



## CROWNING GLORY

Andrea Meza of Mexico bags Miss Universe title for 2020 besting contestants from 73 other countries

LEISURE P2



## WRITS SEEK RE-SWEARING

Writs sought Oli be re-sworn in as he disgraced the Prez office by refusing to repeat all the words she recited during oath

INTERNATIONAL P10



## RAFA EMERGES CHAMP

World No.2 Rafa Nadal overcomes Novak Djokovic challenge to clinch his 10th Italian Open title

SPORTS P12

# CM unveils sops for Covid-hit

A house-to-house survey to check Covid symptoms and co-morbidities will start May 24

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** The state government will start a house-to-house survey beginning May 24 to detect Covid symptoms and co-morbid conditions of people in the state.

Speaking at an all-party meet, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said, "A three-month house-to-house survey (for Covid symptoms and co-morbid conditions) by ASHAs and anganwadi workers will be launched beginning May 24, for which they will be given an additional incentive of ₹1,000 per month."

Stating that community involvement has been one of the main pillars of the state's Covid management, he said Gram Panchayats, Gaon Kalyan Samitis and sarpanchs have been involved since the beginning. Grassroot workers like ANMs, ASHAs, anganwadi workers and organisations like Mission Shakti have been utilised for providing services to people.

The CM announced that ₹10,000 per GKS will be sanctioned for undertaking Covid related activities at village level involving communities. There are 46,106 GKSs in the state. As ASHAs monitor home isolation cases, the government will provide one time assis-

tance of ₹10,000 to each of them for procurement of bicycles, cupboards, slippers, umbrellas and torches, he said.

Announcing free education for children who lost their family members during the pandemic, the CM said, "Covid has devastated many families in the state. We intend to provide a healing touch to such Covid-hit families by continuing to cover the widows and orphans under the Madhubabu Pension Yojana."

He said the government will allow expenditure of up to ₹50 lakhs from MLALADS for assisting in activities related to Covid management including procurement of masks from Mission Shakti groups. The CM appealed to MLAs to educate people to follow Covid appropriate behaviour.

"We are already in the midst of the second wave. We don't know how many more waves or variants we will have to face. We imposed the lockdown to slow down the current wave. However, lockdowns cannot be the solution as it seriously hurts many livelihoods. It's a long fight and we have to prepare our people through awareness," Patnaik told the members.

Naveen said health care facilities in the state have been quickly ramped up and a large number of ICU/HDU beds



An all-party meet to discuss Covid-19 situation in the state is in progress, Monday

have been established this time, compared to the first Covid wave. Similarly, oxygen cylinder equipped beds have been established across districts.

"To ensure error-free medical oxygen supply, we are closely monitoring the huge logistics involved in deploying, refilling and transporting oxygen cylinders in time. We are establishing oxygen plants within main hospitals. We are importing a large number of oxygen cylinders since there is a short supply in the country.

We are ensuring sufficiency in terms of oxygen and critical medicines," the CM said. He said a taskforce will be formed to look after oxygen management and prepare a master plan for the state. Moreover, the state government has already recruited 786 doctors and 5,137 paramedics and is in the process of contractual recruitment of more medical personnel.

The adage that "Every life is precious" would continue to be our guiding principle and the state govern-

ment will leave no stone unturned in saving the lives of people," he assured the MLAs.

Opposition party members put forth their suggestions at the meeting. BJP deputy leader in house, Bishnu Sethi said, "The government wants to manage the crisis at administrative level. Therefore, we have suggested to form Covid crisis management committees at panchayat level." Sethi said they have also urged the government to enhance oxygen, ICU and ventilator beds across the state.

Congress legislative party leader Narasingha Mishra termed the meeting a PR activity of the government as the government did not listen to many members. As the workers and daily labourers are suffering a lot due to lockdown and shutdown, the government should provide ₹6,000 assistance per month to them, he said.

Senior Congress MLA Suresh Routray expressed displeasure over not being allowed to speak during the meeting. Opposition chief whip Mohan Majhi too criticized the government claiming that the government has failed to manage the crisis. While the second wave is coming to an end, the government has been unable to open helpdesk for people, he added.

# Tauktae barrels towards Gujarat

AGENCIES

**Mumbai, May 17:** A very severe cyclonic storm with winds gusting up to 185 km per hour was barreling towards the Gujarat coast Monday, dumping heavy rains on Mumbai, forcing the evacuation of over 1.5 lakh people in Gujarat and leaving two barges with 410 people on board adrift in the Arabian Sea.

Tropical storm 'Tauktae' which has intensified into a very severe cyclonic storm was packing wind speeds of about 20 kmph and is expected to reach Gujarat coast by the evening and cross it between 8 pm and 11 pm, the IMD said. As the cyclone raged past the Maharashtra coast and inched closer to Mumbai in the morning, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport here announced the suspension of operations from 11 am to 2 pm and later decided to keep all operations shut till 6 pm. Over 1.5 lakh people have been shifted from low-lying coastal areas in Gujarat, while 54 teams of the NDRF and SDRF remained deployed.

At least 17 COVID-19 patients on ventilator support in the Porbandar Civil Hospital's ICU were shifted to other facilities Monday as a precautionary measure because of cyclone Tauktae which is heading towards the Gujarat coast, an official said.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



He was trying to disturb law & order, sir. He was putting up posters saying we have got a great gov!

## MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VALUE	VARIATION
SENSEX	49580.73	↑ 848.18
NIFTY	14923.20	↑ 245.40
DOLLAR	73.82	↑ ₹0.01
EURO	89.33	↑ ₹0.34
GOLD	₹48,257	↑ ₹581
SILVER	₹72,251	↑ ₹1166

## WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	39.0°C	38.0°C
MIN	27.9°C	26.4°C
Humidity	62%	61%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast	Light rain very likely	

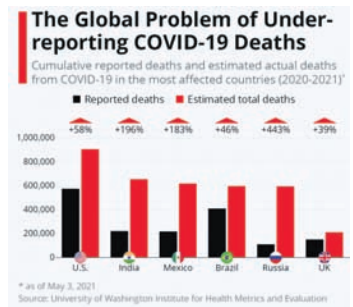
# BMC understated Covid toll

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** An RTI query filed with the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) has revealed that the civic body reported 247 Covid fatalities between June and September while it released death certificates against 3,163 people in the same period.

Responding to an RTI query by Pradip Pradhan, the BMC health officer said it had issued 5,498 death certificates between January and September. However, the unlocking from June 1 saw the civic body release 801 death certificates in the same month while recording only four deaths.

Moreover, the unprecedented surge between September and October saw only 127 deaths. While 53 were recorded in September, nearly 75 deaths were reported in October, the year's highest. However, the civic body issued 1,096 death certificates in September alone



which was the highest in the entire year. "Hundreds had died under COVID treatment in hospitals every day across the state mostly from June to October. However, the government limited the official declaration of COVID deaths between 12 and 17 or even less per day. The state government was suppressing the death figure which is evident from the fact that new crematoriums are being now made

across Odisha," Pradip alleged.

Pradip's word could be corroborated from the fact that the Satya Nagar crematorium cremated 4,473 bodies as stated in the RTI response. However, sources at the BMC mentioned that about 5,500 bodies were burnt last year. While less than 90 bodies had been reported for cremation before March, the number rose to about 100 bodies being burned on a daily basis. While 955 bodies were cremated in October, 1,288 bodies came to the crematorium in September.

"The number of bodies that was cremated at Satya Nagar went up as the Puri administration had closed Swargadwar to outsiders. As a result the burden on Satya Nagar crematorium went up. Moreover, issuing a high number of death certificates is not unusual as we have issued about 800 death certificates in a month before Covid," said a BMC official.

# Govt fixes prices for pvt ambulances

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** Expressing concern over high rates charged by private ambulance operators during Covid-19 pandemic, the state government Monday fixed ceiling prices for various categories of ambulances run by private hospitals and operators.

As per an order of the state commerce and transport department, small category private ambulances like Maruti Omni, Tata Magic and Maruti Eco (vehicles costing up to ₹8 lakh) will charge ₹750 up to 10 kilometres. If they are fitted with life support equipment with a medical technician, they can charge maxi-

mum ₹1,000 up to 10 km (per call). Similarly, medium category private ambulances (₹8 to ₹10 lakh) like Mahindra Bolero will charge ₹1,000 up to a distance of 10 km. If they are fitted with life support system with a technician, they can charge ₹1,500 for the same distance.

Large category private ambulances (Above ₹10 lakh) like Tata Winger/Force, Traveller and Tata 407 can charge a maximum of ₹1250 for each call. With life support system, they can charge ₹2,000 for 10 km. Large category ambulances with advanced life supporting system can charge ₹3,000 up to 10 km

Private ambulances used for only



transportation of patients have been allowed to charge ₹30 per additional km exceeding 10 km while the ambulances with life support and advanced life support systems can charge ₹50 per additional km exceeding 10 km. The maximum price is inclusive of basic services like oxygen, ambu-

lance equipment, PPE kit, gloves, mask, face shield, sanitisation, driver and emergency medical technician. For administration of medication (injectable/oral) including oxygen on board, the ambulance operator can charge extra cost, the order said.

Hiring charges of patient transport ambulance (PTA), basic life support (BLS) ambulance and advance life support (ALS) ambulances will be revised from time to time based on changes in fuel prices.

If a private ambulance operator is found violating the order, the government will take action as per the provisions laid down under the Motor Vehicle Act, 1988.

## NARADA STING CASE

# HC stays bail to TMC mins, MLA



TMC workers try to break police barricades outside the CBI office Nizam Palace protesting the arrest of party ministers and MLAs in connection with the Narada scam case, Monday

**Kolkata/New Delhi, May 17:** The Calcutta High Court Monday stayed the bail given to West Bengal ministers and leaders arrested by CBI in Narada sting case.

Two TMC ministers and an MLA along with a former party leader were Monday arrested and charge-sheeted by the CBI in Narada sting case, amid a high-voltage political drama in West Bengal that saw Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee sitting on a dharna at the probe agency's office for six hours as her party supporters besieged the premises and indulged in violent protests in several parts of the state.

Earlier in the day, a special court had granted bail to the leaders.

The CBI submitted its charge sheet against the four, besides IPS officer SMH Meera who is already out on bail. The Trinamool Congress accused the Centre of using the CBI for political vendetta due to the saffron party's recent loss in the Assembly election, after the agency arrested the four leaders, who were allegedly caught on camera while taking bribes in the 2014 sting by a news channel. The CBI office at Nizam Palace became the latest political battleground in the state.

# Bill quit board as Microsoft probes affair with staff

AGENCIES

**Washington, May 17:** Microsoft Corp conducted an investigation into co-founder Bill Gates' involvement with an employee almost two decades ago after it was informed in 2019 of his attempt to start a romantic relationship with that person.

The board reviewed the matter and held a "thorough investigation" with the help of an external law firm, the software giant said. It didn't reach a conclusion to the probe because Gates had stepped down before it was completed, Microsoft said. "Microsoft received a concern in the latter half of

2019 that Bill Gates sought to initiate an intimate relationship with a company employee in 2000," Microsoft said in a statement. "A committee of the Board reviewed the concern, aided by an outside law firm, to conduct a thorough investigation. Throughout the investigation, Microsoft provided extensive support to the employee who raised the concern."

Dow Jones earlier reported that Microsoft's directors found Gates' involvement with the female employee to be inappropriate and decided last year that he had to step down from the board, citing people familiar with the matter who weren't identified.



Microsoft didn't provide further details on the investigation.

The billionaire said in March last year that he was stepping down from the board to devote more time to phi-

lanthropy. Gates hasn't been active in a day-to-day role since 2008, Microsoft said at that time. Gates co-founded the software company in 1975 and served as its CEO until 2000, the same year his foundation was started, and was chairman until February 2014.

A spokeswoman for Gates said his decision to leave the board has nothing to do with the romantic involvement with an employee.

"There was an affair almost 20 years ago which ended amicably," she said, adding that his "decision to transition off the board was in no way related to this matter." The belated investigation into the affair came at a

time that was marked by a groundswell of discussion at Microsoft about the treatment of women and Me-Too conversations in the broader industry. Since 2000, Microsoft had also put in place processes for investigating allegations and overhauled them with the goal of making them stronger, the company said.

Intel Corp Chief Executive Officer Brian Krzanich resigned after the board was informed that he had had a consensual relationship with a subordinate, even though that relationship had ended years before and predated his appointment to the top job at the company.

# leisure



## I DON'T HAVE THE INSTINCT FOR MARRIAGE OR KIDS: KELLY BROOK

Model-actress Kelly Brook has been with her beau Jeremy Parisi for years, but is not desperate to have children or tie the knot. "I've got a bucket list and I have to say a wedding is not on it!" Brook said, adding that motherhood 'isn't on her radar' at the moment.

## ERIC CLAPTON FEARED NOT BEING ABLE TO PLAY AGAIN

Legendary rocker and guitarist Eric Clapton admits fearing he would never play again after he got the first jab of the Covid vaccine, adding he could not do anything for two weeks. The 76-year-old suffers from peripheral neuropathy, a disease that affects the nerves.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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

**ARIES**  
Today you will feel mushy and forlorn. Ganesh says you will make special efforts to strengthen your relationships. You look upon commitment as a security for the future. As a result, you will develop strong, long-term bondings.

**TAURUS**  
Things will tend to get very difficult and complicated, says Ganesh. Be prepared for setbacks and challenges today. No matter how big the issue, your competence, your resourcefulness will see you through. Try to remain focused and alert. Be cautious and circumspect. Act coolly and sensibly.

**GEMINI**  
You will spend your day fulfilling the demands made upon you by your family members and colleagues. You will need to devote time to matters at home. Pay attention to the needs of your relatives for they will be helpful to you in the near future, says Ganesh.

**CANCER**  
The day shall find you in buoyant spirits, indicates Ganesh. As you are feeling lively and full of beans, you will not mind slogging it out, even if in some mindless activities or chores. It is a perfect day for activities like gardening, cooking, baking and even for a nice house warming get-together.

**LEO**  
A lot of people will sing your praises, however you will not be satisfied with whatever is occurring. The answers to some questions that have been bothering you will remain elusive. You may become emotional owing to feelings of personal loss. You will also be bothered about the near future, says Ganesh.

**VIRGO**  
Today finds you ambitious and meticulous. Actions will not speak—they'll roar! Your planning and scruples will set the pace at work. Expect pats on the back from your bosses and a round of cheers from your peers.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesh says today is a good day to renovate your home. You will be able to decorate your home artistically because of your designing skills. The atmosphere at your home will be a happy one with the arrival of guests. You will make plans to go for a picnic with close friends or relatives.

**SCORPIO**  
You are all set to paint the town red as you feel romance and love creeping into your life slowly. You may bump into 'someone special' today and see love blooming for you. There are also chances of marriage proposals and meeting prospective candidates, says Ganesh.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Variety is the spice of life. Add variety of activities to your daily schedule and nothing would seem boring any more, foretells Ganesh. Indulge in creative activities like writing, cooking, gardening or even reading. Catch up with friends and memories of old times; have a blast!

**CAPRICORN**  
You will feel little lost in the maze of problems and tricky situations. You will, however, find a way out, feels Ganesh. You like to be in a commanding position at work where you guide others and call the shots.

**AQUARIUS**  
If you are an astrologer, doctor or a spiritual leader, today is a favourable day for you. Those who may want to challenge you must reconsider the thought of testing your strengths, says Ganesh. Doing charity work, helping the needy, and working for humanitarian causes give you a feeling of contentment.

**PISCES**  
Today your intellectual streak comes to the fore. You will indulge your curiosity and take interest in natural phenomenon. Your faith will help you complete all your pending tasks with ease. You will leave things to destiny. You will be more inclined to intellectual pursuits rather than professional, however, do not neglect your responsibilities, says Ganesh.

### INDIA'S ADLINE ENDS 3RD RUNNER UP

## Andrea Meza crowned Miss Universe

AGENCIES

**Florida:** Andrea Meza of Mexico has been crowned Miss Universe for the year 2020, besting contestants from 73 other countries, including Miss India Adline Castelino, who came in fourth at the beauty pageant.

The 69th edition of the event, which was held Sunday night at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood here, was a scaled-down affair in the wake of the novel coronavirus pandemic. The competition was postponed from late 2020 to May 2021 due to COVID-19.

According to the official Miss Universe website, the 26-year-old Meza was crowned by her predecessor Zozibini Tunzi of South



Africa, who won the pageant in 2019. When asked if she were the leader of her country, how she would have handled the pandemic, the Mexican contestant said there was "not a perfect way to handle this hard situation".

"However, I believe that what I would have done is create a lockdown even before everything was that big. Because we lost so many lives and we cannot afford that, we have to take care of our people. I would have taken care of them since the beginning," Meza said in her response.

While Brazil's Julia Gama, 28, emerged the runner-up at the contest, Janick Maceta (27) from Peru finished third. India's Castelino expressed her gratitude towards her country, which is battling a deadlier, second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, for support.



ANDREA MEZA

## Amarendra Mohanty succumbs to Covid-19

The versatile music director is best known for his contributions in films like 'Stree', 'Rama Laxman', 'Bhai Hela Bhagari', 'Suna Panjuri' and 'Kandhei Akhire Luha'

according to the doctors, was responding well to the treatment till Sunday morning. However, internal bleeding started in the evening and he couldn't be saved."

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has expressed grief on the music director's demise and extended condolences to the bereaved family while Governor Ganeshi Lal in his tweet wrote, "He will be ever remembered for his creativity and contribution to Odia music."

Expressing shock over the death, noted music director of Odia films Prem Anand said, "He was considered a royal music director in the fraternity. His loss is a huge blow to the Odia music industry."

Playback singer Bibhu Das who was very close to the versatile music director said, "He was a rare talent. He used to do music, sing and compose immortal lines which not many people could do. Besides, he had the uncanny ability to spot the new talents. Odia music industry has lost a legend and become poorer."

Mohanty, a resident of Cuttack was born February 6, 1958. He started his career with All India Radio, Cuttack. Later he started singing in different Odia films. In 1993, he started his career as a music director in Odia film 'Shradhanjali' and went on to work in movies like 'Stree', 'Rama Laxman', 'Vasudha', 'Bhai Hela Bhagari', 'Suna Panjuri' and 'Kandhei Akhire Luha'. This apart, he has also lent voice to a large number of popular Odia bhajans.



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar:** Top music director and a popular bhajan singer Amarendra Mohanty breathed his last battling Covid-19 at a private hospital here Monday morning. The 63-year-old was admitted to SUM Covid hospital May 3 but his condition started deteriorating Friday. Since then he had been put on ventilator support.

Confirming the sad news Mohanty's daughter Anwesha said, "We were quite optimistic about his recovery as he, ac-



## Elnaaz spoils for choice

**Mumbai:** Actress Elnaaz Norouzi says with so many web series and films being made, it is very important to be sure of picking the right projects.

"I have always been picky. That's always how I've worked. Right now, everything is on halt and when things settle down a bit there will be too many scripts and stories for everyone to tell. So, you have to be picky as there is a lot of content out there. Now, there are a lot more films and web series happening and, therefore, more than ever you've to be picky now," she said.

Talking about the kind of role she wants to play, the actress says: "I really always wanted to do an action film. I really want to do a strong boss lady sort of a character. Also, I always wanted to be a part of a thriller. The role I'm already playing in 'Sangeen' is something of that type."



## 'I'm a walking talking time table'

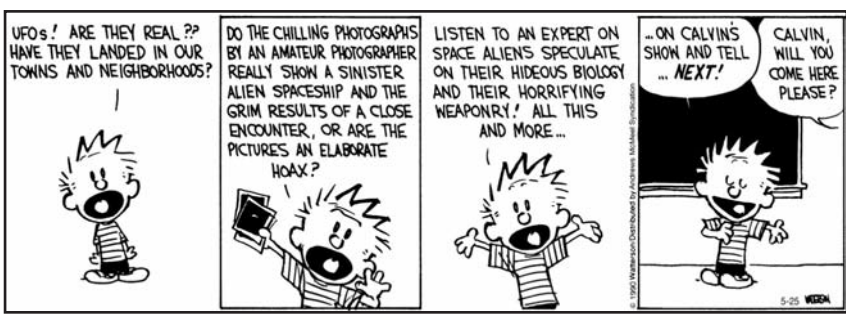
**Mumbai:** Rakul Preet Singh is gearing up for the release of her new film 'Sardar Ka Grandson'. The actress relates to Radha, her character in the film, saying she is a walking talking time table.

Rakul's character in the film is a very organised and level-headed person. Is the actress in real life somewhat like her on-screen avatar? "When (director) Kaashvi (Nair) narrated it to me and after she got to know me, she said Radha is Rakul! I am a little punctual about time and I have to do things right. I am a walking talking time table and I could relate a lot with Radha. So, I do agree to that part," said the De De Pyar De actress. 'Sardar Ka Grandson' is the story of Amreek played by Arjun Kapoor, who wants to fulfil a wish of his grandmother, essayed by Neena Gupta.

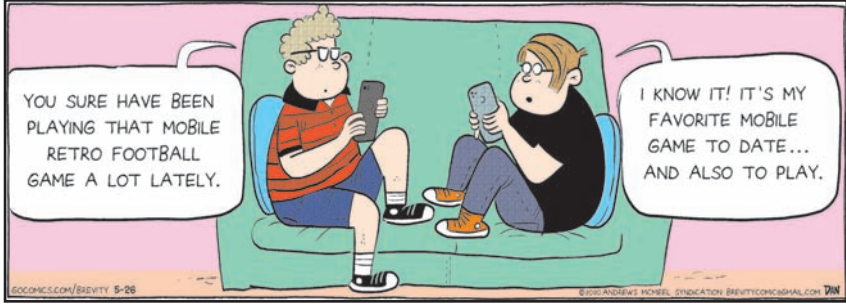
### PEANUTS



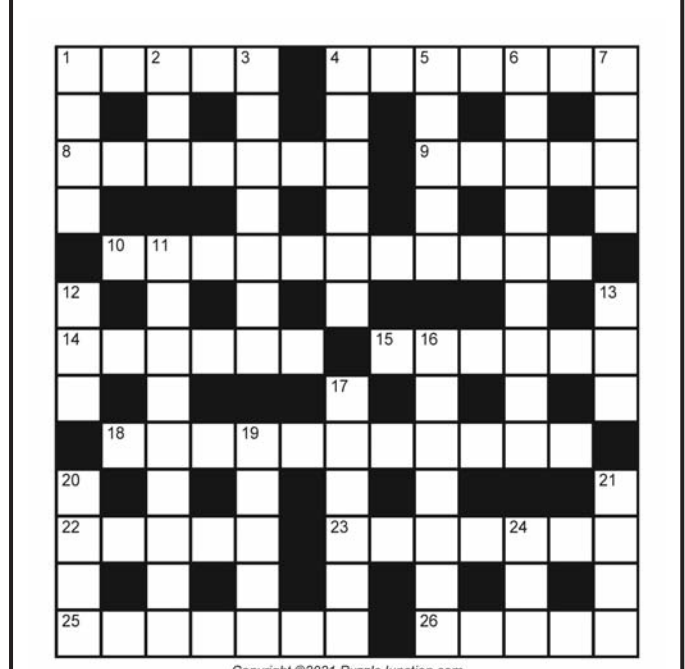
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



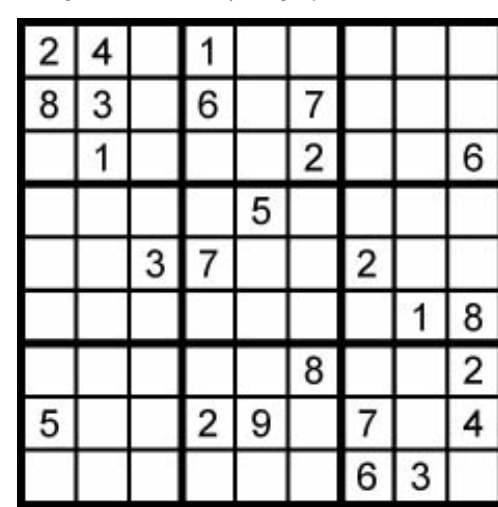
### FUN post CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Show flexibility
  - 4 Getaway spots
  - 8 Underwater bloodsucker
  - 9 Jeweller's glass
  - 10 Unnecessary and unwarranted (8-3)
  - 14 Rapsallions
  - 15 One of the Channel Islands
  - 18 Extinct flying reptile
  - 22 Clutch
  - 23 Jam ingredient
  - 25 Slight
  - 26 Kind of review or emotions
- Down**
- 1 Hole-making tools
  - 2 Ready for battle
  - 3 Patio
  - 4 Kings and queens, e.g.
  - 5 Unwavering
  - 6 In a rowdy manner
  - 7 Clairvoyant
  - 11 Talk terms
  - 12 Eyeball
  - 13 Colourant
  - 16 Cry out
  - 17 Magazine bigwig
  - 19 Swift
  - 20 Matures
  - 21 Etcher's need
  - 24 Repair

### 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



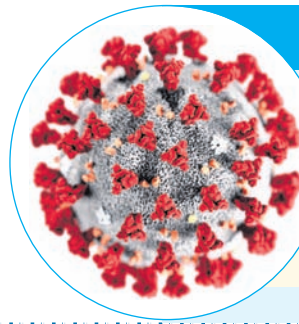
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

# downtown



## NOBLE INITIATIVE

A blood donation camp in progress at BJD party office in Bhubaneswar, Monday



## COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	16,38,10,883	14,22,90,812	33,95,232
India	2,49,65,463	2,11,74,076	2,74,390
Odisha	6,22,981	5,26,353	2,335

# UTRCs told to ensure decongestion of jails



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** The state High Powered Committee (HPC) Monday directed the under-trial review committees (UTRCs) in the districts to immediately take steps for decongestion of jails under their jurisdictions.

The HPC has been established at state level following a Supreme Court order March 23, 2020 to oversee the release of prisoners on interim bails, parole and furlough in a bid to decongest the jails amidst the outbreak of Covid-19 across the country.

As many as three prisoners have succumbed to the novel coronavirus while around 200 inmates were tested positive for the virus during the last couple of months in Odisha.

The chairman of HPC instructed the UTRCs to take steps for the release of prisoners above 60 years of age suffering from co-morbidities on interim parole and furlough. The UTRCs have also been instructed to prepare a list of prisoners who were released earlier on temporary basis during last year for the decongestion of prisons. The HPC directed the committees to release such prisoners again on parole or furlough in view of the fresh Covid resurgence.

The HPC also asked the Prisons Directorate to urgently release 206 convicts on special parole and furlough. Similarly, it directed the DG to decide on the extension of furlough period of 45 convicts currently out of the jail on furlough.

Meanwhile, Prisons DG Santosh Kumar Upadhyay Monday appointed the medical officer at Choudwar circle jail as state nodal officer who will guide the superintendents and medical officers in prisons across the state regarding the treatment of Covid positive inmates.

The superintendents have been asked to take the assistance of the

## COVID SCARE

The HPC asked the Prisons Directorate to urgently release 206 convicts on special parole and furlough

The UTRCs have been instructed to prepare a list of prisoners who were released on temporary basis during last year for the decongestion of prisons

As many as 449 convicts have been released on 90-day parole after the apex court's order May 1, 2021

The HPC has been established in the state following a Supreme Court order March 23, 2020 to oversee the release of prisoners on interim bails, parole and furlough in a bid to decongest the jails amidst the outbreak of Covid-19

respective district Collectors, municipal officers and CDMOs for the testing of inmates and treatment of prisoners found positive for virus at Covid care centres.

The Prisons Directorate revealed that the number of inmates lodged in various jails of the state has come down to 19,707 from 20,482 in the beginning of the month.

As many as 449 convicts have been released on 90-day parole after the apex court's order May 1, 2021.

Meanwhile, the Prisons Directorate has asked the Police Headquarters to ensure decongestion at jails.



A road near Kalpana Square in Bhubaneswar witnesses a snarl, Monday, after a two-day weekend shutdown

OP PHOTO

# Over 55% cases from state's rural pockets

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** Admitting a surge in Covid-19 cases in rural Odisha, state Public Health director Niranjana Mishra Monday said the caseload in rural areas is around 55-60 per cent of the state's total daily infections. However, it is not alarming, he added.

Speaking to reporters here, Mishra said, "Even though the number of infections is increasing in rural pockets, the situation is not so alarming. The rural areas share 50 to 60

**Had the state government not clamped the lockdown, the daily caseload would have been over 20,000**

PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTOR | NIRANJANA MISHRA

per cent of the daily infections." Stating that there is need to increase the surveillance in the rural areas, he said, "The Anganwadi, ASHA and ANM workers are the key forces in the collective fight

against Covid-19. They have been imparted special training and directed to keep close watch on the situation in their respective areas." Moreover, the district Collectors and Chief District Medical Officers (CDMOs) are also conducting regular assessments in their respective districts, he said.

On the overall caseload in the state, Mishra said, "The situation is stable now. The daily count is hovering around 10,000/12,000. If people follow Covid-19 guidelines and help break the transmission chain,

the cases will come down." Supporting imposition of the lockdown, the director said, "Had the state government not clamped the lockdown, the daily caseload would have been over 20,000. We hope that the number of positive cases in the state will come down further due to the lockdown impact which would be felt within 2-3 weeks."

Similarly, another senior doctor Niroj Mishra has advocated for extension of lockdown to reducing the number of daily infections in the state.

# 518 gm brown sugar seized; 2 arrested

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** Commissionerate Police Monday seized brown sugar weighing 518 gram while being transported in a fish delivery vehicle. The police arrested two drug peddlers from Hi-Tech Medical Square here in this connection.

The accused were identified as Madan Kumar Behera and SK Manjul of Jaleswar in Balasore district.



Following a tip-off, a joint squad of Quick Action Team of Commissionerate Police and Mancheswar police Monday intercepted the vehicle of the accused persons at Hi-Tech Medical Square and seized the contraband worth around Rs 50 lakh.

Twin city Police Commissioner Saumendra Pariyadarshi revealed in a video press briefing that the accused were engaged in the drug peddling under the guise of fish trade.

# RAMP UP TESTING IN RURAL AREAS: BJP

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and Kalahandi MP Basanta Panda Monday urged the state government to open more Covid-19 testing facilities in rural areas.

In a video message, Panda said, the people in rural Odisha are bearing the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic owing to lack proper testing facilities. People in rural areas succumb to Covid-19 even before they are detected positive for the virus and the government is unable to record such deaths, he said.

Therefore, the government should increase the testing capacity in villages, he demanded.

The Lok Sabha member also requested the government to reopen the temporary medical centres (TMCs), which were functional last year in every panchayat, to accommodate the migrant workers.

The parliamentarian also suggested the government to focus on rural areas. "There is a need for village-centric healthcare facilities now. The government should form Covid crisis management committees at village levels comprising Anganwadi, ASHA, ANM workers and intellectuals to effectively manage the situation," he further said.



**Had the Modi government and other state governments provided them (migrants) jobs, shelter and food during the pandemic, they would not have returned to Odisha**

PRAMILA MALLICK | BJD LEADER

Reacting to this, senior BJD leader Pramila Mallik said, "The government takes prompt measures in rural areas from where reports of cluster infections come in." Health teams are immediately

being sent to such areas for testing, tracing and treatment of the infected persons, she added.

The block development officers (BDOs), tehsildars and health officers are working in rural areas and taking adequate measures wherever required, Mallik asserted.

On the reopening of TMCs for migrants, the BJD legislator said arrangements are in place for the people of other states staying in Odisha.

"However, Odia people are returning from Gujarat and other states in a state of destitute and hunger following loss of jobs. Had the Modi government and other state governments provided them jobs, shelter and food during the pandemic, they would not have returned to Odisha," the BJD leader remarked.

# e-Permission for marriages, funerals

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** The Commissionerate Police Monday launched a web-based application for issuance of licences for marriage and funeral ceremonies during the lockdown.

Denizens seeking permission from police for marriage and funeral functions have been asked to visit the website of Commissionerate Police (<https://bhubaneswarcuttackpolice.gov.in/>) and click on the link "Apply for Marriage/Funeral License" to get the police permission.

The applicants have been instructed to apply at least 72 hours before the function and fill the online application form with all the required information. The applicants will receive an SMS in connection with the approval of the e-licence. Subsequently, the commissionerate will send individual messages to the invitees for the functions which they can use as permission to commute from their place of stay to function venue."

Police sources also said that the e-licensing system is available for the denizens of Capital city only and that it will be implemented in



**The e-licensing system is available for the denizens of Bhubaneswar only and it will be implemented in Cuttack shortly**

Cuttack shortly. Commissionerate Police has developed the web-based solution with the assistance of 'Oasys Tech Solution'.

Notably, the CP has also launched web-based application for private firms including the IT and ITes companies to get self-generated e-passes for hassle-free movement of their workers.

# Spl vax drive for govt staff in Cuttack

AGENCIES

**Cuttack, May 17:** In order to ensure more denizens in the Silver City get the Covid jabs, the Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC) decided to launch a vaccination drive for government employees in the age bracket of 18-44 years.

CMC Commissioner Ananya Das said that government employees in the 18-44 age group in the Millennium City will be vaccinated at their offices. The special vaccination drive will be launched next week, Das pointed out.

# OHRC office shut for public till May 31

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** In view of the sudden surge in Covid-19 cases and death of a few officials working in different offices located at Toshali Bhawan here, the Odisha Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has restricted the entry of general public and petitioners into its office.

The restriction, which will remain in force till May 31 or until further order, was imposed to adopt strict social distancing and isolation measures to check further spread of the virus in the office.

## CAR FEST AHEAD



Construction of chariots for the upcoming Rath Yatra in progress at Rath Yard in Puri, Monday

OP PHOTO

# RANI bell helps Angul village combat anaemia

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** If experts are to be believed, Mahulanali in Angul district is likely to become the first village in Odisha to get rid of anaemia owing to behavioural changes and community participation in the fight against the disease. Anaemia is a condition in which the blood doesn't have enough healthy red blood cells (RBCs).

As the clock strikes 8 in the evening, Yudhisthir Nayak, a senior citizen of Mahulanali under Sanahula Panchayat of the district, starts ringing a bell from the community centre. As the bell rings, women of reproductive age in the village get prepared for their daily dose of iron folic acid tablet prescribed according to their haemoglobin levels.

This community routine for the last one year has proved to be crucial in reducing the percentage of anaemic women in the village.



While 63 per cent of women in the village consisting three hamlets were diagnosed with anaemia in August 2019, the number has dropped to 40 per cent in December 2020. Along with regular iron folic acid (IFA) tablet intake, the women have also added dietary diversity to their daily food habit.

"Lack of awareness, existing social norms, negligence, wrong food habits and misconceptions about IFA tablets were the major reasons behind this vulnerability," said Banita Behera, sarpanch of Sanahula Panchayat.

At this juncture, RANI

## BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE

**RANI** is a social norm-based intervention, aiming to reduce anaemia among women of reproductive age by promoting the consumption of IFA along with nutritious food

As the bell rings, women of reproductive age in Mahulanali village get prepared for their daily dose of iron folic acid tablet prescribed according to their haemoglobin levels

(Reduction in Anaemia through Normative Innovations) program started its intervention in the village in August 2019. RANI is a social norm-based intervention, aiming to reduce anaemia among women of reproductive age by promoting the consumption of IFA

along with nutritious food. After conduct of mass testing at the village, the community was trained to understand the health risks of anaemia and the importance of taking IFA tablets through participatory activities. Short videos on IFA tablets and its benefits were also shown to the villagers.

"Even then many women in the village cited their forgetfulness and blamed it on daily house chores as the major reason behind irregularity. To counter this, after discussion with the self-help groups and elected local body representatives, it was decided to have the RANI bell at 8pm daily. This behavioural change helped in improving the HB level drastically," said Anadi Charan Sahu, community facilitator of RANI.

This success scripted in Mahulanali village has inspired women in the surrounding villages to fight against anaemia.

# 22 fresh deaths push Covid toll to 2,335

# Help pregnant women during lockdown: Govt

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** Odisha registered 22 fresh fatalities due to Covid, pushing the toll to 2,335, while 10,757 more people tested positive for the infection, taking the caseload in the coastal state to 6,22,981, a senior Health official said Monday.

Accordingly, the number of active cases rose to 1,06,061, said the official.

Of the 10,757 fresh cases, 6,024 were reported from various quarantine centres and the rest during contact tracing, the official added.

Cuttack district reported the maximum number of new cases at 973, followed by Khurda, which has been reporting the highest number of Covid infections in the state for several days now, at 909, Sundargarh at 832, Angul at 606, Bolangir at 507 and Nuapada at 502.

For the first time in the month, no district in the coastal state crossed the daily infection mark of 1,000. Barring Kandhamal, which registered only 87 new cases, all the rest 29 districts reported over 100 cases, nine of them, however, registered over 400 cases.

Taking to Twitter, the Health



Maintaining social distance, people queue up for Covid vaccination at Capital Hospital in Bhubaneswar, Monday OP PHOTO

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

Of the 22 new fatalities, three each were recorded in Khurda, Boudh, Koraput, Nuapada, Rayagada and Sundargarh districts, while two died in the Angul district. One patient each suc-

cumbed to the infection in Gajapati and Puri districts, the official pointed out. This apart, 53 other Covid-19 patients in the state have died due to comorbidities.

At least 11,821 patients have recuperated from the disease, taking the total number of recoveries to 5,26,353, the official said. Odisha's positivity rate stands at

5.69 per cent. Over 1.09 crore samples have been tested in the state thus far, including 58,436 Sunday - which is the highest so far in a single day, the official added.

Meanwhile, the state has issued revised guidelines for Covid-19 treatment facilities, asking them to operate 24x7 helpline numbers with immediate effect, amid com-

## IN A NUTSHELL

Cuttack district reported the maximum number of new cases at 973, followed by Khurda at 909

For the first time in the month, no district in the coastal state crossed the daily infection mark of 1,000

Over 1.09 crore samples have been tested in the state thus far, including 58,436 Sunday - which is the highest so far in a single day

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** Women and Child Development (W&CD) minister Tukuni Sahu Monday directed the officials to provide necessary services to all pregnant women who are coming from other states during Covid lockdown.

Sahu, during the review meeting Monday, also informed that the registration for 'MAMATA' scheme, which was launched for pregnant women and lactating mothers, has been extended to seven months of conception instead of three months. They can also ask any scheme related queries through helpline number 181.

The Minister said that to alleviate the issue of maternal and infant under-nutrition, Government of Odisha has launched a state specific scheme called MAMATA, a conditional cash transfer maternity benefit scheme. This scheme provides monetary support to the pregnant and lactating women to enable them improved nutrition and promote health seeking behaviour. She also instructed authorities



**MAMATA**, a conditional cash transfer maternity benefit scheme, provides monetary support to the pregnant and lactating women so as to enable them for improved nutrition

to make sure all pregnant women must go through the Covid testing and must be provided all services and facilities. She instructed the district health officers, anganwadi centres, child care units, one stop centres and others to be active in providing all necessary materials such as medical help, PPE kit and ration to these women.

# Boy donates ₹43K to twin city police

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** A boy from the City here has donated Rs 43,000 from his savings to the Commissionerate of Police as assistance towards Covid relief.

The boy, Ishan, is a student of Class VI at SAI International School here. Ishan decided to break open his piggy bank and donate the savings to the twin city police who are working tirelessly amid Covid-19 crisis.

In an event at the Police Seva Bhavan Monday, Police Commissioner Saumendra Priyadarshi accepted the donation and thanked Ishan for his generosity. Ishan's donation will be used for purchasing essential items for twin city police personnel, said Priyadarshi.

# Mercury breaches 40 degree C at 7 places

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** After a short gap, heatwave like situation returns to many parts of the state with mercury breaching 40 degree Celsius mark at seven places Monday.

As per Bhubaneswar Meteorological Centre data, Boudh was the hottest place of Odisha Monday with recording a day temperature of 41 degrees Celsius. The maximum temperature at Sonapur was 40.8 degree followed by Angul (40.7 degree) and Sambalpur (40.5 degree). Sundargarh, Titlagarh and Malkaniri towns have recorded a maximum day temperature of 40 degree Celsius each. Capital city Bhubaneswar registered a temperature of 39 degree while it was 38 degree at Cuttack.

# Ganjam admin calls out Sonu Sood's philanthropy

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** The Ganjam Collector has called out Sonu Sood on the actor's claim to have arranged a bed for a patient at Ganjam City Hospital at Berhampur. Through the official Twitter account of the administration, it was informed that the patient in home isolation was in stable condition. It was also revealed that the patient did not require a bed and Berhampur Municipal Corporation is monitoring the situation.

Sonu Sood had claimed that a bed had been arranged at the Ganjam City Hospital after a request was made by one Pradeep Behera May 15. The account, which allegedly belongs to one Pradeep Behera, had said that he was looking for a bed for his wife but was unable to get one.

**There has been suspicion that Sonu has been falsely garnering credit for arranging help for Covid-19 patients**

"Sir, We never claimed that we approached you, it's the needy who approached us & we arranged the bed for him, attached are the chats for your reference. Ur office is doing a great job & u can double check that we had helped him too. Have DM via his contact details. Jai Hind," said the actor in a reply to the administration's tweet.

The district administration responded saying, "Our intention was not to criticise your system. We have our own TEAM GANJAM to

ensure bed availability for patient which work 24\*7. Still it's our duty to investigate if any issues about bed availability. That's why we cleared the facts. You and your organization doing great job."

The tweet to the actor for help has since then been deleted. There has been suspicion that Sonu has been falsely garnering credit for arranging help for Covid-19 patients.

The actor, since last year's lockdown, has been helping thousands of migrants reach home safely. He also provided e-rickshaws to the unemployed. He recently urged more people to come forward and help those who are suffering due to Covid. He posted a screen recording of his phone that shows the actor has been getting messages from people asking for help continuously. He says he is trying to help as many people as possible.

## BEATING THE HEAT



As mercury soars, youths take a dip in a pond in Baramunda area of Bhubaneswar, Monday OP PHOTO

# Panel asked to ready SOP for tackling nCoV among children

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** The state government has set up a committee to manage Covid-19 among children in the wake of the possibility of increased number of cases among them, officials said Monday.

The committee has been asked to formulate standard operating procedures (SOPs) for managing Covid-19 among the paediatric population and submit a report to the government at the earliest, they said. It will suggest preparedness measures, including augmentation, training of human resources to deal with the affected children and formulate SOPs, they said.



Chief of Directorate of Medical Education and Training (DMET) CBK Mohanty has been appointed as the chairman of the seven-member committee, while Director of Family Welfare Bijay Panigrahi will act as member convener. The committee was formed after many children tested positive for the

**Chief of Directorate of Medical Education and Training CBK Mohanty has been appointed as the chairman of the seven-member committee**

virus during the raging second wave, and health experts predicted that more children might be affected in the possible third wave of the pandemic, officials said.

Recently, the state government issued an advisory, asking parents to ensure that children older than

two years wear face masks while stepping out of their homes. Though schools, colleges and anganwadi centres are closed, experts fear that children might get infected by elders in their families. Till Sunday, 30,523 children younger than 14 years were infected in the state, an official said.

Meanwhile, the Health and Family Welfare department named Dr Srinath Reddy as the chairman of a 12-member advisory committee that will guide the state government in vaccination programmes and strategies to deal with possible future waves of the pandemic. CBK Mohanty of DMET was named its convener.

# City airport handled 20.53 MT vaccine, cargo

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, May 17:** The Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) here has handled 20.53 MT of vaccines and other crucial Covid related cargo, including oxygen concentrators and cylinders, an official release from the Airports Authority of India (AAI) said Monday.

AAI-run airports are transporting medical essentials and equipment across the country to strengthen the country's fight against Covid-19. AAI's Bhubaneswar airport and its stakeholders have also playing an active role by facilitating seamless transportation of medical equipment and materials 24x7, the official release said.

A total 669 boxes (20.53 MT) of Covid-19 vaccines have been transported through various airlines till May 9, through the Bhubaneswar

**The airport authorities have organised Covid-19 vaccination camp for employees of AAI and other stakeholders**

airport, the AAI said. Besides, a total of 526 oxygen concentrators, 156 empty oxygen tankers, and 140 oxygen cylinders have been transported by some 75 aircraft such as C17, C130J and AN 32 of the Indian Air Force between April 23 and May 11, it said, adding that as many as 41 oxygen concentrator were transported by airlines as well.

The airport authorities have also organised Covid-19 vaccination camp for employees of AAI and other stakeholders in collaboration and support from the Odisha government, said the release.

# Virus claims man 5 days after marriage

**KENDRAPARA:** In a tragic incident, a newly married youth died of Corona barely five days after his marriage at Durgadebipada village under Rajkanika block of the district. Sanjay Kumar Nayak alias Dipu (26) was working with a private company in Bengaluru with his elder brother. He came to Odisha May 1 last after his family members fixed his marriage. The marriage was solemnised at Deulasahi May 9 last. Dipu had undergone Covid test before he left for Odisha and was tested Covid negative but his health condition started deteriorating, after a few days at home. After marriage, Dipu developed Covid-like symptoms. On May 13, he was rushed to the District Headquarters Hospital after he became critical. The family members tried to shift him to a private hospital at Bhubaneswar but he succumbed on the way to Bhubaneswar.



## MONDAY SHOPPING



People buy green grocery from a market set up temporarily at Chauiliaganj in Cuttack, Monday OP PHOTO

**FOR CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS CONTACT OUR BOOKING STATIONS**

Acharya Vihar-Doyal Agency-9437135727, A.P. Tours and Travel, Maitri Vihar, C.S. Pur- 9861301598, Aurobindo Market-Sai Audio & Electronics-9438304668, Airport Road-Sai Baba Variety Store-9090071530, Anish Infotech- Tankapani Road-9861341488, Bapuji Nagar- Dreamland Studio- 9777517314, Baramunda Rental Colony-Maa Ramchandi Communication-9658821469, Baramunda Housing Board Colony-Pappu Variety Store-9040500106, Cuttack Road-Alishan Snacks-8984236754, District Center (Chandrasekharpur)-Sai Google Mart-9776056507, Forest Park-DTDC Couriers & Services (HB Services)-7381024156, IRC Village-Bapi Xerox-9090090404, Gift Hut(Antriksh Gifts & Decors Pvt. Ltd.)-9954781084, Pruthvi Medicine-9853314816, Janpath-Krupajal Book Store-7978646669, Jaydev Vihar-AK Enterprises-7978116618, Subam Sai Books Store-8895550649, Swain Graphics- 9337121249, Jagannath Mobile Point- Janpath Road, Ram Mandir- 9938475415, Kanan Vihar-Auro Electronics-8260697560, Khandagiri- Swosti Mobile Centre- 7992914045, World Solution- 9938317559, KIIT Road-Jugad Jn-9338545031, Laxmi Sagar-Aditya Mobile-9438191836, Lewis Road-Spider Web-7809186415, Metro Satellite City-Arogya Mitra Medicine Store-9853621640, Madhusudan Nagar-Mohapatra Communication-9124446664, Maa Santoshi travels- Gajapati Nagar- 9777675867, Nayapalli- The Cake Room- 7873660137, Near Mayfair Lagoon-Cookiemann-9439491273, Nigamananda-Omm Sai Travels-9668284823, Nr Cosmopolis Main Gate- Shreeram Medical Store- 8763711714, Net Square- Niladri Vihar (C.S. Pur)- 7205634821, Priyadarshini Market-Astro Point-9938134346, R.N. General Store-Nilakantha Nagar-9438642501, Sahid Nagar- Maa Communication- 9437353424, Sahini General Store- Near Patia Railway Station, Mahavir Vihar- 9937586626, Satya Nagar-Baishnavi Mixture & Sweets-7894821764, Samantapur- Download Point-7504557743, Sailashree Vihar-Harsha Book Store-8093449515, Saheed Nagar-Jagannath Graphics-7978652670, Photo World-7978468191, Sainath Photo Studio-8984436129, Shanti & Co-9937071063, Siripur-Omm Maa Sarala Communication-9777682449, Sushree fashion- Jagmara-9938714347, Shree Vision- Sailashree Vihar-9861476678, Unit-3-LIC of India Premium Point-9337787080, Unit-7- LIC Premium Point- 9338227422, VSS Nagar-Friends Cake & Bake-8658200930, Jeet Infoworld-7205195782, XIMB Square-LD Books-9658061373.

# ICT labs in Jagatsinghpur in shambles

# Black marketing of medical items rampant



**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHEME HAS COME TO A NAUGHT WITH COMPUTER SYSTEMS WORTH CRORES OF RUPEES ROTTING ON THE SCHOOL PREMISES**

**Jagatsinghpur, May 17:** The establishment of the ICT laboratories aimed at skill development of students in over 132 schools in this district has turned out to be damp squib with the laboratories remaining non-functional and unused following closure of schools due to Covid-19.

According to reports, the implementation of the scheme has come to a naught with computer systems worth crores of rupees rotting on the school premises in the district. The need of the hour during the pandemic was to keep the ICT labs operational but the district

administration allegedly showed no interest. These labs could have come handy in imparting online teaching to the students, but the teachers relied more on mobile phones. Observers said that there would have been no Internet network problems if the ICT labs were still operational.

Teachers could have used these labs to make bigger and better presentations to their students. It has been alleged that even e-content was not loaded in most of these computers.

The Centre-sponsored programme aims at providing easy access of technology to the students to learn beyond regular classroom studies beginning with the set up of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) labs. The scheme also aims at giving equal opportunities to students with socio-economic and geographical disadvantages to utilise technology.

The ICT lab scheme of E-Vidyalya programme was started under the Odisha Madhyamik Sikshya Mission that aims to establish labs in 4,000 government schools in the state in the first phase and an additional 2,000 labs in the second phase. However, it is yet to become a reality.

The Odisha Knowledge Corporation, which is the nodal agency, had prepared e-content for various subjects for training teachers of Classes VIII and IX as well as management of these labs. The ICT labs were established in 132 out of 166 schools in Jagatsinghpur district.

These coordinators were dismissed from service following the expiry of their term in February 2019 but the labs were not made operational in every school. It was even shown that the teachers had received certificates after completion of training during summer vacation - which in reality was a farce.

There was no improvement in the implementation of the scheme as all the designated teachers did not receive their trainings. Niranjan Mohanty, headmaster of Naugana Haat High School, said that the labs were lying unused after the abolition of the post of computer coordinators. Moreover, the systems have become defunct due to short-circuit in the electrical installations.

When contacted, Niranjan Behera, district education officer, said around ₹20 lakh was spent on the establishment of the labs in the schools. However, the teachers failed to receive training due to their apathetic attitude. As a result, the scheme is yet to be fully implemented in the district and has failed to achieve the desired results.

POST NEWS NETWORK



**Balasure, May 17:** Black marketing of medical equipment is rampant in parts of Balasure district as the second Covid-19 wave sweeps the state. With more and more people being hit by the virus, demand for medicines and other items have sky-rocketed. Taking advantage of this, some unscrupulous businessmen are making a killing.

Most people these days are trying to acquire oxygen cylinders, oximeters and steamers machines for their home so that they can use them anytime. Cashing in on this trend, some businessmen have hiked the prices of equipment, it was alleged.

Sources said that a 10-litre medical grade Class-D oxygen cylinder is being sold for anything between ₹15,000-₹20,000 when the actual price is ₹4,000. Similarly, oximeters are being sold for ₹2,000 to ₹2,500 when their actual prices vary between ₹300 and ₹450. Steam machines are being sold for ₹500 a piece when their actual price is ₹110 each. Prices of surgical masks

and nebulizers have also increased manifold.

"The doctors are advising people to acquire the equipment for patients under home isolation. So relatives of patients have no options but to buy these items, even if they have to cough up excess money," a local resident of this town said on the condition of anonymity.

Manas Mohanty, who works in the marketing department of Balasure Oxygen Company, said they have run out of cylinders. "The cylinders we had have already been supplied to hospitals as per the direction of the district administration. At times, some customers come to our plants to refill their cylinders. We, however, do not charge extra for refilling," he said.

# 'No curbs' on Bengal returnees in fringe villages; locals panic

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bahanaga, May 17:** Amid the surge of Covid-19 in Balasure, people in fringe villages of the district sharing borders with West Bengal are panicked over returnees from the neighbouring state. Villagers have been spending sleepless nights, a report said.

According to the report, though the district administration has sealed border entry points with

each fringe villages almost every day. Some villagers said that at other places, the administration has made 14-day quarantine mandatory for the returnees, but this is not happening in the villages.

Many locals demanded that the administration take immediate steps to ensure that at least Bengal returnees remain in home quarantine, apart from stepping up vigil and checking the returnees at the railway stations.

**Dongria Kondhs refuse to undergo RT-PCR tests**

**RAYAGADA:** Members of the Dongria Kondh community at Niyamgiri hill in Rayagada district refused to undergo RT-PCR tests Monday making the job of the local administration doubly difficult to contain Covid. According to sources, the primitive tribe members expressed their reluctance to undergo the tests at medical camp set up here. The camp was organised by the Rayagada district administration near Parsali village besides Niyamgiri hill. It was decided that members of the Dongria Kondh community would be tested, officials informed.

**Woman, daughter killed in road mishap**

**SAMBALPUR:** A woman, who was returning home in a car after being discharged from a Covid-19 hospital, and her daughter were killed in a road mishap in Sambalpur district Monday. The deceased have been identified as Bijli Bhoi (45) and Raveena (20), residents of Tikilipada village under Hemgiri tehsil in Sundargarh district. Sunday, Bijli's son Vikash (23) and daughter Raveena left for Sambalpur to bring their mother back to home. Little did they know that fate was about to play a cruel joke in them. Vikas was driving the car when they were returning home. As they neared Sasan by-pass, Vikas lost control of the car and rammed it into a stationary truck.



Contractual labourers engaged in maintenance of railway tracks at Nalco CPP plant staging a rail roko agitation in Banarpal of Angul district demanding salary payment

# TRIBALS FORCED TO DRINK WATER FROM PITS, STREAMS

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jhumpura, May 17:** Crores of rupees are being spent to provide safe drinking water to rural people under the Swajaladhara Yojana and Basudha Yojana, but safe drinking water still remains a dream for people in many forested villages under Jhumpura block in Keonjhar.

According to reports, though there are tube wells and solar-powered water projects in Basantpur, Nayagad, Malda and Kutugaon panchayats, most of them have either gone defunct or deliver dirty stinking water. Villagers alleged that overhead tanks are not cleaned for years while tanks at some places are lidless. "Water is unfit for drinking," rued locals. Unable to get safe water, people are bound to drink water from nearby streams or pits. On the other hand, consumption of contaminated water has resulted in multiple diseases among the people.



As villages are in remote forested areas, the authorities do not come to repair the defunct drinking water projects nor clean the tanks. People of Brahmanijhari and Penteisahi in Basantpur panchayats alleged that tanks are not being cleaned or chlorinised. With the temperatures soaring, water crisis has worsened in these tribal-dominated pockets. Leaving aside their work, tribal women trek miles to collect drink-

ing water. The tribal residents lamented that collecting water is a daily struggle. "Every summer we have to struggle for water to survive. But the local authorities pay no heed," rued some villagers. "In such a situation, we are bound to drink dirty water from the stream," they rued. When contacted, executive engineer of the RWSS, Dayanidhi Sahu said that the overhead water tanks will be cleaned.

# Man-daughter duo turns 'Good Samaritan' for birds

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhandaripokhari, May 17:** The Covid-19 pandemic is not just claiming human lives, but is affecting the lives of animals too. Amid these tough times, a father and daughter duo has turned 'Good Samaritan' for stray birds in Bhandaripokhari. Thirty-seven-year-old Jyoti Shankar Panda and his nine-year-old daughter Mamali of Bayabanapur panchayat under Bhandaripokhari block leave their house every morning carrying with them food grains, millets and water for birds.

Panda and his daughter walk more than a mile every day. The two keep the food grains, millets and water on both sides of road as well as on trees. They feel that during the scorching summer, the birds will survive on their small contribution. Jyoti uses a ladder to climb the trees and keeps the edibles in containers. His daughter carries the food products for the birds, a local villager stated. "I feed around 2.5kg of food grains and millets to the birds. This gives me immense pleasure."

# Basudha Yojana goes haywire in Bargarh district

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bargarh, May 17:** The state government launched the Basudha Yojana to supply drinking water to the rural households in the state. However, the scheme has missed the target due to administrative neglect and political apathy.

The Buxi Jagabandhu Assured Water Supply to Habitations (Basudha) scheme was launched November 22, 2018 with the objective to provide adequate safe water for drinking and domestic purposes on a sustainable basis to the rural households.

A case in point is the rural households in Keshripali and Mahulapali villages under Mahulapali panchayat and Bheden block of Bargarh district.

The residents in the twin villages are yet to get water supply to their households as the drinking water project is yet to become func-

**WATER WOES**

The problem becomes acute when summer approaches. The water level in the village pond declines and becomes unfit for consumption, forcing people to tread several kilometres to fetch drinking water

Three out of the six tube wells in Mahulapali village have become defunct, while the remaining do not pump out enough water to meet the need of the villagers

People are consuming contaminated water and getting afflicted with jaundice as the project is yet to be implemented and only halfway through

two years.

Reports said that the Mahulapali village-3 and Keshripali village are from the same ward and their population is 3,000 and 500 respectively. Drinking water scarcity is the main problem in these two villages. The problem becomes acute when summer approaches.

The water level in the village pond declines and becomes unfit for consumption, forcing people to tread several kilometres to fetch drinking water.

Similarly, three out of the six tube wells in Mahulapali village have become defunct, while the remaining do not pump out enough water to meet the need of the villagers. Likewise, Keshripali village has two tube wells but they do not meet the requirement of the villagers. As a result, the villagers are facing lots of difficulties.

Bijay Karmi of Mahulapali village said that they were expecting that they will get rid of their drinking water problem forever after a drinking water project was launched in the village under Basudha Yojana. However, the project is yet to become functional despite passage of two years. People are consuming contaminated water and getting afflicted

with jaundice, he said. Krupasindhu Pradhan of Mahulapali village said that people are facing difficulties as the projects are only halfway through and yet to become operational. He warned that the drinking water problem in the area will spin out of hand if the project is not made operational immediately. A ward member, Lokanath Sandha said that people are suffering a lot for water. The water problem becomes acute more during summer season when people had to walk for about 2 km to get a bucket of water from a tube well.

Efforts to contact Mahulapali sarpanch Pinky Badhei for her comments on the issue went in vain. Rabi Meher, panchayat executive officer, said the project is being implemented by Rural Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) department but refused to say anything more on the issue.

Phone No. 06821-241026(O)/241079(R) Fax No. 06821-241026/240056 e-mail: eerwss\_brij@ori.nic.in cseerwssbri2009@gmail.com

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, RWS&S DIVISION, BHANJANAGAR-761126**

**Govt. of Orissa "e" Procurement Notice**

**Bid Identification No. E.E. RWS&S\_11/2021-22**

- The Executive Engineer, RWS&S Division, Bhanjanagar, Ganjam on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bid in Single Cover System according to the norm of "e" Procurement system in online mode for providing 100% functional TAP connection for different PWS Schemes in Ganjam District from the eligible contractors as per DTCN
- Nature of Work : Supplying all labour T&P and materials for construction of valve chamber, 100% house connection laying of distribution of pipeline etc. for different PWS schemes in the Ganjam District.
- No. of Tender : 04 Nos.
- Tender Paper Cost : Rs.4000/- to 6000/-
- Tender Cost : 5.80 lakhs to 14.32 lakhs
- Class of Contractor : D & C
- Date and Time of Availability of bid document in the portal : Dt. 19.05.2021 at 11.00 AM to 25.05.2021 up to 5.00 PM
- Date of Opening of Bid : Dt. 27.05.2021 at 11.00 AM
- Period of completion : 90 (Ninety) days
- The bidders have to participate in online bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website <https://tendersorissa.gov.in>

Sd./- Executive Engineer, RWS&S Division, Bhanjanagar

OIPR-25021/11/0007/2122



The thoughts of the Divine are like white doves of peace and sweetness.  
**THE MOTHER**

## CBI in Bengal

A new drama is being enacted in Bengal. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested two high profile state ministers Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee, a ruling Trinamool Congress MLA Madan Mitra and former Kolkata Municipal Corporation Mayor Sovan Chatterjee from their homes on May 17 morning in connection with the old Narada Sting operation case that had caused a big political sensation on the eve of the 2016 state Assembly elections. All four were granted interim bail by the CBI court Monday evening.

The arrests come at a time when the whole country has turned into a veritable hell due to the raging second wave of COVID-19 and the Centre is helplessly watching millions suffer and thousands die daily without being capable to help in any manner.

The timing of the CBI action in this case that is being dragged for the past five years and the issue popping up almost in every major election to the Assembly or Lok Sabha since 2016 not only smacks of political vendetta, but also appears to be an attempt to change the national discourse from the Centre's abdication of responsibility to combat the pandemic.

The Narada sting operation had been carried out by Mathew Samuel targeting high-ranking officials and politicians of the Trinamool showing them purportedly accepting cash as bribes in exchange for providing unofficial favours to a fictitious company. Among the "recipients" were over dozen Trinamool ministers, MPs and MLAs. Though the sting had been made in 2014, it was put on public domain in 2016, just months before the Bengal Assembly polls. But, the Trinamool came out with flying colours in spite of the slur. The issue surfaced again and again in subsequent elections, but it has not cut much ice with the electorate who voted the Trinamool to power.

The BJP has been blatantly using the CBI to settle political scores, intimidate political opponents and weaken opposition parties in different states. The same method was followed in Bengal as well when top Trinamool leaders, including former minister Subhendu Adhikari and Mukul Roy, whose names figured in the Narada sting operation, quit their party and joined the BJP. They were big catches for the BJP and were expected to play a crucial role in its bid to oust the Trinamool government and capture power in the recently concluded Assembly poll. However, the results were an unmitigated disaster for the BJP which failed even to secure the three digit figure, while the Trinamool got a landslide victory.

It appears when the Trinamool was tasting success and basking in the new glory, the BJP top leadership had other things in mind. Before the new government was installed, the CBI sought and got permission from the Governor to file charge sheet and arrest the Trinamool ministers and MLA. The Speaker of the Assembly complained his permission had not been taken and as such the arrests were illegal. But, technically the CBI action seems to be well in order and planned in a meticulous manner, taking advantage of the situation when the new government was yet to be put in place.

The fact that the two other accused in the Narada sting case - Subhendu Adhikari and Mukul Roy - are spared by the CBI raises questions about the partisan handling of the matter by the agency and the Union Home Ministry. The charge made by both the Trinamool and Opposition Congress and the Left doesn't appear to be without substance.

Apart from diverting the nation's attention from the disastrous handling of the pandemic by the Centre, the arrests seem to be part of a bigger design.

During a global pandemic which is ravaging India and has put life out of gear for all Indians while sucking the life out of millions, the priorities of the Modi government are bound to be under question. Spending billions on rewriting history with the Central Vista project and using government agencies to carry out vendetta in the form of arrests and investigations aimed at suppressing opposition or critics seem to be the priority of the government at Centre. If at all there needs to be an urgent enquiry, it should start with the thousands of unclaimed bodies surfacing in UP and Bihar, shaking the very conscience of the nation.

# PANDEMIC OF 'POSITIVITY'

FOCUS NATION

There is a steady echo of voices asking for the Prime Minister to step aside, many demanding that he take responsibility for leading us straight into the mouth of the pandemic to be devoured, and others asking that he make way for someone less divisive in steering the nation through these difficult times. The demand has grown against the backdrop of a strong rebuff from the electorate in West Bengal and expectedly in Kerala, a poor showing in the panchayat polls in Uttar Pradesh and continued toll exerted by the second wave of the pandemic - seen in funeral pyres burning round the clock, bodies found floating in the Ganges and the complete mess on a vaccination programme for the people of India. Even the BJP's ideological parent the RSS can no longer ignore the havoc caused by SARS-Cov-2; it has launched a series styled as 'positivity unlimited', which is actually an insensitivity that still had to make a token acknowledgement of the misery all around us.



Jagdish Rattanan

**THE NEGATIVE EQUITY THE PM HAS EARNED IS BEING MET WITH A 'POSITIVITY' PROPAGANDA BRIGADE THAT IS TAKING ITS ROLE RATHER SERIOUSLY**

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has come out accepting that we let our guard down, though it is all of us, not just the government, he said, and the road ahead should be evidence-based approaches. The BJP has stepped up, too; the negative equity the PM has earned is being met with a 'positivity' propaganda brigade that is taking its role rather seriously. As a result, a new pandemic called 'positivity' is being unleashed to fight the Covid pandemic. This is why a whole new set of 'positivity' videos, stories designed to evoke nationalistic sentiments, and videos of how a 'hard-working' Prime Minister is being unfairly targeted have hit the market as WhatsApp forwards in the last fortnight or thereabouts.

All this transpires amid a total collapse, an underlining of the nation's firm membership in the group of third world nations, left quite clueless and only receiving assorted help from across the world, and even that has not been transparently accounted for or deployed with any sense of efficiency. Yet, the Prime Minister is unlikely to go with a graceful resignation. He will have to be pushed out of office, and this is unlikely to happen as long as his party and



When your loved ones are snatched, when the economy is in doldrums and when raising a voice can land you in jail, then this isn't a pretty picture of Hindutva

its ideological parent the RSS think they can ride the storm. They are equally unlikely to ask a different set of questions, demand accountability and become uncomfortable with reducing of the party to a person.

The plain fact is that all reins are in the hands of the Prime Minister, a complete capture of the party and its machinery, which must bend to his whims, which of course the BJP has done with a readiness that makes it quite common to call this a one-man show. Some would add one lieutenant, the home minister, who is known equally for his divisive exertions, and that makes it at best a 'two-man army', to borrow the words Shatrughan Sinha used when the actor-politician concluded that he could take it no more in the BJP and moved to the Congress.

The arrest of as many as 15 people and the registration of 17 FIRs in mid-May for posters put up in New Delhi critical of Modi by tying him to the export of vaccines when Indians don't have enough, and the questioning of the President of the Youth Congress BV Srinivas in another instance, are only the latest cases that make the point.

Not only is criticism stamped out, Modi has the penchant to use his position for personal glorification, crossing all boundaries as

can be seen from the suit he wore that had his name woven in, the renaming of a cricket stadium in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, as the Narendra Modi stadium, done at the hands of the President of India, and his pictures on all vaccination certificates. As the historian Ramchandra Guha has helpfully pointed out, by naming a stadium for himself while in power, Modi sits in the company of leaders like Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Saddam Hussein and Kim Il-sung.

Not since Indira Gandhi and her total domination and control over the Congress in the 1970s has any single political leader held such power and authority at the national level and shown the willingness to use it to narrow ends. Gandhi had a declared 'Emergency'; India today lives through an undeclared 'Emergency', which is in many ways worse because constitutional limits are stretched, twisted and tested routinely, not under the umbrella of any extraordinary national exigency, but under a new normal that takes hold to terrorise citizens into silence. All of this will have long term implications for the future of Indian democratic traditions.

But following in the footsteps of Indira, and making it one worse than that, also carries severe implications for the future of the BJP and its agenda of turning

India into a Hindu State. The decline of the Congress and the sorry state it eventually reached has often been traced to the early decline that began with Indira. It is surprising that those who can see the connections that led to the decline of India's Grand Old Party are unwilling or unable to see the mirror image of that in the Modi era and style of governance.

The fact is that the BJP has succeeded and grown well beyond its own imagination, helped of course by a free ticket offered by an Opposition that has been in disarray, and has been unable to capture the imagination of the people in the face of sharp, powerful and divisive campaigns by the BJP. Now, the Parivar sees the goal of a Hindu Rashtra within reach; 2024 is not too far away and this third time will open the roads to a very different India. The Ram temple is being built, and the gaming shows that one more election will be in the bag. The script is written. The timelines are set. Only the pandemic and the response have come in the way. When your loved ones are snatched, when the economy is in doldrums and when raising a voice can land you in jail, then this isn't a pretty picture of Hindutva.

The handling of the pandemic has exposed the party for what it is - insensitive not only to one segment or religion but to all of humanity in the relentless pursuit of an agenda that has nothing to do with people and everything to do with power and control and domination. The ugliest of forces have conspired to tear down the magnanimity, the values and the openness that are at the heart of India's spiritual traditions and religious practices that are said to be promoted while in actuality everything is being torn down. This much should be plain for anyone to see. In that sense, the resignation of the Prime Minister will provide welcome relief, but it will be a temporary reprieve because a pre-set agenda will take over, sooner rather than later.

*The writer is a journalist and a faculty member at Bhawan's SPJIMR. Views are personal.*  
@THEBILLIONPRESS

### WISDOM CORNER

- The season of failure is the best time for sowing the seeds of success. **PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA**
- Life is 10 per cent what happens to you and 90 per cent how you react to it. **CHARLES R. SWINDOLL**
- Don't compare yourself with other people; compare yourself with who you were yesterday. **JORDAN PETERSON**

### WORDSWORTH

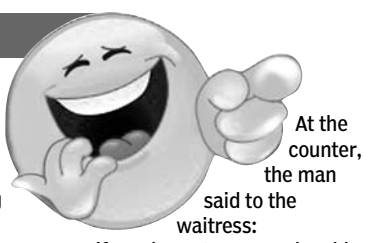
#### Namby-pamby

We owe this word to a very public literary spat between the poets Alexander Pope and Ambrose Philips at the start of the eighteenth century. Pope hated Philips because political opponents such as Joseph Addison praised the latter's rustic verses above his own. It has to be said, from today's perspective, that Pope had a point. Philips is now virtually unknown and rarely read, and even his best known lines, from a poem called A Winter-Piece, describing the rigours of the Danish winter, which was printed in The Tatler in 1709 ("There solid billows of enormous size, / Alps of green ice, in wild disorder rise"), are merely competent. What his critics hated most was a series of dreadful sentimental and sycophantic poems, written in little short lines, that eulogised the children of friends. The most quoted example is the opening of one with the title of Miss Charlotte Pulteney, in Her Mother's Arms: "Timely blossom, infant fair, / Fondling of a happy pair, / Every morn and every night / Their solicitous delight". In 1725, a friend of Pope's named Henry Carey wrote a scabrous lampoon about these poems in which he invented a mocking nickname, Namby-Pamby, based on Philips's given name, and used it in the title, Namby-Pamby: Or, A Panegyric on the New Versification. An extract will give you the tone: "Namby-Pamby, pilly-piss, / Rhimy-pim'd on Missy Miss / Tartaretta Tartaree / From the navel to the knee; / That her father's gracy grace / Might give him a placy place." Pope liked the name and included it in the 1733 edition of The Dunciad, his denunciation of popular authors of the day. It's odd to think it was largely because of the poetic diatribes against Philips by Carey and Pope that Philips is remembered today. But the most significant result was that namby-pamby permanently entered the language to mean feeble or effeminate in behaviour or expression.

### LOL

#### Where is this place?

A man and his wife were driving their Recreational Vehicle across the country and were nearing a town spelled Kissimmee. They noted the strange spelling and tried to figure how to pronounce it - KISS-a-me; kis-A-me; kis-a-ME. They grew more perplexed as they drove into the town. Since they were hungry, they pulled into a place to get something to eat.



At the counter, the man said to the waitress: "My wife and I can't seem to be able to figure out how to pronounce this place. Will you tell me where we are and say it very slowly so that I can understand." The waitress looked at him and said: "Buuurrgrrrrr Kiiiiinnng."

### SPECTRUM PANDEMIC

# Did SARS-CoV-2 origin in a Chinese lab?



Binay Panda

**THE STRONGEST ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR OF A LABORATORY ORIGIN IS THAT NO INTERMEDIATE ANIMAL HOST HAS EVER BEEN IDENTIFIED, EVEN AFTER ANALYSING MORE THAN 80,000 ANIMALS AROUND WUHAN**

### Letters

#### TO THE EDITOR

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

**OrissaPOST**  
B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

The discussion on the laboratory origin of the COVID-19 virus has re-surfaced and this time with support from many well-known scientists. Why are scientists so ambivalent about the source of the virus? Before we begin, let's start with the basics. COVID-19 is a disease, and SARS-CoV-2 or SARS2 is the virus, a member of the betacoronavirus group, that causes it. The virus relies on a protein on its surface, the spike protein, to gain entry into human cells, the first step in the process of infection.

Since the world was first alerted about the virus causing respiratory illness in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, there have been many hypotheses and conjectures on its origin. The proponents of its natural source argue that SARS2, a zoonotic virus, meaning originated in animals, came from nature. A group of scientists headed by Kristian Anderson argued last year in a published letter that it was improbable for the virus to have been made through laboratory manipulation. They argued that if humans had made the virus in the lab-

oratory, they would have designed the viral spike protein differently to infect human cells. They state that in computer-predicted models, the spike protein behaves poorly to bind its human counterpart. Still, in reality, it binds much more efficiently to it. Therefore, they argue in favour of a natural selection where the virus' spike protein got selected efficiently to infect human cells over a while. The study further suggests that a high degree of similarity between the genomes of SARS2 and that of a particular bat coronavirus points to its zoonotic origin. Finally, it indicates a possibility for the virus progenitor using bats as reservoirs before jumping to humans through an intermediate host animal.

Some scientists vigorously argue against this theory. The strongest argument in favour of a laboratory origin is that no intermediate animal host has ever been identified, even after analysing more than 80,000 animals around Wuhan. This encouraged the conspiracy theorists to propagate that the virus was designed and leaked from the Chinese lab, the Wuhan Institute of

Virology, which worked extensively on the virus' close cousins, and several other bat coronaviruses. The lack of any direct evidence favouring the laboratory origin, except for the absence of an intermediate host animal, which may be discovered later, made the origin debate subdued over time. However, this changed last week when 18 scientists, including some renowned coronavirus and infectious disease experts, called for a free and fair investigation to look into the virus' origin. The experts argued that the World Health Organisation's mission to find the virus' origin did not give both the laboratory- and the natural-origin theory equal consideration. Even WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus, while acknowledging the lack of sufficient data to support the laboratory origin, offered additional resources to evaluate the possibility of a laboratory origin. One of the critical points in the WHO fact-finding team is related to a conflict of interest. One of its members, Peter Daszak, has a long-standing collaboration with the Wuhan lab under investigation and had pre-

viously subcontracted the scientific work to the same place. Additionally, as per some scientists, the spike protein of SARS2 bears a four-unit cleavage site on its spike protein. They suggest that the site, unusual among betacoronaviruses of the same lineage, raises suspicion of the possibility of a laboratory design. This was fuelled further after the Nobel prize-winning virologist David Baltimore was quoted in social media on the particular units at the cleavage site as a "smoking gun for the origin of the virus."

Now that we know both sides of the story, can we say that the virus originated in a Chinese lab? We don't know, and it will be a long time till we find out the answer. For that to happen, the Chinese authorities and the international team of experts should investigate with an open mind. Additionally, the experts should have complete access to the raw data, laboratory records, and personnel details from the Wuhan lab.

*The writer is a Professor at JNU, New Delhi.*

#### Image dented

Sir, Suddenly, the entire health system has collapsed and the government is itself gasping for breath. The carefully cultivated image of India as a vaccine exporter has now come to haunt the nation with vaccine shortage afflicting the country. Vaccine export has turned out to be another flawed decision. There are too many missteps by the government and this at a time when the need for efficient governance is paramount. Leaders rise and fall by how they handle crises and Modi has mishandled this pandemic big time. It is the handling of the pandemic and the callousness of the Modi-Shah combine in abandoning all Covid protocols during the election campaign in March-April, which has frustrated even the most ardent Modi fans. The sight of bodies by the hundreds floating on the Ganga, the uncountable deaths and misery of not even managing a decent funeral for loved ones; people gasping for oxygen and not finding hospital beds is what angers people across the country today. All this was due to lack of preparedness. And the fact that the Modi government relied on the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) instead of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Nagpur which has epidemiologists that are hands-on as far as understanding the behaviour of viruses is concerned, would appear to be another blunder. The maladroit handling of the second wave has dented the image of Prime Minister Modi. Barring die-hard BJP supporters and RSS cadres, most independent thinkers, intellectuals and even those that had supported Modi wholeheartedly through their writings have now had to step back and confess that Modi and his government have failed to tackle the second wave.

#### Dignified farewell

Sir, The Centre has directed states to prevent the dumping of bodies in rivers and focus on their safe disposal. This is the most undesirable and alarming situation in the country to witness bodies in rivers. Stopping dumping of bodies, as well as their safe disposal and protection of water quality, have to be attended to on a war footing. There is a need to strengthen enforcement, maintain vigil and also take proactive measures to facilitate and support the families for cremation of bodies. The need of the hour is that authorities spread awareness with the riverside communities on the use of river water and prevent such incidents of dumping of bodies in rivers. Society needs to ensure safe and dignified cremation of the deceased.

#### Image dented

**K Ravi, BHUBANESWAR**

**Amit Singh Kushwaha, SATNA (MP)**

# If I speak up, I face treason charge: UP BJP MLA

SAFFRON PARTY'S SITAPUR MLA HAS BECOME THE LATEST TO JOIN THE LIST OF RULING PARTY LAWMAKERS TO QUESTION THE UP GOVT'S HANDLING OF PANDEMIC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sitapur/Lucknow, May 17: The BJP's Sitapur MLA has become the latest to join the list of ruling party lawmakers in Uttar Pradesh who have expressed resentment over COVID-19 management in the state, saying he feared a sedition charge for speaking up.

"What standing do MLAs have? If we speak too much, treason and sedition charges will be slapped on us as well," Rakesh Rathore told reporters last week, according to a video clip which surfaced Monday.

The MLA was replying to a question about ICU facilities in Sitapur. Pressed further, he said, "Do you think any MLA can put forward his point of view?"

"Everything is going fine. I will only say that things couldn't be better," he said in a sarcastic vein, while replying to another question.

"I am not the government. But I can definitely say that whatever the government is telling you, it should be considered as correct," he said.

Asked why the district administration is lacking in efforts to control the crisis, the MLA said the government and administration are two sides of the same coin.



A medical worker takes swab sample of a man for COVID-19 test at Birapur village in Prayagraj, Monday. PTI PHOTO

Other members of the ruling BJP in Uttar Pradesh too have questioned Yogi Adityanath's handling of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic. May 9, Union Labour minister

Santosh Gangwar complained to the chief minister about the situation in his Bareilly constituency, saying officials don't take calls and government health centres send back patients for 'referrals' from the

district hospital. In a letter to Adityanath, he also complained about the "big shortage" of empty oxygen cylinders and the high prices of medical equipment in Bareilly.

A day later, BJP MLA from Jasrana in Firozabad Ramgopal Lodhi claimed that his coronavirus positive wife was not admitted to an Agra hospital for over three hours, with officials saying that beds were not available.

The upset MLA posted a video clip with his complaint on social media, causing embarrassment to the government.

Lodhi claimed that his wife was not given medicines and water on time.

"What will happen to a common man when an MLA's wife cannot be given proper care," he said in the video, alleging that his wife had to lie on the hospital floor.

In April, a 'confidential' letter written by UP Law Minister Brajesh Pathak surfaced on social media. Pathak had lashed out at his state's health authorities, complaining that beds for coronavirus patients were falling short and ambulances took hours to arrive in the state capital.

The minister did not reject the authenticity of the letter, which appeared to challenge the UP government's claim that it is on top of the situation.

"I had written a confidential letter to the government," he had told PTI, declining to share its contents.

# TN boycotts HRD Min's meet on NEP

NEP'S PROPOSED THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA HAS BEEN WITNESSING STIFF OPPOSITION IN TAMIL NADU



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai/Tiruchirappalli, May 17: The Tamil Nadu government Monday boycotted an online meet by Union HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' on the National Education Policy 2020, saying it did not get a favourable response from the Centre for a ministerial-level discussion on NEP.

Pokhriyal had convened the meeting with state Education Secretaries to discuss implementation of NEP 2020 and other matters.

The newly formed DMK government had sought discussion at ministerial level on "amending" the NEP.

"We even offered our views as a solution to various problems that may arise due to the implementation of the NEP in the present form. But the centre has not responded (and decided to go ahead with the secretary level meeting). So we boycotted the meeting," School Education minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi told reporters in Tiruchirappalli.

Objecting to the 'tacit' implementation of Hindi and Sanskrit through the three-language formula, the minister said centralisation of education is unacceptable as it was not in practice even in the developed nations.

"Delhi can't decide what the people of Tamil Nadu, especially our rural students should learn. Tamil Nadu's two language policy has been in practice since the times of Anna," he added.

DMK founder and former chief minister CN Annadurai is ad-

ressed as Anna. NEP's proposed three-language formula has been witnessing stiff opposition in Tamil Nadu, with the previous AIADMK government also making it clear earlier that the state will only follow the two-language system-- of Tamil and English, in vogue for decades in the state.

Recalling the letter the Tamil Nadu government wrote to the Union education ministry on the issue, Poyyamozhi said he had sought a meeting at ministerial level and was willing to present his views and recommendations on the NEP at the ministerial meeting.

Pokhriyal had convened Monday's meet with state Education Secretaries to review the Covid situation, online education, and work around NEP.

"Through the policy, the Centre insists that there should be two Indian languages. Tamil will naturally be the first language here. But the Centre is talking as if English does not exist," Poyyamozhi alleged.

The implementation of three language policy would pave the way for the 'imposition' of Hindi and Sanskrit, he contended.

"Ours is a multi-cultural and multi-linguistic society..We can't accept the imposition of Hindi and Sanskrit. Implementing the three language policy will not benefit our rural students. DMK stands by its policies," the minister said.

He said the DMK was also against board exams for classes III, V and VIII and claimed that the NEP is silent on reservation.

# Stalin ropes in AIADMK leader in Covid advisory commission

AGENCIES

Chennai, May 17: Showing clear signs that he is moving away from politics of vendetta, newly elected Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has formed an advisory panel of legislators drawn from all political parties with legislature representation.

The committee was constituted as per a resolution adopted in the all party meeting held at the Tamil Nadu secretariat May 13 under the Chairmanship of Chief minister, MK Stalin.

The thirteen member panel will have AIADMK leader and former state health minister MR Vijayabhaskar as one of its members. Chief Minister Stalin is the chairman of the advisory panel which has one member from each political party that have a representation in the legislative assembly. This includes parties which contested on the symbol of DMK and AIADMK.

The other members of the panel are Dr N Ezhilan of the DMK, GK Mani of the PMK, AM Manirathnam of Congress, Dr Sadan Tirumalaikumar of MDMK, Nainar Nagendran of BJP, SS Balaji of the VCK, T Ramachandran of CPI, Dr MH Jawaharullah of Manathiya Makkal Katchi (MMK), R Easwaran of the Kongunadu Makkal Desiya Katchi (KMDK), T Velmurugan of the Tamizhaga Vaazhuvurimai Katchi (TVK), Pooval Jagan Moorthy of Puratchi Bharatham and VP Nagal Malli of the CPM.

The government said that the advisory committee will meet as per the urgency and need of the emerging Covid-19 situation.

Contributions to the Tamil Nadu

Chief Minister's Public Relief Fund continued to pour in to help the government tackle the COVID-19 pandemic with the AIADMK on Monday saying it would give Rs one crore besides a month's salary of its MLAs and MPs. CPI general secretary D Raja said its two Lok Sabha MPs and two MLAs from Tamil Nadu would give their one month's salary to the Fund and CPI(M) State Secretary K Balakrishnan handed over a cheque of Rs 10 lakh, favouring the CMPRF, to Chief Minister M K Stalin at the Secretariat. Top actor Rajinikanth too called on Stalin at the Secretariat here and gave a cheque for Rs 50 lakh. Speaking to reporters, the superstar said, "People should definitely comply with the COVID restrictions imposed by the government and only then the pandemic can be contained. This is my earnest appeal to the people."



# UP to seek help of religious leaders to prevent dumping of bodies



People carry a body for last rites as shallow graves are seen around the banks of the Ganga river, at Phaphamau in Prayagraj, Monday. PTI PHOTO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, May 17: The Uttar Pradesh government will now take the help of religious leaders to create awareness among the people not to dump bodies in the rivers, an official said Monday, amid mounting criticism over such incidents.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath instructed officials during a meeting that the process of burial on the banks of rivers or disposing bodies in rivers as part of last rite was not environment friendly.

There should be a dialogue with the religious leaders in this regard as there is a need to make people aware about it, an official

said. Adityanath asked for continued patrolling by water police of the State Disaster Response Force and Provincial Armed Constabulary around all the rivers of the state and asked for ensuring that the bodies were not disposed of in water under any condition, the spokesperson said.

The chief minister stressed the last rites should be respectfully performed and financial assistance was also being provided for it, the spokesperson said.

Even in case of bodies being left unclaimed, the last rites should be performed according to the religious beliefs, Adityanath said.

A large number of dead bodies have been found flowing in the

rivers in many districts of the state. There have also been reports of bodies being found buried on the banks of the Ganga.

During the meeting, Adityanath said experts have warned about a third coronavirus wave and stressed on the need to be fully prepared.

He asked for preparing paediatric, ICU wards of 100-100 beds in all medical colleges, the spokesman said.

Adityanath said oxygen audit being conducted to balance the demand and supply of oxygen yielded good results. Most refillers and medical colleges now have up to 48-72 hours of oxygen backup, the spokesman said, quoting Adityanath.

# TN reports 33,075 fresh cases, 335 more deaths

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, May 17 : Tamil Nadu on Monday reported 33,075 new coronavirus cases and 335 related fatalities. The new cases, including 6,150 in Chennai, a bulletin said. Though there was a slight dip in the new infections, the fatalities rose by 24 as against the previous day. Of the 335 deaths - 152 were in private and 183 in government hospitals.

This took the total number of fatalities to 18,005 in the State. The toll Sunday was 311, including 60 in Chennai. The total number of people testing positive till date increased to 16,31,291 and the number of active cases, including isolation, remains at 2,31,596, according to the bulletin.

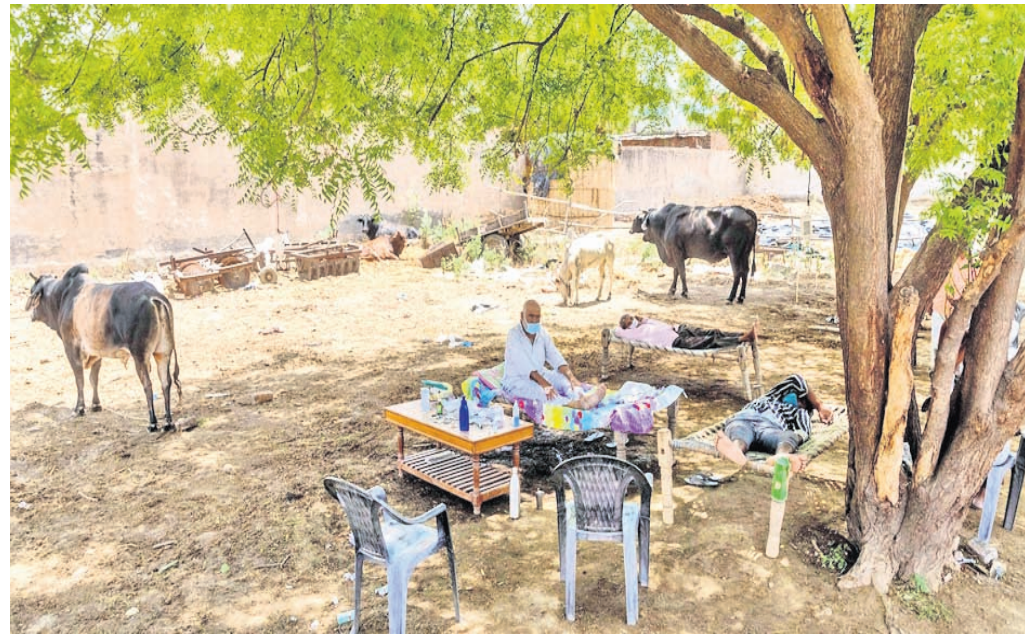
The number of positive patients discharged after treatment today stands at 20,486 and the total has gone up to 13,81,690.

REUTERS

Mewla Gopalgarh, May 17: In a village in northern India engulfed by COVID-19, the sick lie on cots under a tree, glucose drips hanging from a branch. Cows graze all around, while syringes and empty medicine packets are strewn on the ground.

There is no doctor or health facility in Mewla Gopalgarh in India's most-populous state of Uttar Pradesh, a 90-minute drive from the national capital Delhi. There is a government hospital nearby but it has no available beds and the villagers say they cannot afford private clinics.

Instead, village practitioners of alternative medicine have set up an open-air clinic where they distribute glucose and other remedies to patients with symptoms of COVID-19. Some believe lying



People are dying and there is nobody to look after us  
SANJAY SINGH

under the neem tree, known for its medicinal properties, will raise their oxygen levels. There is no scientific basis for this belief or for some of the other remedies being offered.

"When people become breathless, they have to go under trees to raise their oxygen levels," said Sanjay Singh, whose 74-year-old father died a few days ago after developing a fever. Singh said his father was not tested and died in two days.

"People are dying and there is nobody to look after us," he said.

India's devastating second wave of infections, which has brought even hospitals in big cities such

as Delhi to breaking point, is ripping through the country's vast rural hinterland where healthcare is threadbare.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is facing criticism for failing to prepare for the second wave, said in a speech last week that the pandemic was spreading fast in the villages and urged people not to ignore the symptoms. "Get the test done, isolate yourself and start medication on time," he said.

But in this village, people are making do as best they can. One woman had borrowed an oxygen cylinder from a neighbour whose condition had improved slightly, her family said.

"Truth is, there has been no COVID-19 testing. We have tried but they told us they don't have enough staff," said 48-year old Yogesh Talan, a former headman of the village.



There's a lot common between PM Cares ventilators and the PM himself: too much false PR, don't do their respective jobs and nowhere in sight when needed

RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

## 'INDEPENDENT PANEL TO APPOINT EC MEMBERS'

A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) seeking constitution of an independent committee for the appointment of members of Election Commission



### of the day quote

We are in a situation where almost every 5th person is a suspected Covid infected one. We must ensure the strict compliance with all the preventive guidelines

TAMILAISAI SOUNDARARAJAN | TELANGANA GOVERNOR

Assam, which is currently producing 80 metric tonne of oxygen per day against the requirement of 70 mt, has been providing oxygen to six northeastern states -- Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Nagaland

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | ASSAM CHIEF MINISTER

And, at one point of time, a situation of chaos prevailed. But, thanks to God, with everybody's co-operation, the situation has been controlled and it is in complete control now

YOGI ADITYANATH | UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER

### SHORT TAKES

#### SC transfers YSRC MP to Army hosp

New Delhi: In a relief to jailed and rebel YSR Congress MP K Raghuram Raju, the Supreme Court Monday ordered his forthwith transfer to the Army hospital at Secunderabad in neighbouring Telangana for medical examination and hospitalization till further orders in a sedition case filed by Andhra Pradesh police against him. Raju, who is the Lok Sabha MP from Narsapuram parliamentary constituency in Andhra Pradesh, alleged that the sedition case has been lodged against him by state police "because of political vendetta" as he has been criticizing "the action of his own party".

#### C'garh extends curfew till May 25

Chandigarh: The Chandigarh administration Monday decided to extend the curfew in the city till May 25 morning to further contain the coronavirus. A decision in this regard was taken at a review meeting chaired by Administrator VP Singh Badnore here. Responding to complaints against private hospitals for overcharging Covid patients, he directed the Health Department to again notify the approved rates for the treatment.

#### 37.8°C max temp in Delhi

New Delhi: Delhi recorded a high of 37.8 degrees Celsius Monday, two notches below the season's average, the India Meteorological Department said. It was a pleasant morning with the minimum temperature settling at 23.6 degrees Celsius, three notches below the season's average. Humidity levels oscillated between 66 per cent and 28 per cent. The weather department has forecast generally cloudy skies with very light rain/thundershowers for Tuesday.

#### Nine black fungus cases reported in AP

Amaravati: Nine cases of Mucormycosis, also known as Black Fungus, have so far been reported in different districts of Andhra Pradesh but there were no related fatalities, Principal Secretary (Health) Anil Kumar Singh said here Monday. Addressing a press conference, Anil Kumar said superintendents of all hospitals have been asked to send in details of reported Black Fungus cases.

## CYCLONE TAUKTAE

# 121 VILLAGES AFFECTED IN K'TAKA, 8 DEAD

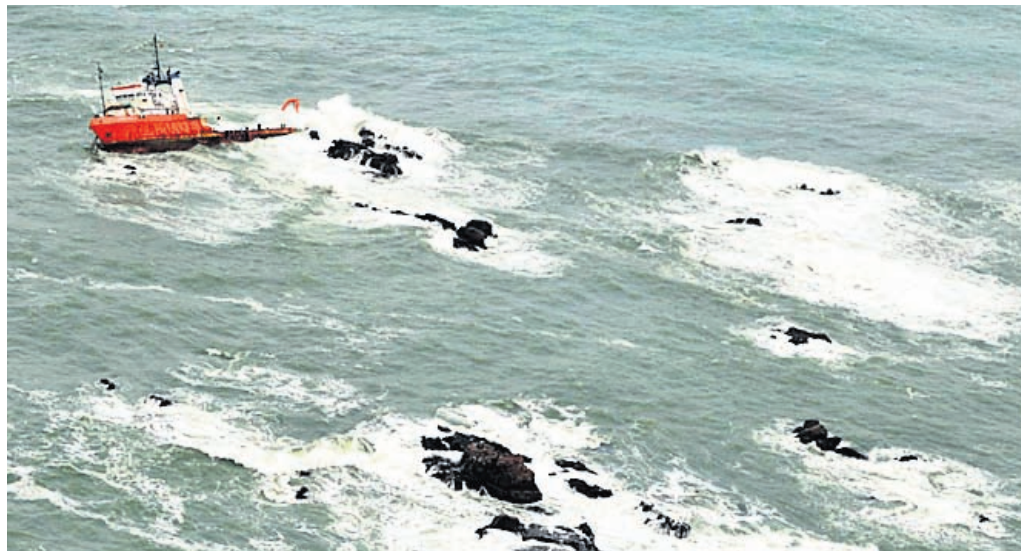
AGENCIES

Bangalore, May 17: Eight people have lost their lives so far in the Cyclone Tauktae-hit coastal and surrounding malnad districts of Karnataka, officials said Monday. According to a situation report by Karnataka State Disaster Management Authority officials, till this evening, 121 villages in seven districts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, Kodagu, Chikkamagaluru, Hassan and Belagavi have been affected by the cyclone.

Among the 121 villages affected, a maximum of 48 are from Uttara Kannada district. Among the eight deaths reported, two each are from Dakshina Kannada and Belagavi, and one each from Uttara Kannada, Udupi, Chikkamagaluru and Shivamogga, officials said.

While two deaths have been reported in Dakshina Kannada because of drowning in sea due to a tug being adrift, two died in Belagavi due to house collapse. A fisherman who went to tie his boat died in Uttara Kannada and he got hit by another boat, while one person died of electric mishap in Udupi.

One death each were reported in Chikkamagaluru and Shivamogga due to house collapse and lightning respectively. Damage to 387 houses have been reported. Among them, 57 houses are fully damaged and 330 are partially damaged, the report said. One animal loss has been reported from Dakshina Kannada. A total of 711 poles, 153 transformers, 9,203 metres of lines,



Navy helicopter rescuing stranded all nine crew members of Tug Coromandel

UNI PHOTO

56.2 km of road, 57 nets and 116 boats have been damaged, it said, adding that agriculture and horticulture crop losses have been estimated in about 30 hectares and in about 2.87 hectares, respectively.

The Met department has forecasted thunderstorms accompanied by lightning with light to moderate spells of rain and gusty winds speed reaching 30-40 kmph is likely to affect Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada, Kodagu, Belagavi, Dharwad, Chamaraajanagara, Ramangara, Bangalore Urban and Rural, Ballari, Chitradurga and Chikkaballapura districts.

Officials Sunday had said as the cyclone system was moving fur-

ther north, towards Maharashtra coast, the cyclone's impact was likely to come down from Monday over the State. Around 1,000 trained personnel from fire force, police, coastal police, home guards, SDRF have been deployed in the three coastal and neighbouring districts for rescue and relief operations, and NDRF teams have also been roped in. Meanwhile, officials said all 9 crew members stranded on tug 'Coromandel' have been rescued.

Indian Navy's ALH helicopter has rescued four seamen stranded onboard the Tug which had run aground close to the coast of New Mangalore, while 5 of them were rescued by boat, they said, adding

that they are being provided medical treatment.

#### 6 KILLED IN MAHA

The storm with winds gusting up to 185 km per hour began making landfall on the Gujarat coast Monday night, after dumping heavy rains Mumbai, forcing the evacuation of over 1.5 lakh people in Gujarat and leaving two barges with 410 people on board adrift in the Arabian Sea. Six persons were killed in Maharashtra's Konkan region in separate incidents related to the severe cyclonic storm and three sailors remained missing after two boats sank in the sea, officials said. Three persons died

## Demand for MGNREGA work rises: Ministry data

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 17: Despite the second coronavirus wave entering rural areas and lockdown in several states, the demand for work under rural employment scheme MGNREGA is on the rise, according to the data released by Rural Development Ministry Monday.

In the wake of the pandemic, there have been casualties in operating staff for implementation of rural development schemes and those work in the front have witnessed casualties due to Covid-19, the ministry said in a statement.

As many as 1.85 crore people have been given work in May so far, which is 52 per cent higher compared to 1.22 crore in 2019 in the same period, the Rural Development Ministry said. In 2019, there was no lockdown in the country as it was not facing any pandemic. "As on 13th May, 2021, 2.95 crore persons have been offered work in FY 2021-22 completing 5.98 lakh assets and generating 34.56 crore person-days. The accomplishment has been achieved despite casualties either through death or infection among the operating staff at all levels, including those in the front line," the ministry said. The fight against Covid-19 in rural areas, training was provided to trainers on Covid-appropriate behaviours, vaccine hesitancy and encourage good health-seeking behaviours and immunity building measures in April this year. The training was given under the Deendayal Aanyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM).

## RITUALS AMID PANDEMIC



Portals of Kedarnath temple opened in Rudraprayag district

PTI PHOTO

## Kalra sent to 3 days police custody

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 17: A Delhi court Monday sent businessman Navneet Kalra, who was arrested late Sunday night, to three days' police custody in connection with oxygen concentrator hoarding case.

Metropolitan Magistrate Archana Beniwal at the Saket district court passed the order after hearing the arguments of Delhi Police and Kalra's lawyers. The Delhi Police had sought a five-day

### O<sub>2</sub> CONCENTRATOR CASE

custody of Kalra for interrogation in connection with alleged black-marketing and hoarding of oxygen concentrators. Advocate Vineet Malhotra, representing Kalra, had argued that Kalra's custody was not required, as the police have already had his phone and bills of sale of the oxygen concentrators.

Additional Public Prosecutor Atul Shrivastava, however, submitted that Additional Sessions Judge at the Saket Court had ear-

lier held custodial interrogation of Kalra was required, and also the Delhi High Court did not entertain his plea seeking anticipatory bail. He also submitted that the whole society is looking at the investigating agency and the judiciary in this case.

A Delhi High Court bench of Justice Subramonium Prasad had turned down Kalra's plea for anticipatory bail, remarking: "I'm persuaded by the trial court's order. Interim protection cannot be given at this stage."

# Bleeding, clotting cases after Covishield 'minuscule'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, May 17: Incidents of bleeding or clotting following Covid-19 vaccination in India are minuscule and in line with the expected number of diagnoses of these conditions in the country, according to a report submitted by the National AEFI (Adverse Event Following Immunization) Committee to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).

Alerts were raised in some countries on post-vaccination "embolic and thrombotic events" March 11 this year, particularly with the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine (Covishield in India), said the report. A decision was taken to con-

duct an urgent in-depth analysis of the adverse events (AE) in India in the light of the global concerns.

The National AEFI Committee noted that as of April 3 this year, 75,435,381 vaccine doses had been administered (Covishield-68,650,819; Covaxin-6,784,562). Of these, 65,944,106 were first doses and 9,491,275 second doses.

Since the Covid-19 vaccination drive was initiated, more than 23,000 adverse events were reported through the CoWIN platform from 684 of the 753 districts of the country. Of these, the AEFI Committee said, only 700 cases (9.3 cases per million doses administered) were reported to be serious and of severe nature. The AEFI Committee has completed an in-depth case review



of 498 serious and severe events, of which 26 cases have been reported to be potential thromboembolic (formation of a clot in a blood ves-

sel that might also break loose and get carried by the blood stream to plug another vessel) events - following the administration of

Covishield vaccine - with a reporting rate of 0.61 cases per million doses. "There were no potential thromboembolic events reported following the administration of Covaxin vaccine," the report said. AEFI data in India showed that there is "very minuscule but definitive risk of thromboembolic events". The reporting rate of these events in India is around 0.61 per million doses, which is much lower than the four cases per million reported by the UK's regulator Medical and Health Regulatory Authority (MHRA). Germany has reported 10 events per million doses.

Thromboembolic events keep occurring in general population as background and scientific literature suggests that this risk is al-

most 70 per cent less in persons of South and South East Asian descent in comparison to those from Europe.

The Union Health Ministry is separately issuing advisories to health-care workers and vaccine beneficiaries to encourage people to be aware of suspected thromboembolic symptoms occurring within 20 days after receiving any Covid-19 vaccine (particularly Covishield) and report preferably to the health facility where the vaccine was administered.

Covishield continues to have a definite positive benefit risk profile with tremendous potential to prevent infections and reduce deaths due to the pandemic across the world and in India.



# national

## of the day quote

I urge everyone to abide by the law and refrain from any activity that violates lockdown norms for the sake of the larger interest of Bengal and its people. We have utmost faith in the judiciary and the battle will be fought legally

ABHISHEK BANERJEE | SENIOR TMC LEADER

I am in great pain. But I also consume cow urine every day. That is why I am safe from coronavirus. I don't have to take any other medicine as long as I drink cow urine. I am not affected by this virus and God forbid will never be because I am taking this medicine (cow urine) regularly

PRAGYA THAKUR | BJP MP FROM BHOPAL

The resignation of Dr Shahid Jameel, one of India's best virologists, is really sad. Modi Sarkar has no place for professionals who can speak their mind freely without fear or favour

JAIRAM RAMESH | CONGRESS LEADER

## SHORT TAKES

### Three killed in encounter

**Bijapur:** Three persons were killed in an exchange of fire between Naxals and security forces in a forest along the border of Bijapur and Sukma districts in Chhattisgarh Monday, a police official said. It was yet to be ascertained whether the deceased were Naxals or civilians, he said, adding that there was no casualty among the security personnel. The gun-fight broke out after Naxals opened fire at a newly set up police camp at Silger in Sukma along the inter-district border, Inspector General of Police (Bastar range) Sundarraj P said.

### 92 inmates test Covid positive

**Jammu:** Ninety-two inmates have tested positive for Covid-19 in two prisons of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said Monday, and asserted that all the positive cases are asymptomatic and have been isolated in separate barracks. The latest detection in Udhampur and Kupwara district jails through special Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) screening pushed the active cases among inmates to 115 out of a total of over 4,570 prisoners in all the jails, officials said.

### Man dies after being set ablaze

**Bairampur (UP):** A 43-year-old man died after he was set ablaze by unidentified assailants in Uttar Pradesh's Dumri village, police said Monday. Sudhir Kumar Singh had gone to a field Sunday to attend the nature's call when he was stabbed with knives and then petrol was poured over him after which he was set afire in Pachperwa police station area, they said. Police reached the spot after receiving information about the incident and took Singh to a nearby hospital where he was referred to Lucknow for treatment. However, he succumbed to his injuries in the hospital in Lucknow, police said.

### Quake hits Gir Somnath in Guj

**Ahmedabad:** An earthquake of magnitude 4.5 hit Gujarat's Gir Somnath district in the early hours of Monday, officials said. No casualty or damage to property was reported, they said. The earthquake was recorded at 3.37 am with its epicentre one km East-South East of Una in the Gir Somnath district located in Saurashtra region, an official of the Gandhinagar-based Institute of Seismological Research said.

# Can Covid vax get adulterated?

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, May 17 :** India is known as the pharmacy of the world, but the country has also been battling the challenge of counterfeit drugs for long. While the list includes many life-saving drugs and currently fake Remdesivir and oxygen concentrators, a fake Covid-19 vaccine can dampen the efforts of governments and add to the already overwhelming healthcare system in India, says an expert.

The second wave of Coronavirus in India has had a greater impact on the country's healthcare system. People have been running helter-skelter to get medicines, oxygen cylinders, concentrators, masks, PPE kits and other essential life-saving things. The sudden surge in demand unfortunately boosted the trade of fake medicines and other essentials for Covid treatment.

Early this month, four people were arrested in Pune for selling fake vials of Remdesivir for ₹35,000 -- a price far above the official ₹2,000 price cap for the original medicine. Police said the men had sold at least seven vials filled with liquid paracetamol to a relative of a coronavirus patient. In Mysuru, a nurse at a private hospital was arrested for selling Remdesivir vials that had been refilled with antibiotics and saline solution. There are many such cases.

### But what if the Covid vaccine gets adulterated?

"We have strong immunisation networks, however, we need to be extra vigilant in this case, as any adverse situation will have a long impact. The Covid vaccine can save a life, but a falsified vaccine will kill human beings as well erode public confidence in healthcare systems, healthcare professionals, and government agencies," Nakul Pasricha, Chief Executive of Pharma Secure, a company that offers drug verification technology to pharmaceutical companies in India, told IANS. "Greater risk of harm to consumers will result in greater liability for healthcare providers. Circulation of falsified or fake vaccines will add to the already

### One more terrorist killed in encounter

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Srinagar, May 17:** Another terrorist has been killed in an ongoing encounter between terrorists and security forces at Khanmoh on the outskirts of Srinagar Monday, officials said.

The firefight between terrorists and security forces took place after a joint team of the police and the army cordoned off the area and launched a search operation on the basis of specific information about presence of terrorists. As the security forces zeroed in on the spot where terrorists were hiding they came under a heavy volume of fire that triggered the encounter. "One more unidentified terrorist has been killed in Srinagar encounter; (toll 2). Search is going on," police said.

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, May 17:** All the research efforts, spanning over a century, have only managed to cover 23 per cent of snow leopard habitat and the rest remains unexplored, according to a WWF report.

Most of the vast range -- possibly over 1.7 million sqkm of rugged mountain terrain -- has never been researched from a snow leopard context, said the report titled "Over 100 Years of Snow Leopard Research - A spatially explicit review of the state of knowledge in the snow leopard range" which examines the current state of knowledge across their habitat.



### First batch of anti-Covid drug 2DG rolled out

**NEW DELHI:** The first batch of anti-Covid oral drug 2-DG, developed by the DRDO, was rolled out Monday as a severe wave of the coronavirus pandemic continued to ravage large parts of India. Releasing the drug along with Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG) has brought a "new ray of hope" in the treatment of Covid-19 patients and exuded confidence that it would be effective. The Drugs Controller General of India (DGCI) approved 2-DG for emergency use as an adjunct therapy in moderate to severe coronavirus patients earlier this month. "This is a great example of the scientific prowess of our country," Singh said in his brief remarks. The Defence Minister also listed the efforts of the armed forces in helping the civilian authorities deal with the pandemic across the country, but asserted that their deployment has not impacted the military's operational preparedness at the borders. "Even after going through all these difficulties, we have ensured that our preparedness at the border does not have any impact. There is no shortage of enthusiasm of our forces anywhere. We know this very well, no matter how big the difficulty is, we will overcome it," he said.

overwhelming crisis that the country is facing thus hampering the efforts of our governments, healthcare organisations, and our frontline warriors," he added.

### What causes these rampant counterfeiters?

"Scarcity breeds falsification and counterfeiting, that is a fact. Adding to that, the absence of anti-counterfeiting, anti-counterfeiting and traceability measures is making their task quite easy," Pasricha noted, adding "counterfeiters are becoming smarter, and we need to stay one step ahead of them".

Similar to global companies, measures must be taken at brand level to ensure the product sup-

We want to vaccinate both sections (18 to 44 and 45 and above) at the same time so that all age groups of people in Delhi can be administered vaccines before the third wave of Covid pandemic starts

MANISH SISODIA | DELHI DEPUTY CM

## ISRO TO SHARE MEDICAL O<sub>2</sub> CONCENTRATOR TECH

The Indian space agency has announced its decision to transfer the technology to make portable medical oxygen concentrators developed by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC)



# Politicians can't hoard Covid drugs: Delhi HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 17:** Political leaders have no business to hoard stocks of Covid-19 medicines that are already in shortage and they are expected to surrender these drugs, said the Delhi High Court which on Monday also expressed dissatisfaction over a "vague and white-washed enquiry" report filed by the Delhi Police over the allegations against politicians hoarding and distributing medicines, including Remdesivir, in national capital.

"Just because some political figures are involved, you will not investigate, we will not allow this," said the court adding that it would have appreciated if the police had enquired into specific allegations levelled against each person and then filed the report.

However, the court, which was hearing a PIL seeking lodging of an FIR on the allegations that politicians are able to procure in huge quantity and distribute Covid-19 medicines even as patients were running from pillar to post to get them, said since it is projected that these medicines were procured for public charity, it hopes and expects that they are not hoarded for political gains. "Political leaders



have no business to hoard stocks of these medicines. We expect them to surrender to the Director General of Health Services (DGHS) which will then distribute it to the poor and needy people at government hospitals. This is the best way to do public service," said a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh and added that if their intention is to do public good, they should themselves go and surrender the stock.

The police, in its status report, said the political leaders, including cricketer-turned-politician Gautam Gambhir, have been actually helping people in getting medical aid in the form of medicines, oxygen and others and have not charged any money and no one has been defrauded. The police, represented through standing counsel Sanjay Lau, said the enquiry in the alleged instances is being conducted on a day-to-day basis and the offi-

cial have examined Lok Sabha MP and BJP leader Gautam Gambhir, President of Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee Chaudhary Anil Kumar, ex Congress M.L.A. Mukesh Sharma, BJP spokesperson Harish Khurana, AAP MLA Dilip Pandey.

The others who have been enquired are Vice President Congress (Delhi) Ali Mehdi, Block adhyaksh of Congress (Delhi) Ashok Baghel, ex MP Bijnor Shahid Siddiqui and President of All India Youth Congress Srinivas BV.

"The enquiry conducted so far has revealed that all the persons alleged to have been hoarding medicines etc, have been actually helping people in getting medical aid in the form of medicine, oxygen, plasma or hospital bed, the person enquired into have not charged any money for the help provided, and thus no one has been defrauded. The distribution/ help has been voluntary and without discrimination," the report said.

The police sought six weeks to examine the issue and conclude the enquiry, which was declined by the court on the ground that pandemic is going on right now and the police force shall stand up as it owes a duty to citizens.

## SERVE NEEDY



People wait in a queue for food distributed by a volunteer in New Delhi

## 'RLYS REACHES MILESTONE OF CARRYING 10K TONNES O<sub>2</sub>'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 17:** The railways reached the milestone of transporting 10,000 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen on its 'Oxygen Express' trains Monday morning, and the service now covers 13 states, Railway Board Chairman Suneet Sharma said.

Launched in the wake of the second wave of Covid-19 infections, the service started April 19 when seven empty trucks left Mumbai to be loaded with liquid medical oxygen (LMO).

"We reached the milestone of carrying 10,000 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen Monday morning on 'Oxygen Express' 'Oxygen Express' delivered oxygen to 13 states," Sharma said.

He said that the railways has delivered over 10,300 tonnes of LMO in more than 600 tankers to various states.

"Oxygen Express' trains have been delivering nearly 800 tonnes of LMO each day for the last few days, Sharma said. "Despite the cyclone (Tauktae), the railways ran early this morning two Oxygen Expresses from Gujarat to beat high winds and deliver 150 tonnes of oxyge while one of them left from Vadodara at 4 am with two RO-RO trucks and 45 tonnes of LMO for delivery in the Delhi region, the other left Hapa at 5.30 am with six tankers loaded with 106 tonnes of oxygen relief for deliveries for Uttar Pradesh and the Delhi region." Railway Board chairman said. The railways also dispatched the first 'Oxygen Express' from Bokaro to Punjab.

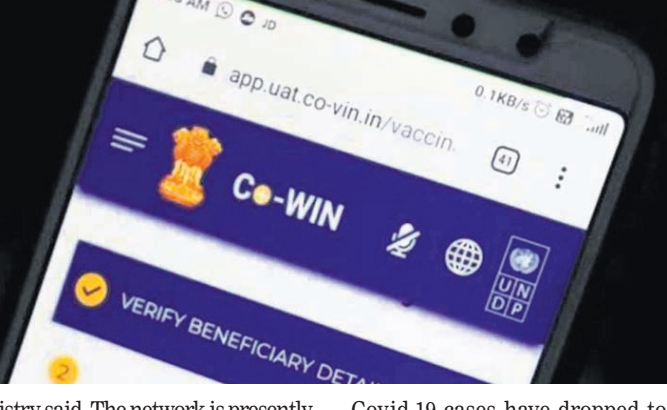
## CoWIN in regional languages from next week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 17:** The CoWIN portal will be made available in Hindi and 14 regional languages by next week, while 17 more laboratories will be added to the INSACOG network to monitor the variants of Covid-19, the health ministry said Monday.

According to a statement by the ministry, these decisions were announced at the 26th meeting of the high-level Group of Ministers (GoM) on Covid-19, chaired by Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, Monday.

Vardhan informed his colleagues that 17 new laboratories are going to be added to the INSACOG network to increase the number of samples screened and allow for more spatial analysis, the min-



istry said. The network is presently served by 10 laboratories located at different corners of the country. Speaking on their contribution to the country's achievements today, Vardhan said, "India's new

Covid-19 cases have dropped to less than three lakh for the first time after 26 days. Also, a net decline of 1,01,461 cases has been recorded in the active caseload in the last 24 hours." He lauded the

## Over 70% snow leopard habitat remains unexplored: WWF

Increased habitat loss and degradation, poaching and conflict with communities have contributed to a decline in their numbers and left the species hanging by a thread in many places, the WWF report mentions

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, May 17:** All the research efforts, spanning over a century, have only managed to cover 23 per cent of snow leopard habitat and the rest remains unexplored, according to a WWF report.

Most of the vast range -- possibly over 1.7 million sqkm of rugged mountain terrain -- has never been researched from a snow leopard context, said the report titled "Over 100 Years of Snow Leopard Research - A spatially explicit review of the state of knowledge in the snow leopard range" which examines the current state of knowledge across their habitat.



The report is based on an analysis of peer reviewed published papers on the species and its habitat.

It points at some glaring gaps in our knowledge of this elusive and threatened big cat species and high-

lights that lack of basic data could be hampering its conservation.

Globally there could be as few as 4,000 snow leopards left in Asia's high mountains and this remaining population faces continued and emerging threats.

The report also highlights that although conservationists are addressing several of the threats, a robust analysis of how effective the interventions are in achieving their objectives remains deficient.

The WWF report points out that despite a major research focus on snow leopard population assessments, less than 3 per cent of the big cat's range has robust data on abundance.

Though snow leopard research in the past few decades has been growing exponentially, there are only four research hotspots where multi-year research is being carried out. A large majority of snow leopard habitat, spanning over 12 countries, remains under-researched, and critical knowledge gaps must be plugged for informed conservation, according to a WWF report.

As part of its conservation strategy, WWF supports vital research, including the use of camera traps and satellite collaring, to collect more data on the elusive big cat.

In recent years, there has been a growing global focus on national-level population assessments and

several countries, and NGOs, have come up with nationwide snow leopard numbers. According to the WWF, The snow leopard's powerful build allows it to scale great steep slopes with ease. Its hind legs give it the ability to leap six times the length of its body. A long tail provides balance and agility and also wraps around the resting snow leopard as protection from the cold.

The mountains ranges rich with their prey such as blue sheep, Argali wild sheep, ibex, marmots, pikas and hares found in 12 countries -- including China, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, and Mongolia -- are their habitat.



It may very well be that local businesses, local jurisdictions will work towards vaccine mandates... That is going to be locally driven and not federally driven  
ROCHELLE WALENSKY | DIRECTOR, US CDC

## WARNERMEDIA, DISCOVERY TO MERGE

AT&T announced Monday a merger between its WarnerMedia unit, which owns CNN and HBO, and Discovery media, creating a streaming giant that could compete with Netflix and Disney+



## of the day quote

Very energetic efforts are now being made both through the Quartet, and various countries are now in constant contact through bilateral channels with both the Israelis and the Palestinians in order to stop the exchange of strikes  
DMITRY PESKOV | KREMLIN SPOKESMAN

The Russian side is committing stupidity because it is a mistake to turn former friends into enemies. If friendship is not possible, at least correct relations should be restored  
MILOS ZEMAN | CZECH PRESIDENT

We know multiple vaccines will be needed, especially as variants continue to emerge and the need for effective and booster vaccines, which can be stored at normal temperatures increases  
THOMAS TRIOMPHE | HEAD OF SANOFI'S VACCINES UNIT

# Strikes hit Gaza tunnels as envoys work for truce

ISRAEL HAS SAID IT INTENDS TO PRESS ON FOR NOW WITH ITS ATTACKS AGAINST HAMAS, WHILE THE UNITED STATES SIGNALLLED IT WOULD NOT PRESSURE THE TWO SIDES FOR A CEASE-FIRE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Gaza City, May 17: The Israeli military unleashed a wave of heavy airstrikes on the Gaza Strip early Monday, saying it destroyed 15 kilometers of militant tunnels and the homes of nine Hamas commanders, as international diplomats worked to end the weeklong war that has killed hundreds of people.

The latest attacks killed a top Gaza leader of the Islamic Jihad militant group whom the Israeli military blamed for some of the thousands of rocket attacks launched at Israel in recent days.

Israel has said it intends to press on for now with its attacks against Hamas, the militant group that rules Gaza, and the United States signalled it would not pressure the two sides for a cease-fire.

At least 200 Palestinians have been killed in the strikes, including 59 children and 35 women, with 1,300 people wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Eight people in Israel, including a 5-year-old boy and a soldier, have been killed in ongoing rocket attacks launched from civilian areas in Gaza toward civilian areas in Israel.

Violence has also erupted between Jews and Arabs inside Israel, leaving scores of people injured. Monday, an Israeli man attacked last week by a group of Arab citizens in the central city of Lod died of his wounds, according to police.



MIDEAST MENACE

The overnight airstrikes in Gaza Monday hollowed out one floor of a multistory concrete building. A woman picked through clothing, rubble and splintered furniture in a room that had been destroyed. One strike demolished the wall of one room, leaving untouched an open cabinet filled with bedding inside. Children walked over debris in the road.

A car in the street that witnesses said was hit by an airstrike was bent and torn, its roof ripped back and what was left of the driver's side door smeared with blood. A beachside cafe the car had just left was splintered and on fire. Rescue workers tried to put out the blaze with a small fire extinguisher. There was no

immediate word on casualties. Gaza's mayor, Yahya Sarraj, told Al-Jazeera TV that the strikes had caused extensive damage to roads and other infrastructure. "If the aggression continues, we expect conditions to become worse," he said.

The UN has warned that the territory's sole power station is at risk of running out of fuel, and Sarraj said Gaza was also low on spare parts. Gaza already experiences daily power outages for between eight and 12 hours, and tap water is undrinkable. Mohammed Thabet, a spokesman for the territory's electricity distribution company, said it has fuel to supply Gaza with electricity for two or three days.

The war broke out May 10, when

# Writs seeking fresh swearing in of Oli

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, May 17: Four writ petitions were filed in the Supreme Court of Nepal Monday demanding that Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli be sworn in again as he disgraced the office of the President by refusing to repeat all the words she recited during the oath-taking ceremony.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari administered the oath of office and secrecy to Oli as the prime minister at a scaled-down ceremony at Shital Niwas, the presidential palace, Friday.

During the oath-taking ceremony, Oli, the 69-year-old Chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), omitted the word "vow" when the President recited it, besides "in the name of God".

"I will take oath in the name of the country and the people," Oli, who has become Nepal's prime minister for the third time, said, while President Bhandari mentioned "God, country and the people."

All four writ petitions have demanded that Oli take another oath of office and secrecy as the one taken Friday was illegal, The Kathmandu Post reported.

Senior advocate Chandra Kanta Gyawali and advocates Lokendra Oli and Keshar Jung KC have reg-



istered a joint writ while advocates Raj Kumar Suwal, Santosh Bhandari and Nawaraj Adhary have registered separate writs on the same issue.

The petitioners claim that the prime minister disgraced the office of the President by saying "it is not necessary" even when the President repeated the word twice, the report said.

They have demanded that all the actions of the prime minister be declared null and void until he takes the oath again, it said.

The petitioners said the prime minister told the president that a phrase of the oath - solemnly and sincerely pledge - was not necessary and such an utterance by the prime minister during the swearing-in ceremony undermined the prestige of the President's Office.

The petitioners have demanded that the court ask Oli to retake the oath of office and secrecy and bar him from working as the Prime Minister until he is sworn in again, the report said.

## SHORT TAKES

### Italy restarts int'l tourism

Rome: Italy has formally reopened its borders for restriction-free travel for visitors from some countries, almost a year after the Covid-19 pandemic ravaged the country. Many streets, parks and squares in the Italian capital were full of visitors over the weekend, Xinhua news agency reported. As of Sunday, travellers from European Union (EU) member states, the UK, and Israel have been allowed to enter Italy without restrictions if they could show a recent negative coronavirus test, proof of vaccination, or if they have recovered from the virus in the last six months.

### 1K people shifted due to LA wildfire

Los Angeles: About 1,000 people were evacuated from their homes in the US state of California Sunday morning due to a wildfire, said the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD). The affected area is at Topanga State Park in the Santa Monica Mountains, approximately 35 kilometers west of downtown Los Angeles, said the LAFD, noting that the fire, dubbed Palisades Fires, has spread to 835 acres (3.4 square kilometers) with zero percent containment at the time, the Xinhua news agency reported.

### Aid ship rescues over 300 people

Rome: The aid ship Sea-Eye 4 has rescued about 330 migrants attempting to make the perilous journey across the Mediterranean in the past few days, the private vessel's German operator announced Monday. The latest rescue operation conducted overnight brought 99 people on board, most of whom said they are from Syria, dpa news agency quoted Sea-Eye as saying on Twitter. The crew was now nearing "the limit" of their capacities to care for the rescuees, Sea-Eye wrote. The Sea-Eye 4 set out last last week and has been picking up migrants travelling on boats unfit for the high seas.

### Taiwan bars entry to non-nationals

Taipei: Taiwan is banning the entry of non-nationals without a resident permit and the transit of international airport passengers, after reporting a new daily record of 333 locally-transmitted Covid-19 cases, Health Minister Chen Shih-chung said Monday. The temporary suspension will be imposed from Wednesday to June 18, dpa news agency quoted the Minister as saying at a news conference here.

# Ransomware attack hits 4 Asian countries

The ransomware attack impacted information technology operations in Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong and the Philippines

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Paris, May 17: A targeted ransomware attack hit four countries among the Asian operations of Axa Partners, the international subsidiary of Axa insurance group, with some data in Thailand accessed, Axa Partners said.

The attack and its full impact were being investigated. If the investigation "confirms that sensitive data of any individuals have been affected, the necessary steps will be taken to notify and support all corporate clients and individuals

## Pandemic fueled violence against LGBTI: EU

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Brussels, May 17: The European Union's (EU) foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell has highlighted the worsening situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to even higher levels of violence and discrimination against LGBTI persons, including domestic violence, hate speech online and offline, and hate crimes, the 74-year-old said Sunday ahead of Monday's International Day



impacted," the company said a brief statement Sunday. It noted the attack was recent, but did not specify when exactly it occurred.

The ransomware attack impacted information technology operations in Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong and the Philippines, the statement said. "As a result, certain data processed by Inter Partners Asia (IPA) in Thailand has been accessed," it said.

The statement added that "regulators and business partners have been informed".

News of the Asia attack was first reported by the Financial

Times, which said that cyber-criminals using ransomware called Avaddon stole data that included customer information, medical records and claims. Hospital and doctors' information was also filched, the FT reported.

AXA, among Europe's top five insurers, said this month that it will stop writing cyber-insurance policies in France that reimburse customers for extortion payments made to ransomware criminals.

The Paris-based group said it was suspending the option in France only in response to growing concern that such reimbursements encourage cyber criminals to demand ransom from companies they prey on, crippling them with malware. Once victims of ransomware pay up, criminals provide software keys to decode the data.

# Mindat falls to junta, resistance withdraws

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Yangon, May 17: Myanmar's military has finally taken control of the small town of Mindat in the country's western Chin state, after three weeks of savage fighting.

The local militia Mindat Defense Force (MDF) says its fighters have retreated from the town in nearby hills after three weeks of brave resistance.

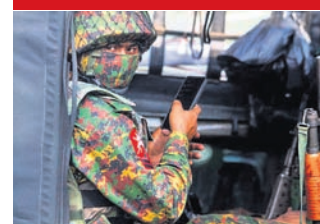
MDF spokesman John told IANS that Myanmar military troops entered the town Sunday evening using villagers as shields.



LIFELIKE

Natasha Hibbert poses alongside an exhibition of life-size elephant sculptures, part of the Co-Existence campaign organised by the Elephant Family Trust, on The Mall in London, Britain

## MYANMAR COUP



Nearly 300 to 350 local Chins had joined the MDF three weeks ago to stop the Tatmadaw from entering the town. The army was forced to use helicopters to bring in troop re-

inforcements, as at least three of its road convoys were ambushed. Later, it started pounding the town with artillery fire.

Local residents in Mindat set up what they called a People's Administration Team, stating that they did not recognise the authority of the military government.

Last week, the government declared martial law in the town. It has described those defying its authority there as terrorists, and says it will set up a military tribunal to put on trial those responsible for attacks on the security forces.

## Pak Oppn leader placed on no-fly list

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, May 17: The Pakistan government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan Monday added the name of Opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif, who has been charged with corruption, to the no-fly list, barring him from leaving the country for medical treatment.

Earlier this month, the Lahore High Court granted Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president Shehbaz -- also the younger brother of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif -- permission to travel abroad once for medical treatment.

After obtaining bail, Shehbaz, 69, was about to fly to London May 8 when a Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) team at the airport stopped him from travelling on the grounds that his name had been on the provisional national identification list (PNIL), which impose a temporary bar on someone to leave the country.

Shehbaz was offloaded from Doha-bound flight May 8. Addressing a press conference here Monday, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said Shehbaz's name was added to the exit control list (ECL) after approval from the federal Cabinet.

A special committee of the Interior Ministry May 12 had proposed to the Cabinet that Shehbaz should be barred from leaving the country due to corruption cases against him.

Shehbaz wanted to go to London for a medical checkup after he was bailed out of jail last month.

The interior minister said Shehbaz had not submitted any medical documents for travelling abroad or specified the treatment for his illness.

# Long working hours are a 'killer', says UN

The WHO-ILO study is the first global analysis of the risks to life and health associated with working long hours

AGENCIES

United Nations, May 17: Working more than 55 hours a week increases the risk of death from heart disease and stroke, according to a United Nations study out Monday.

The report by the UN's World Health Organization and International Labor Organization agencies comes as the Covid-19 pandemic accelerates workplace changes that could reinforce the tendency to work longer hours.

The WHO-ILO study, published in the journal Environment International, is the first global analysis of the risks to life and health associated with working long hours.

It does not focus on the pandemic but on the preceding years. The authors synthesised data from dozens of studies involving hundreds of thousands of participants.



"Working 55 hours or more per week is a serious health hazard," said Maria Neira, director of the WHO's environment, climate change and health department.

"It's time that we all -- governments, employers, and employees -- wake up to the fact that long

working hours can lead to premature death."

The study concluded that working 55 hours or more per week was associated with an estimated 35-percent increase in the risk of suffering a stroke, and a 17-percent rise in the risk of dying from is-

chemic heart disease, compared to working 35 to 40 hours.

Teleworking  
The WHO and the ILO estimated that in 2016, 398,000 people died from a stroke and 3,47,000 from heart disease after working at least 55 hours per week.

Between 2000 and 2016, the number of deaths due to heart disease linked to long working hours increased by 42 percent, while the figure for strokes went up by 19 percent.

Most of the recorded deaths were among people aged 60 to 79, who had worked 55 hours or more per week when they were between 45 and 74 years old.

"With working long hours now known to be responsible for about one-third of the total estimated work-related burden of disease, it is established as the risk factor with the largest occupational dis-

ease burden," the WHO said.

The organisation also said that the coronavirus crisis was speeding up developments that could feed the trend towards increased working time. "The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly changed the way many people work," said WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"Teleworking has become the norm in many industries, often blurring the boundaries between home and work. In addition, many businesses have been forced to scale back or shut down operations to save money, and people who are still on the payroll end up working longer hours."

"No job is worth the risk of stroke or heart disease. Governments, employers and workers need to work together to agree on limits to protect the health of workers."

# business



Those affected (by ending coal mining) need some reliability on the path to climate neutrality. I don't want to unravel this again after one year  
**ANGELA MERKEL** | GERMAN CHANCELLOR

## CLUBHOUSE ARRIVING ON ANDROID DEVICES IN INDIA FRIDAY

The invite-only audio chat app Clubhouse that launched its Android app a week ago is now coming to India Friday for the Android users in the country



### of the day quote

We expect the Challenge will stimulate innovative ideas, some of which could be immediately applied to existing diesel-electric equipment and help fast-track implementation of longer-term solutions  
**EDGAR BASTO** | PRESIDENT OF BHP MINERALS AUSTRALIA

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

Bitcoin is actually highly centralised, with supermajority controlled by a handful of big mining companies. A single coal mine in Xinjiang flooded, almost killing miners, and Bitcoin hash rate dropped 35%. Sound "decentralized" to you?  
**ELON MUSK** | TESLA CEO

## India begins anti-dumping probe against China, Thailand, Vietnam

To boost domestic manufacturing, the Centre had imposed a 25% safeguard duty on solar imports from China and Malaysia in July 2018 for two years



### FACT FILE

The investigation was triggered by an application by the Indian Solar Manufacturers' Association

Chinese solar cells products, which are used in the manufacturing of solar modules, are 15-20% cheaper than their Indian counterparts

A similar anti-dumping investigation against the import of solar cells from China, Taiwan and Malaysia was initiated by the government in July 2017

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, May 17:** The Commerce Ministry has initiated an anti-dumping investigation against the import of solar cells from China, Thailand and Vietnam. The investigation was triggered by an application by the Indian Solar Manufacturers' Association (ISMA). Solar cells are the basic ingredient used in the manufacturing of solar modules and Chinese products are 15-20% cheaper than their Indian counterparts.

The notice issued by the Directorate General of Trade Remedies said that prima facie evidence of dumping was found against the aforementioned product of the above countries, leading to injury to the domestic industry. Low module prices have played a major role in bringing solar tariffs down to the current low of ₹1.99/unit, but it has kept the domestic solar sector relied on imports and local manufacturers have found it difficult to sell their products.

A similar anti-dumping investigation against the import of solar cells from China, Taiwan and Malaysia was initiated by the government in July 2017 but was eventually called off in March 2018 on ISMA's request.

To boost domestic manufacturing, the Centre had imposed a 25% safeguard duty on solar imports from China and Malaysia in July 2018 for two years, which was extended to July 2021, at a rate of 15%.

As FE reported earlier, after the safeguard duty imposition on

China and Malaysia, solar imports had since surged from Vietnam and Thailand. Between FY18 and FY20, imports of solar cells and modules from Vietnam and Thailand recorded a growth rate of 800% and 5,750%, to \$136 million and \$117 million, respectively. Import of Chinese products have fallen 60% to \$1.3 billion in the same period.

Overall solar imports have come down by 72% annually in April-February FY21 to \$468.5 million due to the Covid-19 restrictions, as the pace of solar capacity addition also dwindled to 5 giga-watt (GW) in the same period, down by about 45% annually.

From the beginning of FY23, solar module and cell imports will attract a basic customs duty (BCD) of 40% and 25%, respectively. However, procurement of these items from China is seen to surge significantly in the last three quarters of FY22 as there will be no import barriers in place after the safeguard duty regime ends in July.

## India's WPI inflation rises to 10.49% in April

Prices of primary articles were up 10.16% in April from -1.08 per cent a year ago; little scope for rate cuts, say experts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 17:** India's wholesale inflation accelerated to 10.49 per cent in April on account of a surge in the prices of fuel and manufactured products, data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry showed.

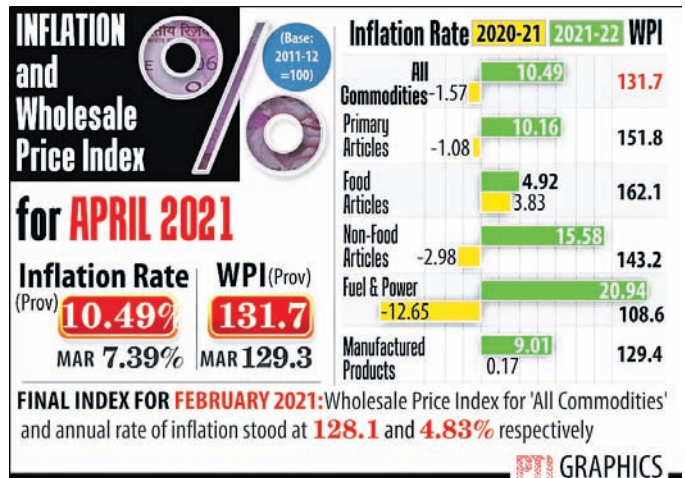
Wholesale inflation rate, measured by WPI, has been rising continuously since December. It soared to an eight-year high in March to 7.39 per cent.

The latest price data released by the government on Monday showed that food prices rose to 4.92 per cent in April, along with a massive price surge in manufacturing products at 9.01 per cent. Fuel and power inflation stood at nearly 21 per cent led by higher petrol and diesel prices.

Prices of primary articles, which

account for more than a fifth of the entire WPI, grew 10.16 per cent in April from -1.08 per cent a year ago, driven by higher prices of fruits, eggs and meat among other items. Prices of pulses, fruits and eggs, meat and fish rose by 10.74 per cent, 27.43 per cent and 10.88 per cent, respectively.

"Interestingly, in sequential terms, the WPI-food recorded a sharp 3.8% MoM increase in April 2021, as compared to a relatively limited 1% uptick in the CPI-food index, suggesting a greater impact of supply chain disruptions at the wholesale level. The inflation for manufactured food products also hardened to 12.6 per cent in April 2021, led by a continued uptrend in edible oils, as well as beverages such as tea and coffee," ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said.



### SHORT TAKES

#### Petrol, diesel prices remain stable

**New Delhi:** Fuel prices were unchanged Monday after they were hiked for the ninth time in the month on Sunday by state-run oil marketing companies (OMCs). Petrol and diesel price remains unchanged the across all major cities. In Delhi, a litre of petrol is retailing at ₹92.58 per litre, while diesel costs ₹83.22 per litre. Diesel, too, is retailing at over ₹90 per litre in Mumbai, Bhubaneswar, Hyderabad and Jaipur.

#### KKR to invest \$95mn in Lenskart

**Mumbai:** KKR will invest \$95 million in Lenskart through a secondary stake acquisition through its Asian private equity fund. Avendus Capital will be advising on the transaction. Existing investors in Lenskart - TPG Growth and TR Capital - which first invested in Lenskart in late 2014 will each divest a portion of their holding in the company. After the completion of the transaction, KKR will also support Lenskart by helping it to scale its operations overseas and enhance its digital offerings to augment customers' virtual and omni-store experience.

#### Bitcoin hits three-month low

**Singapore:** Bitcoin dropped to a three-month low Monday as investors sold cryptocurrencies in the wake of Tesla boss Elon Musk's hinting over the weekend that the carmaker is considering or may have already sold some of its Bitcoin holdings. Musk has boosted crypto markets with his enthusiasm for the asset class, but has lately roiled trade by appearing to cool on bitcoin in favour of its one-time parody, dogecoin. The gyrations are beginning to spook even steeled traders.

#### NEFT unavailable for 14 hrs Sunday

**Mumbai:** The popular National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) system for online transfer of funds will remain unavailable for 14 hours from Saturday mid-night till Sunday afternoon due technical upgrade, the Reserve Bank of India said Monday. National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) is a nation-wide centralised payment system owned and operated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It is available round the clock availability on all days of the year.

## Hotel industry faces double revenue losses in state

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, May 17:** In the backdrop of Covid-19 second wave, hotel industry in Odisha is facing a bleak prospect. The impact of the pandemic this time is more severe compared to what the industry suffered in 2019-20 and it continued to 2020-2021 fiscal.



The Hotel & Restaurant Association of Odisha (HRAO) claimed that the sector faced double losses in 2020-21 fiscal in terms of revenue and occupancy compared to the previous financial year.

Secretary Srinibash Subudhi said, "We haven't witnessed any growth in the hotel sector vis-a-vis

occupancy. As the pandemic situation is getting worse, we apprehend that we will suffer a severe blow this time too."

"We were hoping for recovery, but the second wave of Covid-19 hit us hard. While all types of public transportation within and intra-state has been suspended, hotels have been directed to down shutters. We expect this situation to continue till July 2021," he added.

The association had urged state government for the exemption of license fees and extension of moratorium period on interest, but no support has been provided yet. "If our requests are not considered, how can we survive? If the lockdown continues for long, the industry will not survive," he said. HRAO claimed that the hotel industry recorded around 50 per cent fall in revenue per available room (RevPAR) after Q1 of FY21.

According to HRAO secretary, the average annual occupancy of the hotels in the state was around 40 per cent, but this year it a mere 5-10 per cent.

According to HRAO, there are around 2,500 registered hotels in the state and this sector generates around ₹9,000 crore-revenue annually. In addition, the hotel and restaurant sector contributes around 10-20 per cent of the state's GDP.

## 'Demand shock' biggest toll of Covid second wave: RBI

THE FEROCITY OF THE PANDEMIC'S SECOND WAVE HAS "OVERWHELMED INDIA AND THE WORLD", SAYS RBI

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, May 17:** The biggest toll of the second Covid-19 wave is in terms of a "demand shock", the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said Monday.

The resurgence of Covid-19 has "dented but not debilitated" economic activity in the first half of first quarter of financial year 2021-22, the central bank said in its monthly bulletin.

The ferocity of the pandemic's second wave has "overwhelmed India and the world", the RBI stated, adding that "war efforts" have been mounted to stop the second surge in its tracks.

"Real economy indicators moderated through April-May 2021. The biggest toll of the second wave is in terms of a demand shock - loss of mobility, discretionary spending and employment, besides inventory accumulation, while the aggregate supply is less impacted," the Reserve Bank said.

Though the economic activities have been hit, the impact of Covid-19 second wave is not as adverse as it was in the same period last year, the central bank suggested.



"Although extremely tentative at this stage, the central tendency of available diagnosis is that the loss of momentum is not as severe as at this time a year ago," it said.

As the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted economic activities significantly, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) were hit hard, the bulletin further noted.

"The consolidated balance sheet of NBFCs grew at a slower pace in Q2 and Q3:2020-21. However, NBFCs were able to continue credit intermediation, albeit at a lower rate, reflecting the resilience of the sector," it stated.

The Reserve Bank and the government undertook various liquidity augmenting measures to tackle Covid-19 disruptions, which facilitated favourable market conditions as indicated by the pick-up in debenture issuances, the RBI claimed.

Among sectors NBFCs lend to, industrial sector, particularly micro and small and large industries, were the hardest hit by the pandemic as they posted decline in credit growth, it added.

The RBI also noted that NBFCs in the retail loan sector "stayed ahead of the curve" aided by their relatively low delinquency.

## 'Rising Covid spends, fuel prices to crowd out consumer demand'

HEALTH EXPENDITURE, WHICH CURRENTLY CONSTITUTES 5 PER CENT OF OVERALL INFLATION BASKET, MAY JUMP TO AT LEAST 11 PER CENT FROM DUE TO THE PANDEMIC: SBI REPORT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, May 17:** The massive increase in healthcare spends, especially in the hinterland, steadily rising fuel prices and online delivery of articles will increase inflation pressure much higher on one hand and crowd out other consumer spending on the other, putting a big question mark on overall growth that's still being driven by consumption demand, according to a report.

Soumya Kanti Ghosh, the group chief economic adviser at State Bank, in a note also noted that the steep fall in retail inflation in April to 4.29 per cent from 5.52 per cent in March is deceptive, as the CSO inflation number is primarily due to easing food prices as the rural core inflation has jumped

to 6.4 per cent.

As the pandemic rages through the country, it is worthwhile to look beyond the headline inflation as rural core has now jumped to 6.4 per cent in April and will rise further in May. The increasing health spend due to the pandemic is having a meaningful impact in rural areas, Ghosh said.

Item-wise inflation of health CPI shows persistent month-on-month increase in inflation of non-institutional medicines, and X-ray, ECG, pathological tests.

Therefore, the headline inflation may not be correct to look at. A more important price concept is the relative prices which are not a monetary phenomenon but their movements convey important information about the scarcity of particular goods and services as



now like health, he said.

For example, overall CPI declined in April because of significant decline in food CPI, but when the relative prices of food

items is compared to overall CPI the deceleration was not sharp as it was seen in actual food CPI. Similarly, for certain items like fuel and health the increase in rel-

ative prices is maximum. Interestingly, core CPI that declined 57 bps, increased in relative terms by 18 points.

According to him, given this, there are three key points to assess the price pressures, such as health, fuel price and rising commodity prices.

Health expenditure, which currently constitutes 5 per cent of overall inflation basket, may jump to at least 11 per cent from due to the pandemic, Ghosh said.

This is likely to also result in squeeze in expenditure on other items of discretionary consumption, a recipe for a cutback in consumption spending, he said.

Secondly, rising fuel prices since is having a direct impact on squeeze in consumption spending on discretionary items, other than on

## India loses Farzad-B gas field in Iran

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 17:** India Monday lost the ONGC Videsh Ltd-discovered Farzad-B gas field in the Persian Gulf after Iran awarded a contract for developing the giant gas field to a local company.

"The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has signed a contract worth \$1.78 billion with Petropars Group for the development of Farzad B Gas Field in the Persian Gulf," the Iranian Oil Ministry's official news service Shana reported. "The deal was signed Monday May 17, in a ceremony held in the presence of Iranian Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh in Tehran."

The field holds 23 trillion cubic feet of in-place gas reserves, of which about 60 per cent is recoverable. It also holds gas condensates of about 5,000 barrels per billion cubic feet of gas.

The buyback contract signed Monday envisages daily production of 28 million cubic meters of sour gas over five years, Shana said.

ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), the overseas investment arm of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), had in 2008 discovered a giant gas field in the Farsi offshore exploration block.

OVL and its partners had offered to invest up to USD 11 billion for the development of the discovery, which was later named Farzad-B.

## Sebi proposes framework for gold exchange

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, May 17:** Markets regulator Sebi Monday proposed an elaborate framework for setting up a gold exchange wherein the yellow metal will be traded in the form of electronic gold receipts and will help in having a transparent domestic spot price discovery mechanism.

Also, the proposed denominations - reflecting underlying physical gold - of Electronic Gold Receipts (EGRs) are 1 kilogram, 100 grams, 50 grams and subject to conditions, those can also be even for 5 and 10 grams. Apart from issuing a consultation paper on the gold exchange, the watchdog has come out with draft norms for vault managers and they will be registered as Sebi intermediaries.

The proposed gold exchange, encompassing the entire ecosystem of trading and physical delivery of gold, is extremely necessary to create a vibrant gold ecosystem in India which is commensurate with its large share of global gold consumption, according to Sebi.



Presenting the Budget for 2021-22, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said that Sebi will be the regulator for gold exchange and Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority (WDRA) will be strengthened to set up the commodity market ecosystem.

ROJIBLANCOS ONE WIN AWAY FROM CLAIMING LA LIGA TITLE WITH REAL MADRID STILL IN FRAY

# Suarez lifts Atletico



Atletico players rejoice after Luis Suarez (bottom R) scored the winner, Sunday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Madrid, May 17:** Luis Suarez knew success wouldn't come easy at Atletico Madrid. He didn't expect it to be this hard, though.

Suarez came to the rescue for Atletico when their Spanish league title chances suddenly appeared to be slipping away Sunday, scoring an 88th-minute winner in a 2-1 victory against Osasuna that moved the team a win away from claiming their first league title since 2014.

Atletico enter the final round two points in front of Real Madrid, who stayed in contention by winning 1-0 at Athletic Bilbao. Real have a better head-to-head tie-breaker against their city rival. Barcelona dropped out of contention for the title after losing 1-2 to Celta Vigo at home.

Atletico's lengthy spell at the top of the league disappeared in only a few minutes late in the second-to-last round, when all matches

were played at the same time.

Real scored against Athletic in the 68th minute, then Atletico conceded against Osasuna in the 75th. Instead of being in the position of celebrating their first league title in seven years, Atletico suddenly saw their city rival take control of the title race ahead of the final round.

Only a victory could have put Atletico back in control of their own fate, and Diego Simeone's team got it after Renan Lodi scored from inside the area in the 82nd and Suarez netted the winner with a low shot from near the penalty spot a few minutes from the end.

It was the 20th league goal for Suarez, who has been key for Atletico the entire season after being let go by Barcelona.

The several hundred Atletico fans outside the Wanda Metropolitano cheered loudly and could be heard from inside after Suarez's decisive goal. He took out his jersey as he rushed to celebrate

with his teammates.

Atletico can clinch the title against relegation-threatened Valladolid in the final round. Real will host seventh-place Villarreal hoping for a stumble by their rival.

Atletico are trying to win their 11th league title, and first since they took on Real and Barcelona with a squad led by Diego Costa and Arda Turan. Since 2014, Barcelona have won the league four times and Real twice, including last season. Atletico's previous title had come in 1996, when Simeone still played for the club.

**REAL STAY ALIVE**

Trying to win back-to-back league trophies for the first time since 2007-08, Real took the title race to the final round

thanks to their win against mid-table Athletic at San Mames Stadium.

Defender Nacho Fernandez scored the winner from close range in the 68th after a pass from Casemiro. The victory came amid widespread rumors that Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane is leaving the club at the end of the season, but he denied reports that he had already told the squad of his intention to quit.

**BARCA OUT OF CONTENTION**

Barcelona's home loss comes in another disappointing season for the club in which it only lifted the Copa del Rey. Messi scored his league-leading 30th goal with a 28th-minute header at the Camp Nou, but Santi Mina equalised in the 38th and netted the winner in the 88th. Barcelona played a man down from the 83rd after defender Clement Lenglet was sent off.



# MESSI HAS FUTURE TO DECIDE

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Barcelona, May 17:** With Barcelona's season effectively over, Lionel Messi now has a big decision to make. Should he finish out his career at the club that helped him become an all-time soccer great? Or have the team's struggles to keep winning trophies convinced him that he can find more success in Paris or Manchester?

Barcelona were left without any chance of winning the Spanish league Sunday, bowing out the title race in demoralizing fashion after letting Celta Vigo overhaul a goal by Messi and rally for a 2-1 victory.

Barcelona have one game left on the calendar, but with nothing to play for except third place in the league, the club's attention is now fully on the future of their inscrutable star.

Last summer, Messi had said he wanted to leave Barcelona after a campaign that finished without a title and a humiliating 2-8 loss to Bayern Munich in the Champions League.

When that exit was denied by the club, Messi said that he would focus on this season and put off any decision until this summer when his contract expires June 30.

Since then, Joan Laporta has been elected for a second stint as the club's president. Laporta ran Barcelona when Messi was just blossoming with the team and maintained a good relationship with the player and his family. Even so, Messi has not confirmed a decision on his future.

"I hope not," coach Ronald Koeman replied when he was asked if he believed Messi had played his final match at Camp Nou — a stadium still without fans because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"He is still the best player in the world and today he showed that it is impossible to play without him," Koeman said. "It is up to Messi. For me and the club, we want him to stay with us. Because if Leo is not here, we have doubts about who can score."

The 33-year-old Messi extended his club-record tally to 672 goals with a header to give Barcelona a first-half lead against Celta. But like too many times in recent weeks, Barcelona's defense let it down, conceding twice including an 89th-minute goal.

Koeman had succeeded in bringing in some younger players to rejuvenate Barcelona's squad this season and steering the team to the Copa del Rey title last month. The former Barcelona defender had also inspired his team to a hot streak in the league that had allowed it to almost erase a double-digit lead by Atletico.

But when Barcelona had the opportunity to move past Atletico and take the lead in late April, they were upset 1-2 by Granada at home.



That loss derailed the team.

Barcelona drew with Athletic and at Levante before the loss to Celta. If it does not beat the already relegated Eibar in the last round, Barcelona could finish in fourth place.

The late-season collapse of his team that may have put Koeman's job in danger comes with midfielder great Xavi Hernandez apparently being groomed to take his place.



**A NIGHT TO FORGET:** Ronald Koeman pats Lionel Messi's back as the disappointed Argentine walks off the field after their loss, Sunday

## PSG WIN, LILLE DRAW

# French title race goes to final day

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Paris, May 17:** Paris Saint-Germain routed Reims 4-0 to take the French title race to the last day, as Lille drew 0-0 at home to Saint-Etienne for a one-point lead at the top. Both teams are away next weekend, with PSG at Brest and Lille facing Angers.

"We're first and we have to win the last game," Lille captain Jose Fonte said. "We usually get good results away from home."

PSG coasted after Reims had defender Yunis Abdelhamid sent off in the 11th minute for a handball, and Neymar converted the penalty with a staggered run-up followed by a typically casual shot which sent the goalkeeper the wrong way.

Kylian Mbappe doubled the lead midway through the first half after a mistake from defender Thomas Foket, who sent the ball in his own penalty area straight to Mbappe for a league-leading 26th goal and 40th overall this season.

Central defender Marquinhos scored with a trademark downward header midway through the second half and Italy striker Moise Kean completed the scoring in the last minute.

Lille struggled to break down an organized Saint-Etienne side but came close to scoring in the 36th when Luiz Araujo's shot sailed just wide after he latched onto striker Burak Yilmaz's astute pass.

Lille almost won during injury time but attacking midfielder Yusuf

Yazici's free-kick hit the post and Yilmaz's shot from the rebound was blocked by a defender.

"Once more I didn't recognize my team at home. The way we started was very sluggish," Lille coach Christophe Galtier said. "It was better after that, but we couldn't expect much luck since we played a very average game. It's a final in Angers and we'll have to win it to be champions."

**CHAMPIONS LEAGUE CHASE**

Monaco won to narrowly keep their title hopes alive, but they need to win at Lens in the last round and hope Lille and PSG both lose to stand any chance of clinching the trophy on goal difference from Lille.

More realistically, Monaco is one point ahead of Lyon, with both sides in the hunt for third place and the Champions League qualifying rounds.

Monaco beat seventh-place Rennes 2-1 with Russia midfielder Aleksandr Golovin setting up striker Wissam Ben Yedder's 21st league goal of the campaign and adding the second goal with a slightly deflected strike.

Brazil midfielder Lucas Paqueta grabbed two goals and star forward Memphis Depay one as Lyon coasted to a 5-2 win at 19th-place Nimes, which was relegated by the defeat. Midfielder Houssem Aouar added the fourth following a fine team move and substitute forward Islam Slimani headed in the fifth from close range for Lyon.



**PARTNERS IN CRIME:** PSG scorers Neymar (L) and Kylian Mbappe celebrate the former's goal against Reims, Sunday

# Milan to wait for CL berth

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Milan, May 17:** AC Milan, Napoli and Juventus will have to wait until the final day of the season to see which two teams qualify for next season's Champions League.

Milan, which is bidding to return to Europe's elite after an eight-year absence, could only draw 0-0 against Cagliari Sunday to leave it level on points with Napoli after Gennaro Gattuso's side won 2-0 at Fiorentina. The two teams are a point above fifth-place Juventus, which beat Serie A champion Inter Milan 3-2 Saturday.

Milan next play at Atalanta, who have already qualified for the Champions League. Napoli will host Hellas Verona and Juventus visit Bologna. The top four qualify for Europe's premier club competition.

Milan knew a win would guarantee it a return to the Champions League for the first time since the 2013-14 season. Cagliari would have needed a point to secure safety but earlier results meant it was already guaranteed another season in Serie A.

Milan were without star forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who has also been ruled out of the upcoming European Championship because of a knee injury.

It was reduced to long-range shots in the first half. The Rossoneri went closer in the second period but were denied on several occasions



**NOT SO IMPRESSIVE DISPLAY:** AC Milan custodian Gianluigi Donnarumma looks dejected after his side unable to seal a win at home against Cagliari, Sunday

by Cagliari goalkeeper Alessio Cragnò.

**CHAMPIONS LEAGUE DREAMS**

Napoli knew that a win would ensure they head into the final weekend of the season in the top four. Lorenzo Insigne's free-kick came off the crossbar in the first half but the Napoli captain broke the deadlock 11 minutes after the break. Napoli were awarded a penalty

when Nikola Milenkovic tugged Amir Rrahmani's shirt on a corner. Insigne's spot-kick was saved by Pietro Terracciano but the Italy international tucked away the rebound.

Insigne hit the woodwork again before Napoli doubled their lead 11 minutes later after Piotr Zielinski's shot was deflected in by Fiorentina defender Lorenzo Venuti for an own-goal.

# Nadal beats Djoko, claims 10th Italian Open title

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Rome, May 17:** The World No.3 Spaniard Rafa Nadal Sunday won his 10th Italian Open title, after overcoming a second set comeback from No.1 Novak Djokovic in the final to triumph 7-5, 1-6, 6-3 in two hours and 50 minutes.

The victory gave second seeded Nadal the 36th ATP Masters 1000 crown, equalling top seeded Djokovic's all-time record, since the series was established in 1990.

In the 57th meeting of the ATP Tour's one of the most prolific rivalries, Djokovic was facing 20-time Grand Slam singles champion, for the ninth time at the Foro Italico.

Nadal improved to 4-2 in Rome finals against Djokovic with the

victory, and brought his ATP head-to-head record against the Serbian to 28-29 overall.

In the men's doubles final, second-seeded Croats Nikola Pietrangeli and Mate Pavic powered their way to their sixth Italian Open trophy, overcoming a tough challenge from Rajeev Ram of the USA and Briton Joe Salisbury, winning 6-4, 7-6(7-4).

Djokovic had spent nearly five hours on court Saturday, first winning his rain-delayed quarterfinal against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas and then the semifinal epic against Italian Lorenzo Sonego, to reach the final. Nadal, on the other hand, took down Reilly Opelka of the USA.

Djokovic, who was bidding to record his first win on clay against the Spaniard since the 2016 Rome

quarter-finals, showed little signs of fatigue in the opening set.

The Serbian raced to a 2-0 lead, staying aggressive and keeping the points short. But Nadal broke straight back, and his forehand speed steadily climbed as the set unfolded, earning 15 of his 21 winners.

Nadal claimed the decisive break late in the set, taking advantage of a shaky service game of the Serbian at 5-5 to claim the lead, sealing the set. But a dip in Nadal's intensity gave Djokovic the opening he needed in the second set.

However, Nadal held firm and raised his level in the final set, reeling out forehand winners to take a 4-2 lead. He converted his second championship point after Djokovic sent a backhand long, sealing the win.

## SERIES vs ENGLAND, AUSTRALIA

# India's Tests were not fixed, says ICC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Dubai, May 17:** The ICC Monday dismissed claims made by news channel 'Al Jazeera' that India's Test matches against England (2016) and Australia (2017) were fixed, saying the passages of play identified as fixed were entirely predictable, and therefore 'implausible as a fix'.

'Al Jazeera' in a documentary - 'Cricket's Match Fixers' - released in 2018 had claimed that India's game against England in Chennai in 2016 and the one against Australia in 2017 in Ranchi were fixed.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) also cleared five people - filmed by the channel - of any wrongdoing saying even as they behaved in a questionable manner but no credible evidence was available to charge them.

During the programme, an alleged bookie Aneel Munnawar was seen making claims about his dubious connections and history of fixing matches including two Tests involving Virat Kohli's Indian team.

The ICC had launched an investigation into the claims. "The programme alleged that two matches were fixed: India v England in Chennai in 2016 and India v

Australia in Ranchi in 2017. To assess whether the passages of play highlighted in the programme were unusual in any way, the ICC engaged four independent betting and cricketing specialists to analyse the claims," the ICC said in a release after it concluded its investigation.

"All four concluded that the passages of play identified in the programme as being allegedly fixed were entirely predictable, and therefore implausible as a fix," the release added. The ICC did not name the people exonerated but sources said former Pakistan cricketer Hasan Raza, Sri Lanka's Tharanga Indika and Tharindu Mendis were among them. While small-time Mumbai first-class cricketer Robin Morris was also filmed, he didn't join the investigations.

"No charges will be brought under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code against any of the five Participants to the Code who featured in the programme due to insufficient credible and reliable evidence," the ICC said.

The comprehensive ICC investigation focused on three main areas: the claims made by the programme, the suspects who were part of it and how the programme gathered evidence.

