factor or capacity utilisation) rising to 75 per cent and more, after many quarters. This is aided by the opening of the economy in Q1 (January-March 2021), with rising economic output as well as sharp uptick in exports."

The second wave of lockdowns will certainly impact economic activity, and in turn, energy demand. The larger than usual increase in part is attributed to lower base, and as well as to the pent up demand being executed now, he added.

After a gap of six months, power consumption had recorded a 4.6 per cent year-on-year growth in September 2020 and 11.6 per cent in October 2020.

In November 2020, the power consumption growth slowed to 3.12 per cent, mainly due to the early onset of winters. In December 2020, power consumption grew by 4.5 per cent while it was up 4.4 per cent in January 2021.

Govt eases norms to fast track nod for imported cylinders

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 15: The government Saturday eases certain norms under Gas Cylinders Rules, 2016 to fast track approvals for imported cylinders and pressure vessels for storage and transportation of medical oxygen amid rising Covid cases.

The relaxations would be valid for six months or till further orders of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), an official statement said.

The department said that the certification of Petroleum and Explosive Safety Organization (PESO) will not be mandatory before importing consignment of oxygen cylinders, and containers.

The certification of PESO will be required before use of the oxygen cylinders, which entails weight and hydro testing, it added.

"The Indian missions should, however, ensure that the oxygen cylinders should comply with India or international standards before shipment," it said.

In case of filled cylinders, the agency exporting to India would



have to certify that the oxygen filled in the cylinder is of such purity and concentration that is fit for medical use.

The certification would be attested by the Indian mission in the exporting country and soon upon arrival in India, such filled cylinders will be inspected on sample basis by an empanelled agency of PESO.

"All the filled cylinders must be

verified for quality of gas filled therein under the supervision of medical/ Food and Drugs Controllers and if quality of gas conforms to their requirement of medical oxygen, cylinders may be sent directly to hospitals for use," the department said.

Regarding PSA (pressure swing adsorption) installations at hospitals with filling facilities or at COVID centres, it said PSA plants

where generated oxygen is directly supplied to hospital and no filling of cylinders is taking place, in such cases the facilities do not need any permission or license under PESO rules.

The department instructed that if the PSA is attached with a compressor and filling of oxygen cylinder is to take place, hospitals have to notify it to PESO with certain information like number of cylin-

The PESO certification will be required before use of oxygen cylinders, which entails weight and hydro testing. The relaxations would be valid for six months or till further orders

ders to be stored at site; and number of filling points.

"Any COVID centre may utilise liquid cylinders on board with vaporizer for supplying of gaseous medical oxygen through pipeline or for filling cylinders in open places are permitted" subject to certain conditions, it said.

Further, it said that in case of consignment of oxygen cylinders, ISO containers or PSA plants or its related equipment have already arrived in India, without taking import permission from PESO, due to an urgency, the filling permission for these cylinders will be issued based on relaxed rules.

TORRES BRIGHTENS CITY LIGHTS

Young Spaniard's hat-trick helps newly-crowned Premier League champions Manchester City overcome Newcastle challenge in a 7-goal thriller



FERRAN ECLIPSES MESSI RECORD

NEWCASTLE: Ferran Torres broke a record previously held by Lionel Messi when he struck a memorable hat-trick for Manchester City against Newcastle Friday. The 21-year-old's treble helped the newly crowned Premier League champions to a thrilling 4-3 victory against Newcastle at St James' Park. In doing so he became the youngest player to score a league hat-trick for a Pep Guardiola side, the previous record being set by Messi 11 years ago. Argentine superstar Messi was 22 years and 200 days old when he scored a hat-trick in a 5-0 La Liga win for Guardiola's Barcelona against Tenerife in 2010. Fast forward 11 years and Torres is 125 days younger than Messi was, with all three of his goals coming in a remarkable 24-minute spell either side of halftime.

The win over Newcastle was their 12th straight away victory - a record, as they surpassed the feat of 11-straight win in away fixtures held by Chelsea (2008) and the Man City team from 2017, also managed by Pep Guardiola

Scott Carson made Premier League history Friday when he was named in the Manchester City side to take on Newcastle a decade after his last appearance in the competition. The 35-year-old had not started a Premier League game since May 2011 (also against Newcastle at St. James Park) as the 3645 day gap the longest between appearances for a goalkeeper in Premier League history

City's class of 2020-21 had been tied on 11 away straight victories with Chelsea (2008) and the Man City team from 2017, also managed by Guardiola.

2022 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

India team to leave for Qatar May 19



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 15: The Indian football team will leave for Qatar May 19 after the gulf country, in a big relief, accepted All India Football Federation's (AIFF) request to allow its players to train there ahead of the 2022 World Cup Qualifiers next month.

Not only that, Qatar has even agreed to the AIFF's request to waive the mandatory 10-day hard quarantine after reaching there. The players will have a preparatory camp of nearly two weeks in a bio-bubble in Qatar before the first match June 3.

"We are planning to fly the team May 19 evening. There will be no quarantine (of the players) and they will be in a bio-bubble," AIFF general secretary Kushal Das told this agency Saturday.

He said the players will assemble in New Delhi and they will be tested for COVID-19 before their departure to Qatar.

India is already out of reckoning for a 2022 FIFA World Cup berth but is still in contention for a 2023 Asian Cup spot in the joint qualifiers. The remaining three matches - against Qatar (June 3), Bangladesh (June 7) and Afghanistan (June 15) - are crucial for Asian Cup qualification.

Qatar was picked by the Asian

Football Confederation in March as the centralised venue to host the remaining Group E matches owing to the coronavirus-related travel and quarantine restrictions.

Das had said Wednesday that the national team cannot train in the country right now given the COVID-19 surge and it was considering foreign options for a camp ahead of the World Cup qualifying round matches.

A national camp under head coach Igor Stimac was earlier planned in Kolkata from May 2 to 21. After that, the team was to leave the country May 22 for Dubai where a week-long camp as well as a friendly match - not international - was planned.

But all those plans were put to rest in view of the devastating second wave of COVID-19 pandemic in the country. The Indian team is currently fourth in the group standings with three points from five matches.

From the remaining fixtures, the team will hope to collect as many points as possible and finish third so that it can seal automatic qualification for the 2023 Asian Cup qualifying third round.

In March, India played their first international matches since November 2019 - friendly games against Oman (1-1 draw) and the UAE (0-6 loss) in Dubai.

MEMORABLE OUTING: Ferran Torres (3rd from R) is congratulated by his teammates after scoring one of his goals at Newcastle, Friday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Newcastle, May 15: Ferran Torres scored a brilliant hat-trick as newly crowned champion Manchester City won a record 12th straight away game in the English Premier League, 4-3 at Newcastle.

The Spain winger was part of another heavily rotated lineup named by Pep Guardiola that also included third-choice goalkeeper Scott Carson, an on-loan 35-year-old who was making his first start in the top flight in 10 years Friday.

With the title wrapped up Tuesday with three matches to spare, City looks like it will have some fun in the final week of the campaign and Torres certainly enjoyed himself at St. James' Park.

He is finishing his first season at the club in impressive fashion, taking his tally to five goals in his last four league games by scoring twice in three minutes from the 64th as City fought back from 3-2 behind.

City moved 13 points clear of second-placed Manchester United,

which handed its neighbor the title by losing to Leicester in mid-week.

Newcastle, which is safe from relegation, went ahead through Emil Krafth's header at a corner in the 25th before Joao Cancelo equalized off a deflected shot that spun into the far corner from the edge of the area in the 39th.

Torres produced an impressive flicked volley in mid-air three minutes later as City moved ahead 2-1, only for Joelinton to get fouled in the area by Nathan Ake and

dust himself down to convert the penalty past Carson in first-half stoppage time.

Newcastle was awarded another penalty when Joe Willock was tripped by Kyle Walker and the fouled player again took the spot-kick. This time, Carson made the save, but the ball rebounded out and Willock converted into an empty net in the 62nd.

Walker teed up Torres to equalise, and the winger was on hand to volley the winning goal high into the net when Cancelo's

Sthalekar slams BCCI on Veda

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 15: Former Australian women's team captain Lisa Sthalekar feels the BCCI neither checked on Veda Krishnamurthy after the twin tragedies in her family nor communicated to the bereaved India cricketer its decision to not consider her for the upcoming tour of England.

Earlier this month, the flamboyant middle-order India batter lost her elder sister Vatsala Shivakumar to COVID-19, two weeks after her mother succumbed to the dreaded virus.

On expected lines, she was not included in the Indian Test and ODI team for next month's tour of the United Kingdom, but ICC Hall of Famer Sthalekar was not convinced with the BCCI's handling of the whole episode.

"Whilst not selecting Veda for the upcoming series may be justified from their point of view, what angers me the most is that as a contracted player she has not received any communication from BCCI, just to even check how she is coping," Sthalekar said in a note on her Twitter handle.

She added, "A true association should deeply care about the players that play the game... Not focus



solely on just the game at any cost. So disappointed."

The 28-year-old Bangalore-based Veda recently paid an emotional tribute to her sister and mother, who succumbed to the virus in a span of two weeks.

The all-rounder, who has been helping others through her social media by amplifying their requests for aid, has represented India in 48 ODIs and 76 T20s.

Sthalekar, the first player to achieve the double of 1000 runs and 100 wickets in women's ODIs, felt the time has come for a player's association for the Indian women's team.

"As a past player the ACA (Australian Cricketers' Association) have reached out daily to see how we are and pro-



vided all kinds of services. If there was a need for a player association in (India) surely it is now." The 41-year-old Sthalekar, now a commentator, said being looked after has become more important at the moment, with the pandemic wreaking havoc across the world.

"The stress, anxiety, fear and grief that many players have experienced through this pandemic will take its toll on them as individuals and inadvertently affect the game," Sthalekar signed off.

India is reeling under a devastating second wave of the pandemic with cases rising by over three lakh everyday and the crisis has been compounded by a shortage of some crucial medicines and oxygen supplies.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rome, May 15: Top-ranked Novak Djokovic regained his cool after throwing his racket off the court in a gruelling, rain-delayed 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 quarterfinal victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas at the Italian Open Saturday.

Djokovic fought back from breaks of his serve in each of the final two sets to reach his eighth consecutive semifinal at the Foro Italico - where he has lifted the trophy five times, most recently last September when the tournament was moved to later in the year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Djokovic didn't have much time to rest before he faces home favorite Lorenzo Sonego later Saturday for a spot in the final.

Sonego was backed by a loud crowd when he rallied past seventh-ranked Andrey Rublev 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 to reach his first Masters semifinal.

Their match was washed out Friday. Fans were allowed to fill 25 per cent of capacity as part of the Italian government's reopening plan.

Earlier Friday, Rafa Nadal ended a run of three straight losses to Alexander Zverev with a convincing 6-3, 6-4 win over the German to reach the Italian Open semifinals.

Zverev beat Nadal in straight sets at the same stage in Madrid a week ago and their latest meeting

was also lopsided. Nadal raced to 4-0 in the first set and saved all eight break points he faced in the second. In the women's tournament, French Open champion Iga Swiatek beat two-time Rome champion Elina Svitolina 6-2, 7-5 to set up a semifinal later against 17-year-old American Coco Gauff.

The Djokovic-Tsitsipas match began on Friday but was suspended overnight with Tsitsipas leading 2-1 in the second set and up a break

— with play having already been interrupted for three and half hours due to the intermittent rain.

Facing a break point early in the third set, Djokovic attempted a difficult drop shot that landed on top of the net cord and agonizingly bounced back into his side of the court - handing Tsitsipas a 2-1 lead.

Djokovic reacted by throwing his racket angrily into the advertising boards lining the side of the

court, which drew a code violation warning for unsportsmanlike conduct from the chair umpire.

Djokovic's temper was also an issue during his second-round match this week against Taylor Fritz, when he fumed at the umpire for not stopping play soon enough due to rain.

Last year, Djokovic was disqualified from the US Open for unintentionally hitting a line judge in the throat with a ball.

Djokovic rallies past Tsitsipas



Novak Djokovic serves during his match against Stefanos Tsitsipas

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Camp cancelled for Tokyo-bound wrestlers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 15: The planned camp for eight Olympic-bound Indian wrestlers in Sonepat has been cancelled due to hard quarantine and they will instead train in multiple European cities, with the national federation allowing each of them a sparring partner of their choice.

The wrestlers - both men and women - were to assemble at the SAI centre in Bahalgarh Tuesday, but now, as per the plan devised by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), all of them will travel to Warsaw in the last week of May.

The capital city of Poland will host the last Ranking Series event before the Tokyo Games from June 8-13, giving a chance to all to earn some crucial ranking points that will help them get better draw at the Olympics.

"We had planned a camp in Bahalgarh but since they would not be allowed to train for 14 days due to hard quarantine, we thought it is better they for the time being they train at their respective 'akhadas' and then travel to Poland," WFI assistant secretary Vinod Tomar told this agency.

"We are also allowing all the wrestlers to travel with one partner of their choice for practice. A few, like Vinesh Phogat, Bajrang Punia, Ravi Dahiya and Deepak Punia, will be accompanied by their personal coaches too," he added.

The WFI has written to its counterparts in Poland that Indian wrestlers be allowed to use their facilities for a training camp ahead of the tournament in Warsaw next month.

After the tournament gets over, the Indian wrestlers will stay put



Vinesh Phogat, who is training abroad, will join the Indian team in Poland

in Warsaw for another training camp, which is being organised by the Polish federation.

Following the Warsaw trip, the Indian contingent will move to Hungary for a training camp and

then travel to Turkey, where it will train and compete at the Yasar Dogu event (June 25-27) before returning to India in July.

Vinesh is already abroad with her Hungarian coach Woller Akos and will reach Poland directly from there. It will be interesting to see if young Sonam Malik (women 62kg) and Sumit Malik (men's 125kg) will be part of the near 40-day trip since both of them are recovering from their respective knee injuries.

Sonam had suffered the knee injury during the Asian Olympic Qualifier in Almaty while Sumit had suffered the injury during the national camp but still competed at both the Olympic Qualifiers. He had secured the quota in Bulgaria, where he settled for a silver medal.

India will field a strong eight-wrestler contingent at the Games, beginning in Tokyo July 23.

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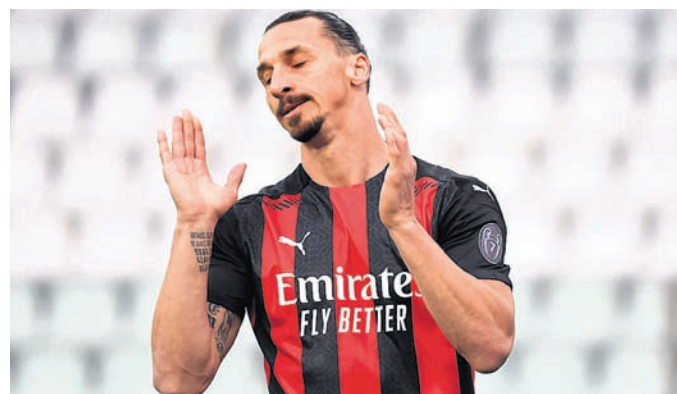
Milan, May 15: Zlatan Ibrahimovic will miss the upcoming European Championship because of a knee injury, the Swedish soccer federation said Saturday.

Ibrahimovic limped out of AC Milan's 3-0 win at Juventus last weekend and the Sweden forward had further tests on his injured left knee Saturday.

Milan released a statement saying that Ibrahimovic will undergo 'a conservative treatment of six weeks' and the Swedish soccer federation announced shortly afterward that the 39-year-old had told the national coach that he would not be fit in time for the tournament.

"Today, Zlatan has informed Janne Andersson that his injury will stop him from participating in the European Championships this summer," the federation said in a tweet.

Injured Ibrahimovic out of Euro



"Get excited Zlatan, we hope to see you on the football field again soon!"

Ibrahimovic came out of international retirement in March, five years after his last match for his country Euro 2020, which was postponed a year because of the coronavirus pandemic, kicks off June 11. Sweden's first match is against

Spain June 14. It also plays Poland and Slovakia in Group E.

Andersson confirmed that Ibrahimovic had informed him earlier Saturday. "Of course, it feels sad, especially for Zlatan but also for us," Andersson said in a statement. "I hope he is back on the field again as soon as possible."