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RAISES QUESTIONS OF VACCINE EQUITY, LOCKDOWN EFFECTIVENESS

Curbs tighten but vaccination slackens in country's most vulnerable districts

67% of 306 dists with 20% positivity show dip in vaccination May 1-7 compared to previous week

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

AS MANY as two-thirds of all districts reporting a positivity rate of more than 20 per cent — an index of the pandemic's current severity and its potential spread — have reported an alarming dip in vaccination after the Centre's new norms kicked in May 1, an analysis of districtwise data obtained by *The Indian Express* reveals.

Not only does this raise doubts over the immediate course of the national vaccination programme, it also puts a question mark on vaccine equity. For, a scrutiny of the worst-hit districts shows these include several rural areas where the curve is rising and where there are glaring gaps in medical infrastructure.

Between May 2 and May 8, as many as 306 districts — just under half of the country — were reporting a positivity rate of more than 20 per cent. The Centre's strategy for these

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NAVY BRINGS 40 MT OXYGEN TO MUMBAI

Indian Naval Ship Trikanth on Monday brought 40 metric tonnes of liquid medical oxygen to Mumbai from Qatar. According to a statement, the consignment is part of the French mission 'Oxygen Solidarity Bridge' to support India's fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. The first consignment was handed over to Maharashtra state authorities. *Ganesh Shirsekar*

Vaccine inequity gets worse: rural India, smaller hospitals hit

PRANAV MUKUL & ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

THE SLIDE in the number of vaccine doses administered in the week starting May 1, after the government "opened up" vaccination beyond priority groups, to its lowest level in eight weeks hides a further skew — indication that the inoculation process could be turning more inequitable than earlier.

In a vaccine market that continues to see a demand-supply mismatch, the revised vaccine procurement process builds in a skew against smaller hospitals in cities and towns in comparison to their bigger counterparts in simply getting access to the shots, and a more disconcerting urban-rural divide in terms of where healthcare facilities are

vis-à-vis the already-established supply-chain map.

The skew is beginning to get reflected on two counts.

First, the ability of hospitals to procure vaccines and arrange shipments, alongside the impact that these factors may have on the landed cost of the shots for each facility, according to multiple players in the vaccine supply chain that *The Indian Express* spoke to.

Then there is the issue of mandatory Co-Win registration as part of the new decentralised distribution strategy, which potentially adds to an entry barrier that could be tougher to navigate for users in the hinterland, both in terms access to the platform and an English-only interface for users so far.

In the guidelines for the "Liberalised and Accelerated

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Rs 700-Rs 1,500: Amid lack of clarity, what pvt hospitals are charging

PRABHA RAGHAVAN & AASHISH ARYAN
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

THE GOVERNMENT'S liberalised Covid-19 vaccine policy has led to wide differences in the prices that private hospitals are charging for the shots, not just inter-city but intra-city as well.

For instance, as per the Co-WIN portal on Monday, H N Reliance Hospital in Mumbai is charging Rs 700 per dose for Covishield — Rs 100 more than the price at which the Serum Institute of India (SII) sold the vaccine to private hospitals. However, Nanavati Hospital in the city has set a price of Rs 900 for one shot, as per the portal. Other hospitals like Dr B L Kapur Hospital in Delhi and Max Healthcare in North India which, like Nanavati, are under the management of Radiant Life

EXPLAINED Disparity to widen

THE DIFFERENT rates are likely to lead to disparity in access to vaccines. Most of the supply is currently with select private hospitals with freedom to set own prices, while states are scrambling to access doses. While this has led to a lack of transparency in the system, prices may stabilise if the supply picks up.

Care, also charge this rate, showed Co-WIN.

Similarly, the rate specified by Apollo Hospitals and Fortis

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Covid rumblings within: BJP leaders in UP complain as govt puts up a brave face

COVID IN THE COUNTRYSIDE
UTTAR PRADESH
AN EXPRESS SERIES
PART-4

LIZ MATHEW, HARIKISHAN SHARMA & MAULSHREE SETH
NEW DELHI, LUCKNOW, MAY 10

AS UTTAR Pradesh continues to battle the second wave of Covid-19, there are growing voices of unease within the state BJP, with a number of MLAs and MPs raising questions about the state government's handling of the situation — from shortage of hospital beds to alleged lack of cooperation from authorities to deal with the hundreds of SOS calls from their constituencies.

Over the last few weeks, many of them have written to the Chief Minister with these complaints, prompting Chief



CM inspects AIIMS, Gorakhpur, Covid facility, Monday. *PTI*

Minister Yogi Adityanath, who has himself only recently recovered from Covid-19, to start visiting hotspot districts in the state and review arrangements.

While Union Minister of State for Labour and Employment Santosh Gangwar's May 6 letter to Adityanath complaining about poor Covid care in his Lok Sabha constituency, Bareilly, saw the CM taking stock of the situation in the district, earlier, Uttar Pradesh Cabinet Minister and Lucknow MLA Brijesh Pathak; BJP's Bareilly

MLA Kesar Singh who ultimately

died of Covid; Mohanlal Ganj MLA Kaushal Kishore who lost his brother to Covid; Basti MP Haish Dwivedi; Bhabohi MLA Dinanath Bhaskar and Kanpur MP Satyadev Pachauri too had written such letters to the CM, pointing out the failure of the system and how they felt helpless as calls poured in with requests for hospital beds and medical supplies such as oxygen.

The party has had to suffer personal losses, with at least four BJP MLAs dying of Covid since

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As deaths go up 10 fold, worrying signs from smaller states

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, MAY 10

SINCE April, the daily count of new cases has increased five times, from about 80,000 to more than four lakh a day now. During this same time, however, the number of deaths being reported every day has increased almost 10 times, from about 400 a day to over 4,000 a day now.

While Maharashtra continues to report the maximum number of deaths every day, the worrying sign is the rapid rise in deaths in other states, even relatively smaller ones like Jharkhand, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Punjab and now Uttarakhand. At the end of March, Maharashtra was contributing roughly one-third of all the deaths in the country. Now, that share is just about one-fifth.

States such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Punjab have seen a large number of coronavirus-related deaths in the last 40 days. Karnataka has now been routinely reporting more than 400 deaths a day, while the death toll in Delhi and

Uttar Pradesh has been around 300 each.

There are a dozen states now that are reporting more than 100 deaths a day. These include relatively new entrants such as Uttarakhand, Haryana, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

Uttarakhand, for example, was reporting deaths in single digits until the second week of April. By Sunday, however, the daily death count from the state had risen to 180. Not all of these deaths happened on the same day — the death toll reported by states usually has a large number of uncounted ones from previous days. Still, over half of Uttarakhand's 3,700 deaths have occurred just in the last one month.

This proportion is the highest

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THE EDITORIAL PAGE

PLEASE DON'T DENY

Governments should ensure truth isn't a Covid casualty, howsoever terrible it makes them look

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EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

HYDERABAD, MAY 10

ELEVEN Covid-19 patients in the ICU of Sri Venkateswara Ramnarain Ruia Government General Hospital at Tirupati, the largest in the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh, died on Monday evening due to lack of oxygen after a tanker with the gas got late by minutes.

District Collector M Hari Narayana said while the 11 people who were on oxygen support died, they were able to save several others. Nearly 1,000 Covid patients are being treated at the hospital, from Tirupati, Chittoor, Nellore and Kadapa.

Officials said the oxygen pressure started dropping after 8:30 pm and the patients died within a few minutes, before the supply could be restored. Angry relatives broke into the Covid ICU, damaged some equipment and overturned tables with injections and medicines.

Officials said nurses and doctors fled the ICU fearing for their safety, returning only after police arrived and took control of the situation.

Earlier on Monday, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy had held a review meeting on the prevailing Covid situation in the state, including measures to increase oxygen supply. Andhra reported 14,986 new positive cases on Sunday and 84 Covid deaths.

Monday also saw a spat between Andhra and Telangana over Covid patients from Andhra reportedly being stopped from proceeding towards Hyderabad for treatment. PTI reported that Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das spoke to his Telangana counterpart Suresh Kumar to sort out the issue.

As per the PTI report, authorities in Telangana started

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FIR names six in 'gangrape' of 26-year-old at Tikri protest site

SAKSHI DAYAL
GURGAON, MAY 10

THE HARYANA police have registered an FIR against six people for the alleged gangrape of a 26-year-old woman who was participating in the farmers' protest at Tikri border, and who died of Covid on April 30.

According to police, the woman hailed from West Bengal and had come to the border in April with six people from the

Kisan Social Army, including two women, whom she had met during a public meeting in Bengal. Days after arriving at the border, she began to exhibit Covid symptoms and as her condition worsened, was admitted to hospital on April 26, police said.

Her father said at a press conference on Monday evening that she came to know of the alleged rape after he reached Jhajjar on April 29 and met her at the hospital.

"She told me she had been

harassed and raped after she left for Tikri. In the train, one of the accused grabbed her hand and forcefully kissed her. After she came to Tikri, she was staying in the tent of the Kisan Social Army, where two of the men who had accompanied her raped her. She told me that they had been blackmailing her," he said.

Police have identified the two men as Anil Malik and Anup Singh. "We have registered an FIR under various IPC sections,

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BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



BMC TO ISSUE GLOBAL TENDER TO PROCURE 50 LAKH VACCINE DOSES

PAGE 4

Vaccines short, Mumbai residents head to centres in rural pockets

YOGESH NAIK
MUMBAI, MAY 10

TO GET around the shortage of vaccine doses in Mumbai, many are booking slots at inoculation centres in rural pockets of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, fuelling anger among local residents.

Each day, people from Mumbai and satellite towns like Thane, Navi Mumbai, Kalyan Dombivali and especially those in



Cars lined up at Shendrun PHC. *Express*

18-44 years category who cannot find a slot near their place of res-

idence are flocking to vaccination centres in tribal-dominated Shahapur and Murbad talukas in Thane district.

The Indian Express visited one centre in Shahapur tehsil, a tribal-dominated belt, and another in Murbad.

At Shendrun's Primary Healthcare Centre, there were at least 25 cars. Shendrun PHC is about 13 km from Shahapur town on the Shahapur Murbad road.

Amit Raghav (40), a resident

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WORLD



AL AQSA VIOLENCE: ROCKETS FIRED AT ISRAEL, 9 KILLED IN GAZA

OLI LOSES TRUST VOTE IN NEPAL, HAS ROOM FOR NEW COALITION

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PAGE 1 ANCHOR

SADAF MODAK & TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA
MUMBAI, MAY 10

Shahabuddin Karikar's employer at a construction site in Mumbai's western suburb Malad asked him to get vaccinated. The 30-year-old labourer has an Android phone but no data pack. He tried to use the phone of a neighbour in Behram Baug slum to register online, but failed.

"After some time, I gave up. I don't understand how to do it. I

will get vaccinated when I go back to my village in West Bengal later this year," he said.

In Malvani slum 10 km north of Malad, Zulekha Mehboob Mulla (41) managed to register herself on CoWIN, but could not book a slot after trying for three days with her slow Internet connection. Desperate to get the shot, she showed up at a vaccination centre in NESCO on May 8. After she had waited for two hours, she was turned away.

"They said book online and come," Zulekha said. According to government es-



As stocks run low, a sign at a drive-in vaccination facility at a mall in Navi Mumbai says no shots on Monday. *Amit Chakravarty*

timates, over 40 per cent of Mumbai's 1.3 crore population lives in slums. A large section of the slum population either does not have a smartphone or is not adept at handling one. The government's insistence on registering and booking a slot online through CoWIN makes it especially difficult for these citizens to get vaccinated.

Also, vaccines are in short supply, and many among this population simply do not have the time to keep trying for a slot. Karikar said he earned Rs 200 after working for 12 hours at the construc-

tion site: "I don't have the time to sit and keep trying for a slot."

While there are no data, officials at various vaccination centres in Mumbai estimated that the turnout from slums was "very poor". The civic body stopped walk-ins last week, making pre-registration on CoWIN mandatory for everyone except those getting the second dose of Covaxin, after several centres reported massive crowds and anger over long waiting times.

42-year-old domestic worker Sunita Wagh got her first dose of Covishield last month, and in-

tends to go for her second shot next week. She does not know she will no longer be able to simply stand in line like she did the first time. No health official or public health representative has visited the Versova slum colony of a hundred-plus homes where she lives.

"I do not know much about this... I got the vaccine because my employer insisted I do. I went to Cooper Hospital and stood in line for five hours. I will go again next week," she said. Wagh does not have a smartphone and knows

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4 MAHARASHTRA

BMC to issue global tender to procure 50 L vaccine doses

Mayor has given nod to the proposal

LAXMAN SINGH
MUMBAI, MAY 10

REVIVING ITS plan to procure vaccines for the city independently, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has decided to issue a global tender for purchase of about 50 lakh doses to ramp up Mumbai's immunization drive. The BMC is in the process of finalizing the rules of the global tenders to be floated this week, officials said.

Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal Monday tabled a proposal for procurement of 50 lakh doses for "in principle" approval at a meeting with the corporation's party group leaders. Mayor Kishori Pednekar has given the go-ahead to the proposal.

"Apart from two Indian companies, the four international companies (making the vaccine) can also participate. This would be helpful as some of these are one dose vaccines. There was a discussion in the Group Leaders meeting today and we all immediately agreed to the commissioner's proposal," Pednekar told *The Indian Express*.

Guardian Minister Aaditya Thackeray is also pushing the move. He tweeted that the BMC was exploring possibilities of global procurement of vaccines. "After discussing with CM Uddhav Thackeray and understanding the need for adequate vaccines to ensure that vaccination in the state is swift and efficient, I have asked BMC explore possibilities of global procurement of vaccines," he said.

Earlier, the BMC had dropped the plan of independently procuring vaccines as the state government did not green signal it. At an Idea Exchange with *The Indian Express* last Thursday, Chahal had said the plan had to be dropped as the state government had conveyed that it would supply all corporations.

A BMC source said the change of mind to allow BMC to buy its own vaccines may have to do with next year's BMC polls and the poor financial health of the state government. "The BMC has enough money to buy such a huge quantity of vaccine stock," said the source, adding that it would help Sena "hold the fort" in the elections.

Although the exact expenditure is yet to be worked out, officials said the vaccine purchase could dent the BMC exchequer by about Rs 400 crore. The selected bidder will have to deliver the doses between 3 to 4 weeks.

Officials said that apart from Bharat Biotech and SII, the BMC is eyeing vaccines from Pfizer, Moderna, Sputnikik and Johnson & Johnson. Senior officials said there would be multiple tenders. "We are in process of finalizing the tender conditions," P Velrasu, Additional Municipal Commissioner, (Projects), told *The Indian Express*.

The finalized company will have to do other compliance in India like import facilitation, getting essential registration.

Despite repeated attempts, Chahal was not available for comment.

FULL REPORT ON:
www.indianexpress.com



A container of medical oxygen being offloaded in Mumbai. Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) successfully executed the handling of four containers carrying 80 metric tonnes of medical oxygen in cryogenic state in the vessel MV. GSF GISELLE of AXS service, which were sent by UAE. The containers will be transported to destinations decided by the government. *Express*

Task force to ensure safe custody for kids of Covid-positive patients

SADAF MODAK
MUMBAI, MAY 10

HOSPITALS WILL now have to ask Covid-19 patients at the time of admission if they have minor children and under whose custody are they kept during the treatment. This is among the guidelines given to members of district-level task forces, newly appointed by the Women and Child Development (WCD) department, to ensure children, whose parents are infected with the virus, are in safe custody.

The directions to set up a task force were given following order by the Supreme Court and guidelines by the Union WCD ministry after social media posts were seen circulating with details of children claimed to have lost both parents to Covid-19.

The posts, which claimed that such children were up for adoption, were red-flagged by authorities stating that it was illegal.

Each district is required to set up the 10-member task force, headed by the collector. Other members are the civic chief, police commissioner or superintendent of police in rural areas, secretary of the District Legal Services Authority, Chairperson of the Child Welfare Committee, district civil surgeon, district child protection officer and officials of the WCD, health and information departments.

The tasks assigned to the municipal commissioner, district child surgeon and the district's health officer include directions to be given to all hospitals under their jurisdiction to ensure information is taken from those be-

ing admitted about the custody of their minor children during their stay at the hospital.

The collectors are directed to supervise the task force's activities and meet once in 15 days to check on the adherence of the guidelines. Health officials are also directed to ensure that Child Helpline 1098 is prominently displayed in the hospital premises.

The guidelines also direct police to ensure that action is initiated against those who put up posts offering illegal adoption of children. The DLSA is directed to offer legal aid to ensure the protection of financial and property rights of the minor children.

The CWC is directed to follow procedures to hand over custody of the child to a relative or follow the CARA guidelines in cases of adoption. The guidelines also

state that children should be given counselling wherever required.

The task force members are expected to send information to the district WCD office on a weekly basis which will be submitted to the WCD commissioner. The guidelines also include ensuring periodic medical checks and treatment to those in children's homes in their districts.

"The increase in cases and deaths due to Covid-19 is also having an impact on children. The situation has given rise to cases where children have lost both parents to Covid-19. This has made such children vulnerable to being victimised and trafficked or pushed into child labour. The task-force is assigned to ensure care and protection of these children," an official said.

'SC certified failure': Sena targets Centre over Covid task force, BJP hits back

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 10

DAYS AFTER the Supreme Court set up a national task force for Covid response and oxygen allocation, the Shiv Sena on Monday said it had certified the Centre's failure in tackling Covid. The BJP hit back, saying that the Centre itself had suggested setting up a task force.

An editorial in Saamana said that the Supreme Court set up a national committee after the Union government failed to tackle the Corona crisis. "The SC has certified the Centre's failure by setting up the task force. Now, what does the BJP's Goebbels system have to say on it?" asked the editorial.

It further said that the second wave of Covid has spread across the country and there is daily

The SC has certified the Centre's failure by setting up the task force. Now, what does the BJP's Goebbels system have to say on it?

SAAMANA EDITORIAL

confusion about medicines, vaccination and oxygen supply in the states.

"Many patients and their relatives are knocking on the door of the court as they are not getting oxygen and beds. Since the last few days, the courts have taken up the task of oxygen, bed distribution with others. Finally, the court set up a national committee and entrusted them with the responsibility," said the editorial.

It also said that while the SC has taken steps to address the Covid crisis, the nation's rulers

are still engaged in politics. "They were busy resolving the issue of Assam's chief ministership. Though Mamata Banerjee has won in West Bengal, they are spending time plotting conspiracies to not allow her to run the state smoothly," the editorial said.

Opposition leader Devendra Fadnis asked whether it is ignorance or purposeful act of defamation.

"How can one be so shallow to write/speak on serious things like a SC order without even reading the details? Especially the pillars of democracy?" asked Fadnis in a tweet.

He said that the Union government itself, through the solicitor general, suggested constituting a national task force of experts.

"So, why BLATANT LIE again & again?" asked Fadnis.

Monitoring animals for symptoms: Byculla zoo

SANJANA BHALERAO
MUMBAI, MAY 9

COVID-19 TESTING of staffers at regular intervals, restricted access to animal enclosures and regular health check-ups of animals are some of the measures that Mumbai's Veer Mata Jijabai Bhosale Udyan and Zoo has been taking since the pandemic began last year.

An official from the Byculla zoo said, "Currently, no testing of the animals is required. As per the guidelines issued last year, regular health check-ups of the zoo workers and that of animals are being conducted. We are monitoring symptoms like coughing, nasal discharge, respiratory distress, diarrhoea, anorexia, nervous symptoms and fever among the animals."

After 11 months, the Byculla zoo had re-opened for visitors in February this year. It was again shut in April after Covid-19 cases

started rising.

In Mumbai, Sanjay Gandhi National Park has 20 captive animals, while the Byculla zoo has nearly 335 animals, birds and reptiles. Of the total animals, 12 are mammals, including a pair of tigers, leopards, hyenas, hippopotamus and a lone elephant.

"We are following the CZA guidelines, i.e., regular sanitisation of the enclosures and observation of the animals for any symptoms. Every 15 days, we are conducting RT-PCR tests for the staff, who are handling the animals. Except for the concerned staff, no one else is allowed to go inside the enclosures. There has been no need to collect swabs of animals from SGNP for Covid-19 test. If we have to take a swab test, we have to sedate the animal which is also a risk," said G Mallikarjuna, SGNP director.

A nasal or an oral swab of the animals for the Covid-19 test is only collected if symptoms are diagnosed. The samples from the

wild animals will be collected either by the 'squeeze cage' method or by tranquilising them. In the 'squeeze cage' method, the animal will be confined in a cage without any space so that it cannot move or resist while taking samples. India has four designated Covid-19 testing centres for captive animals.

After eight Asiatic lions at Hyderabad zoo tested positive for Covid-19, rescue centres, national parks which have captive animals and zoos across the country are vigilant.

In April last year, after a tiger at a US zoo tested positive for coronavirus, the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) had asked all zoos across the country to be on high alert and collect samples fortnightly in suspected cases.

Because of the rapid spread of the coronavirus in the country, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change recently issued an advisory to close all zoological parks.

Give 'idle' unit to firm making Covaxin, HC tells state govt

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, MAY 10

THE BOMBAY High Court has directed the Maharashtra government to hand over "peaceful possession" of an "idle" vaccine-manufacturing unit situated in a Pune village to Biovet Private Limited, an associate of Bharat Biotech, to begin manufacturing of Covaxin - the homegrown Covid-19 vaccine -- and other life-saving vaccines.

The facility is situated in Village Manjari Khurd, in Haveli Taluka, on a piece of land measuring 11.58 hectares.

A division bench of Justice K K Tated and Justice Nitin R Borkar passed the order to the Maharashtra government through the Pune District Collector on May 6, on an interim application by Biovet seeking possession of the unit for vaccine-manufacturing. The applicant firm also sought direction to the authorities to permit it to carry out structural changes to utilise the maximum installed capacity of the unit, which the court accepted.

The unit was being used by Intervet India Pvt Ltd, a multinational subsidiary of Merck & Co, after the land was granted to it in 1973 to manufacture a vaccine for Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD).

State gets 6 lakh doses of Covishield, 36 k of Covaxin

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, MAY 10

MAHARASHTRA HAS received six lakh Covishield vaccine doses and 36,000 Covaxin doses, state Additional Chief Secretary Dr Pradeep Vyas told *The Indian Express* on Monday. Of the six lakh Covishield doses, 2.5 lakh doses are for the 45+ age group while 3.5 lakh doses will be allocated for the 18-44 age group.

The state pays for the procurement of doses for the 18-44 age group while the Centre allocates vaccines procured from Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech for the 45 years and above age group to states.

Till May 9, a total of 1.8 crore beneficiaries have been administered Covid-19 vaccine doses across the state. Of this, 4.36 lakh beneficiaries are among the 18-44 age group who have been administered the vaccine since the drive began on May 1.

An analysis of the data shows that till May 9, a total of 6.68 lakh healthcare workers have been administered both doses of the vaccine while 6.19 lakh frontline workers have got both doses. The highest number of persons vaccinated with doses amount to 20.67 lakh beneficiaries in both 45-59 age group, and the 60 years and above age group.

Intervet, which is exiting business operations in India, had entered into an agreement with Biovet to transfer the Pune land and manufacturing unit to the latter.

However, after Biovet sought government approval for transfer of land and unit, the Forest Department said it could not be carried out as the area was part of reserved forest land, adding the 1973 grant itself was bad.

Advocate RD Soni, appearing for Biovet, informed the court that the firm had filed a writ plea challenging two directives by the Forest Department that prevented the firm from starting manufacturing activities at the facility.

Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni, appearing for the state government, submitted that it did not have objection if the firm's plea is allowed only for manufacturing Covaxin and other life-saving vaccines without claiming any right or title on same property, subject to outcome of writ plea. He said that the officers concerned will decide "without wasting time" on requests for necessary permissions. The bench allowed interim application made by Biovet and directed the authorities to grant licenses, permissions or no-objection certificates to Biovet in a "time-bound manner" to enable manufacturing of the vaccines.

Treatment of mucormycosis under MJPJAY, says Tope

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 10

THE STATE government has decided to include mucormycosis treatment under the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan Arogya Yojna (MJPJAY) to facilitate free healthcare to patients.

Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Monday said, "The state health department has decided to launch an awareness campaign about mucormycosis. It has also decided to bring it under the MJPJAY."

Mucormycosis is found among Covid-positive and diabetes patients, who often develop black spots under nose and lips. If it is not treated early, the disease can cause severe effect on eyes, brain and lungs.

"The medicines for mucormycosis are expensive. So we decided to include it under the government scheme under which there are 1,000 hospitals across Maharashtra," Tope said.

The minister said the state will soon declare the fixed rate of injection for mucormycosis treatment.

Tope also urged Covid-positive people to opt for immediate treatment. "Those with diabetes should exercise regularly and have nutritious food. All medicines should be taken as per doctor's advice for Covid," he added.

No pre-arrest bail for man who 'defrauded' trader

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, MAY 10

THE BOMBAY High Court recently rejected the anticipatory bail application of a man who was booked for allegedly defrauding a trader from Mumbai, who had ordered 5000 A+ quality Nitrile gloves and made payment of Rs 17.64 lakh to the applicant.

The case was filed after the applicant failed to deliver the goods after receiving the payment and claimed that he was cheated by another supplier of the gloves.

A single-judge bench of Justice Prakash D Naik last month passed an order on the

The case was filed after the applicant failed to deliver the goods after payment and claimed that he was cheated by another supplier

anticipatory bail application filed by Saiyad Faiz Hasan in connection with the FIR registered with Vanrai police station in Mumbai for offences of cheating and breach of trust on February 6.

As per the FIR, in January, the complainant, a trader from Mumbai, came across WhatsApp promotion messages forwarded by the accused for

sale of Nitrile gloves and placed a purchase order for 5000 boxes of A+ quality Nitrile gloves (blue colour), after which the accused showed invoices, E-way bills and other documents. Relying on assurance of the accused, the complainant paid Rs 17.64 lakh, but the delivery was delayed and the accused allegedly avoided calls, prompting the complainant to register an FIR.

The HC held, "The entire transaction appears to be suspicious. Undisputedly, the entire payment was made to him and the complainant has not received the goods nor the payment. In view of the above, no case is made out for granting relief of granting pre-arrest bail under section 438 of CrPC."

MANOJ MORE
PUNE, MAY 10

SAMBHAJIRAO KAKADE, the last of the socialist leaders from Pune who was known as the arch-rival of NCP chief Sharad Pawar, died of old age on Monday. He was 89.

Other than Pawar, who had won from the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency several times, Kakade was the only other leader who won two terms from the seat.

Fondly addressed as 'Lala', Kakade headed the state Janata Party unit in the 1970s and later joined the Janata Dal formed under the leadership of V P Singh. He was known for his proximity to the former prime minister.

The Kakade family had control over the Pune district Central Cooperative Bank for nearly 25 years before yielding control to the Pawar family.

"The Kakade family and Pawar family are well known in Pune district. The Kakade family strongly opposed the Pawars on the political terrain and outside. They did everything to outdo each other..." recalled Manav Kamble, a close associate.

Paying his tribute, NCP chief Pawar tweeted, "In Kakade's death, Baramati has lost a strong political leader. As senior Janata Dal leader, he cast his influence on Maharashtra's political terrain for a long time. He gave direction to new leadership."

Kakade was the contempo-



Sambhajirao Kakade

rary of stalwarts such as N M Joshi, Mohan Dhariya and Nanasahab Gore. "They were all socialist leaders from Pune who were acclaimed for their leadership qualities and their tireless work for society at large. Kakade worked in close association with them," said Congress leader

Ramesh Iyer. BJP leader Mahesh Kulkarni said Kakade had won two Lok Sabha elections from Baramati. "In the Lok Sabha elections after Emergency was lifted in 1977, he had defeated barrister Vithalrao Gadil of the Congress. He had also won in a by-poll in 1985, after Sharad Pawar had resigned," he said.

In the 1977 election, the Janata Party had won all the three seats of Pune city, Baramati and Khed in Pune district during what was described as the 'Janata Party wave'.

Iyer said, "Though Kakade was a strong opponent of Pawar, it was Pawar who had supported Kakade in the by-poll in 1985. Kakade had won the election

then." Kakade's nephew Viraj had also contested from Baramati once, but lost the election. Iyer said in 2004, Kakade, who had decided to contest from Baramati, eventually withdrew from the race after it became known that Pawar was suffering from a serious illness. "Kakade had issued a statement to the effect, saying he was withdrawing from the race in support of Pawar who was suffering from a disease" he said.

Kakade was first elected as a member of the state Legislative Council in 1971. His associates said he always opposed the Congress and never gave up the ideology of the Janata Party. Despite old age, he would make all efforts to attend a rally held for a public cause, they said.

Inspector levelled allegations against Param Bir Singh Mumbai Police file chargesheet in FIR registered by Dange

MOHAMED THAYER
MUMBAI, MAY 10

NEARLY A year-and-a-half after an FIR was registered against Yash Mehta – grandson of diamond merchant and film producer Bharat Shah – along with his friends over a brawl outside a pub by Gamdevi police station, Mumbai Police filed a chargesheet last week.

The case was controversial since the senior inspector of Gamdevi police station, Anup Dange, who had registered the case, was later suspended when Param Bir Singh became Mumbai Police Commissioner.

Dange recently wrote a letter to CM Uddhav Thackeray, the state Home Minister and DGP, alleging that Singh had transferred him since Dange had not agreed to his demand for not naming a builder, Jitu Navlani, in the FIR. Dange had also alleged that Singh later demanded Rs 2 crore to revoke his suspension.



Param Bir Singh

The allegations are being investigated by a panel appointed by the Maharashtra government and Anti Corruption Bureau. Senior inspector of Gamdevi police station R Rajbhar told The Indian Express, "We have filed a chargesheet against seven persons in connection with the case. These include Yash Mehta, two of his friends, three others with whom they got into a brawl and Jitu Navlani."

The accused have been charged under Sections 353 (obstructing a public servant from performing his duty) among other sections of the IPC.

The incident took place on November 22, 2019, outside 'Dirty Buns Sobro', a pub owned by Jitu Navlani. Dange had al-

leged that even though it was late at night, Navlani refused to shut the pub and claimed to have good relations with Param Bir Singh, the then DG Anti Corruption Bureau.

Around the same time, a fight broke out in the elevator of the pub. When a police constable tried to intervene, the youths who were part of the fight allegedly assaulted the constable. Dange alleged that when he tried to arrest three persons involved in the brawl, Navlani stopped him from doing so.

In the FIR, Dange alleged that when his team came to the police station with the three accused, he started receiving calls from several police officers.

He said in the complaint that he found one of the three accused arrested by them as Yash Mehta, grandson of Bharat Shah. An FIR was then registered against Navlani, Mehta and others.

Dange in the recent complaint alleged that Singh had

tried to get Navlani's name removed from the FIR. The chargesheet filed by the Gamdevi police last week is in connection with this FIR.

Soon after this FIR was registered in November 2019, Shah and his son reached Gamdevi police station and allegedly threatened Dange. Following this, Dange had registered another FIR against Shah and his son and a chargesheet in this case was filed last year, sources said.

On February 29, 2020, Singh became the Mumbai Police commissioner and in July Dange was first transferred from Gamdevi police station. Eventually Dange was suspended from the force on July 18 on the grounds that he allegedly made derogatory remarks against some senior officers in a police WhatsApp group.

After the Maharashtra government had a fallout with Singh, Dange was reinstated in the force.

MLA 'abuses' health officer for 'not informing' him about Covid tests

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 10

CONGRESS MLA from Deoli, Wardha district, Ranjit Kamble has been accused of abusing the district health officer on Monday.

The doctor, Ajay Dhawale, recorded a 2.20-minute telephonic conversation in which Kamble can be heard abusing him. Wardha police said it seemed to be a "non-cognizable" complaint and they will seek legal opinion before taking action.

Kamble apparently was angry with Dhawale as the latter "did not inform" him that RT-PCR testing had been started in Nachangaon, which falls under his constituency.

Dhawale told The Indian Express, "Covid-19 cases in Kamble's constituency are increasing. Hence, we had to start RT-PCR and antigen tests there. Just because he was not aware of the development, he abused me. I told him I am not aware that he was not informed by my subordinate but he did not listen to me."

In the conversation, the man who Dhawale alleges to be Kamble says, "You are conducting tests in my constituency and do not feel the need to inform me about it? You announced a lockdown and have started with the testing as well? Are you playing politics with me? I will beat you... I will thrash you with my chappal. What do you think of my constituency? How can you conduct tests during lockdown? You can go to the superintendent or local police. You think he will save you? I will beat you inside the police station."

Kamble did not respond to calls or messages. S M Bandiwari, senior police inspector of the Wardha city police station, said: "Dhawale has given us the audio clip and a written complaint. The crime is of non-cognizable nature. We are seeking legal opinion before initiating appropriate action."

Two new FCI offices to benefit Marathwada, Western Vidarbha

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 10

THE CENTRE has sanctioned two more divisional offices of Food Corporation of India (FCI) in the state, at Aurangabad and Amravati, to benefit the Marathwada and Western Vidarbha region.

While making the announcement, Union Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Ramesh Chandra Patil said on Monday, "The role of Food Corporation of India is of paramount importance in ensuring food security to masses under National Food Security Act."

The FCI acts as a trusted institution in procurement of produce from the farmers, and its role during the time of Covid-19 is extremely important, he added.

The offices got functional with immediate effect. "With this, the farmers, PDS beneficiaries, NGOs, Government Agencies and end consumers of Marathwada and Western Vidarbha will be benefited in a significant manner," said Danve.

Until now, FCI had six Divisional Offices in the region, including one in Goa. The offices are situated in Borivali (catering to Mumbai and suburban area), Panvel (Raigarh), Pune (southern Marathwada, Western Maharashtra and Konkan belt), Nagpur (Vidarbha) and Manmad (Nasik, Khandesh and a major portion of Marathwada).

HAZARE FILES PLEA FOR CASE TRANSFER

Mumbai: Social activist Anna Hazare has filed a plea before the principal judge of a sessions court, seeking transfer of the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank case to another court.

Hazare claimed that his PIL filed before the Bombay High Court in 2018 had challenged the sale of sugar cooperative factories in the state, which is pending. The HC had, while deciding another PIL filed by one Surinder Arora, directed an investigation in the case. The transfer application filed by Hazare says Arora "is won over by the accused" so that other protest petitioners, including his, are not heard in the case. The Mumbai Police Economic Offences Wing has filed a closure report in the case, giving a clean chit to directors of the cooperatives and others, including leaders like Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. Arora had filed a protest petition opposing the closure report, which is pending. ENS

Finish probe into corruption charges against Param Bir Singh within a week, says lawyer

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 10

A DAY after The Indian Express reported about the three probes by the Maharashtra Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) against Senior IPS Officer Param Bir Singh, the lawyer of one of the complainants demanded the investigation in the corruption cases to be completed within a week.

Advocate Abha Singh, lawyer of alleged bookie Sonu Jalan, held

a press conference on Monday, stating the demand.

Jalan in his complaint had alleged that Rs 3.45 crore was taken from him in two cases to close investigation against him by former cop Pradeep Sharma. Jalan alleged that in one of the two cases, Rs 10 crore was demanded by Sharma in Param Bir Singh's cabin and eventually, he ended up paying Rs 3 crore.

This is one of the three complaints in which the ACB is conducting what it calls a "discreet inquiry". There are two other

such inquiries on separate complaints by two inspectors Anup Dange and Bhimrao Ghadge.

These probes by the ACB are in addition to the two inquiries by police and an FIR, based on the complaints of Dange, Ghadge and Jalan.

As per the ACB's manual, a "discreet inquiry" should be completed in no more than three months.

During the press conference, Abha Singh said while the ACB manual may have a stipulated time period, the law of the land

laid out by the Supreme Court in the Lalita Kumari judgment states that an inquiry should just take a week before a decision on whether an FIR should be registered or not should be taken.

"In this case, three days have already passed, so the ACB should complete the inquiry in four days. If not, on behalf of my client, I may approach the ACB court or any other court to get justice," Abha Singh said.

ACB officials said their inquiry was under way and refused to comment on the issue.

Reconstruction of Himalaya Bridge may start by month-end

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 10

TWO YEARS after its collapse, work on reconstruction of Himalaya Bridge at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) is expected to start by the end of this month.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has finalised a contractor and a proposal will be tabled before the standing committee for final approval on Wednesday.

According to the proposal, while the expenditure for the bridge's re-construction is Rs 5.53 crore, the entire project cost, which also includes various taxes, is Rs 7.5 crore. The contract has been awarded to Pinaki Engineers and Developers.

Once the proposal is approved by the committee, the work will start in 15 days. The civic body has said the project will be completed within 15 months (excluding monsoon period) from the day the contractor is appointed.

The 28.5-metre long and 4.4-metre wide new bridge will be made of ce-

ment concrete upon a steel structure.

In March 2019, six people had died and 31 injured after the bridge, which used to connect CSMT over Dr D N Road to Azad Maidan police station, collapsed during the evening peak hour rush.

Following the collapse, the BMC's roads and traffic department had conducted a study to decide whether to re-construct the bridge or build a subway. After the department suggested a bridge, the BMC prepared a plan for a new bridge with the help of a consultant.

On an average, nearly 25,000 commuters cross D N Road to get to the CSMT station daily. After the incident, commuters use a subway located at 200 metre from the site of the fallen bridge.

A zebra crossing with signals has also been made for pedestrians.

NOTICE
BEFORE THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR, WESTERN DIRECTOR,
EVEREST, 5TH FLOOR, 100 MARINE DRIVE, MUMBAI 400002
IN THE MATTER OF SECTION 12(5) OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2013 READ WITH RULE 28 OF THE COMPANIES (INCORPORATION) RULES, 2014 AND
IN THE MATTER OF M/S PRATAM FIN SERV PRIVATE LIMITED
A COMPANY INCORPORATED UNDER THE COMPANIES ACT, 2013 AND
HAVING ITS REGISTERED OFFICE AT, CAVIANA B WING/703, HIRANANDANI ESTATE, THANE MH 400607 IN

...Applicant
NOTICE is hereby given to the General Public that the company proposes to make application to the Central Government under Section 12 of the Companies Act 2013 seeking confirmation in terms of the special resolution passed on 03RD MAY, 2021 to enable the company to shift its Registered Office from Mumbai to Pune (i.e. within the same state, from the jurisdiction of Registrar of Companies, Mumbai to the jurisdiction of Registrar of Companies, Pune). Any Person whose interest is likely to be affected by the proposed shifting of the Registered Office of the Company may deliver or caused to be delivered or sent by registered post of his/her objections supported by an affidavit stating the nature of his/her interest and grounds of opposition to the above mentioned Regional Director, Western Region, within twenty one days from the date of publication of notice with a copy to the applicant company as its registered office.
By order of the Board of Directors
FOR PRATAM FIN SERV PRIVATE LIMITED
CIN - U67190MH2016PTC274257
DIN: 07410720
Place : Thane
Date : 06/05/2021
Sd/-
SANDEEP MUKUND PIMPLE
Director

ADMISSION OPEN FOR 2021-2023
TWO - YEAR FULL TIME
M.SC IN PACKAGING TECHNOLOGY & POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN PACKAGING
(M.Sc in Packaging Technology Course available at Hyderabad & Delhi centre only)
Eligibility: Fresh Graduate in Engineering / Technology or Science (12th + 3 years degree - entire 5 years in science only), with Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Statistics, Microbiology or Bio-Chemistry as the main subject or one of them as second subject in the 3 Years Degree or Agriculture / Pharma / Food Science / Polymer Science Degree of a AICTE / recognised University with minimum second class and maximum age 30 years as on 31/05/2021, age relaxation 3 years for OBC and 5 years for SC / ST.
Students awaiting the result may also apply.
Admission: Through Entrance Examination at Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Delhi. Application Forms available at all the centres of IIP
Last date for receiving filled application forms at IIP Mumbai: 11th June, 2021
Entrance Exam : On 18th June, 2021
Hostel Facility: Separate Hostel accommodation for Boys and Girls is available at Mumbai only.
Job Prospects: Excellent, in Food, Pharma, Polymer including MNCs and other Companies in India and Overseas. Over 5,000 Alumni are working in Industries in India and Abroad. Application form along with Prospectus can be obtained from any IIP Centre/ Website of Indian Institute of Packaging by paying Rs. 500/- only by cash/online or DD in favour of "Indian Institute of Packaging" payable at respective Centres of IIP.
Due to Covid Pandemic situation online payment & online submission will be encouraged
Candidate can visit IIP website and submit the online application through www.iip-in.com
Further details, please contact: HEAD OFFICE & IIP CENTRES
HEAD OFFICE:
E-2, Road No. 8, MIDC Area, Andheri (E), Mumbai - 400 093. INDIA
Tel: 91-22-2821 9803/6751/9469, 28391506, 28329623, 2825 4631 Extn. 310, 303, 306, 301
Fax: 91-22-28328178 / 2837 5302, Mob. 8692943727, 7208119238
Email: meip@iip-in.com, onlinepgdd@iip-in.com, theiip@iip-in.com Web: www.iip-in.com

BAJAJ FINANCE LIMITED
CIN-L65910MH1987PLC042961
Registered Office: Akurdi, Pune 411 035
Corporate Office: 4th Floor, Bajaj Finserv Corporate Office, Off Pune-Ahmednagar Road, Viman Nagar, Pune 411 014
FIXED DEPOSIT SCHEMES
'FAA/Stable' rating by CRISIL AND 'MAAA (Stable)' rating by ICRA.
The abovementioned ratings indicate highest degree of safety with regard to timely payment of interest and principal on the instrument.

Annualised rate of Interest per annum valid up to ₹5 Crores per deposit (w.e.f. May 12, 2021)						
Tenor in months	Minimum deposit (in Rs.)	Cumulative	Non-Cumulative			
			Monthly	Quarterly	Half Yearly	Annual
12 - 23	25,000	5.65%	5.51%	5.53%	5.57%	5.65%
24 - 35		6.10%	5.94%	5.97%	6.01%	6.10%
36 - 60		6.50%	6.31%	6.35%	6.40%	6.50%

NAME		ADDRESS		OCCUPATION	
Shri D. Omkar Goswami (Independent Director)		E-121, Masjid Mith, First Floor, Greater Kailash 3, New Delhi 110048.		Economist	
Dr. Gita Prinsal (Independent Director)		Prinsal House, G1, Pochhananwala Road, Worli, Mumbai 400025.		Business	
Dr. Nasubhad Forbes (Independent Director)		74 Koroogon Park, Lane No. 3, Pune 411001		Business	
Shri Anant Narayan roy (Independent Director)		62 Sarangar, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan Road, Worli Sea Face, Mumbai 400030.		Retired Civil Servant	

F. Summarised Financial Position of the Company (standalone) as appearing in the two latest audited balance sheets:			(₹ in Crore)		
	As at 31 March 2020	As at 31 March 2019			
ASSETS			As at 31 March 2020	As at 31 March 2019	
Financial assets					
Cash and cash equivalents	674.53	240.00			
Bank balances other than cash and cash equivalents	4.83	1.69			
Derivative financial instruments	171.76	805.38			
Trade receivables	827.38	95,181.26			
Loans	1,33,417.08	10,370.41			
Investments	20,138.98	10,370.41			
Other financial assets	349.51	381.61			
Total financial assets	1,35,623.87	1,06,990.35			
Non-financial assets					
Current tax assets (net)	204.57	147.80			
Deferred tax assets (net)	847.61	660.83			
Property, plant and equipment	1,016.16	495.84			
Intangible assets	211.98	158.49			
Other non-financial assets	99.38	56.56			
Total non-financial assets	2,379.70	1,519.52			
Total assets	1,38,003.57	1,08,499.87			
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY					
Financial liabilities					
Payables					
Total outstanding dues of micro enterprises and small enterprises	0.30	0.44			
- Total outstanding dues of creditors other than micro enterprises and small enterprises	636.76	547.25			
Other payables					
- Total outstanding dues of micro enterprises and small enterprises	179.46	218.64			
- Total outstanding dues of creditors other than micro enterprises and small enterprises	41,713.77	39,948.97			
Debt securities	36,923.32	29,970.67			
Borrowings (other than debt securities)	21,427.10	13,933.01			
Deposits	4,414.75	4,139.97			
Subordinated debt	669.90	1,419.91			
Other financial liabilities					
Total financial liabilities	105,692.36	88,529.86			
Non-financial liabilities					
Current tax liabilities (net)	52.10	22.37			
Provisions	78.87	68.88			
Other non-financial liabilities	367.03	315.13			
Total non-financial liabilities	498.00	406.38			
Equity					
Equity share capital	119.99	115.37			
Other equity	31,693.22	19,448.26			
Total assets	31,813.21	19,563.63			
Total liabilities and equity	1,38,003.57	1,08,499.87			
Contingent Liabilities (Standalone)					
Particulars					
	As at 31 March 2020	As at 31 March 2019			
Disputed claims against the Company not acknowledged as debts	44.18	28.04			
VAT matters under appeal	4.39	4.39			
ESI matters under appeal	5.14	5.14			
Service tax matters under appeal					
- On interest subsidey	1,971.65	1,340.49			

The above text of advertisement has been issued on the authority and in the name of the Board of Directors and has been approved by the Board of Directors at its Meeting held on 21 July 2020 and copy of the same signed by the majority of Directors has been delivered to the Reserve Bank of India for registration.

Pune
07 May 2021

HOW TO INVEST:
The amount should be deposited only by net-banking, cheque or debit card. Cheques should be payable to 'Bajaj Finance Ltd. for FD of ₹1 of deposit number' and crossed 'Account Payee only'. The cheques should be payable at par and CTS compliant. Application Form along with the necessary remittance should be sent to the Distributors of the Fixed Deposits of BFL or be submitted at any of the BFL Branches. For NFF/RKIS, please use the following details: Beneficiary Name: Bajaj Finance Ltd. Bank acc no.: ZBAJAFND (numerical account number is replaced by CMC collection code - ZBAJAFND). Account type: Current account, Bank Name: Indusind Bank Ltd, IFSC: INDB0000006, Branch Name: Nariman Point, Mumbai. Applications can also be made online by visiting www.bajajfinserv.in/fixd-deposit or any of our affiliated partner websites or apps. For investment queries or information about our affiliated partner websites, write to us at fd@bajajfinserv.in or call us on +91 869890101

By order of the Board of Directors
for Bajaj Finance Limited
Rajeev Jain, Managing Director
DIN: 01550158

EX-SERVICEMEN CONTRIBUTORY HEALTH SCHEME (ECHS) UNDER STATION HEADQUARTERS, AHMEDNAGAR

1. ECHS Cell, Station Headquarters, Ahmednagar invites applications for engagement of following vacancies on contractual basis in ECHS Polyclinics:-

Sr	Name of Post	No of Vac	ECHS Polyclinic	Reserved for ESM
(a)	OIC	01	Ahmednagar	100%
(b)	Medical Specialist	02	01 x Ahmednagar, Solapur	60%
(c)	Medical Offr	01	Latur	60%
(d)	Nurs Asst	01	Solapur	70%
(e)	Data Entry Operator	01	Solapur	70%

2. For terms and conditions visit website www.echs.gov.in. Applications should reach Station HQ, Ahmednagar, Jamkhed Road, District-Ahmednagar, Pin-414002 by 2 P.M. on 02 Jun 2021. E-mail ID shiqahmednagar@echs.gov.in & Tele No. 0241-2321233

3. Only those persons will be called for interview who are fulfilling the requisite criteria.

4. Interview is tentatively scheduled in the 1st/2nd week of Jun 2021 depending on the COVID-19 situation.

WESTERN RAILWAY

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

No. C45/1/AVM/2021/2 Dated : 07.05.2021 Divisional Railway Manager (Commercial), Mumbai Division, Western Railway, Mumbai Central invites e-Tender on single stage two packet system, from food and catering service providers for "Provision of Catering Services at Major Station Unit - Automatic Vending Machine (AVM)" in the form of Stand Alone- Self Dispensing Units at following stations for a period of five years.

Sr. No.	Tender Notice No.	Station	Category of Station	Location	Reserve Price per annum (in ₹)	Earnest Money (in ₹)
1	C45/1/AVM/MC/T/Circulating	Mumbai Central	A1	Circulating area, north side of PRS entrance gate	2,97,500	29,800
2	C45/1/AVM/BDS/Concourse	Bandra Terminus	A1	Concourse hall, between AMUL stall and SSE Linen Office	3,41,000	34,100
3	C45/1/AVM/VAPI/1/1	VAPI	A	PF No. 1, between pillar no. 12 & 13 north side of OHE Mast 17/1/34	2,58,500	25,900
4	C45/1/AVM/UDN/1/1	Udhna	A	PF No. 1, between pole no. 11 & 12 south side of water cooler.	1,74,000	17,400
5	C45/1/AVM/VYA/1/1	Vyara	D	PF No. 1, east side of OHE mast 56/41 & Water Fountain	11,750	1,200
6	C45/1/AVM/VYA/1/2	Vyara	D	PF No. 1, west side of OHE mast 56/29 & Water Fountain	11,750	1,200
7	C45/1/AVM/VYA/2/1	Vyara	D	PF No. 2, east side of OHE mast 56/46 & Water Fountain	11,750	1,200
8	C45/1/AVM/CHM/1/1	Chalthan	D	PF No. 1, between Station building and Toilet block	32,250	3,300
9	C45/1/AVM/CHM/2/1	Chalthan	D	PF No. 2, on west side of OHE mast 11/04 and Water Fountain	33,750	3,400
10	C45/1/AVM/MID/1/1	Madhi	E	PF No. 1, between OHE mast 41/25 and Water Hut	9,500	1,000
11	C45/1/AVM/MID/2/1	Madhi	E	PF No. 2, on east side of OHE mast 41/34 & Water Hut	9,250	1,000
12	C45/1/AVM/BIY/1/1	Bardoli	E	PF No. 1, on east side of Water Fountain on NDB end	9,500	1,000
13	C45/1/AVM/BIY/2/1	Bardoli	E	PF No. 2, on east side of Water Fountain on NDB end	10,000	1,000

Amendment/Corrigendum, if any: Kindly visit website www.ireps.gov.in / till tender closing time & date for any amendments/Corrigendum. Time and Date for Closure for Submission of e-Tender Document: Up to 15:00 Hrs. on 07.06.2021 through online website www.ireps.gov.in / only. Date and time of opening of e-Tender: At 15:30 hrs on 07.06.2021 through online website www.ireps.gov.in / only. Validity of Offer from Date of e-Tender Opening: 60 Days. Address for Correspondence: Divisional Railway Manager (Commercial), Divisional Railway Manager's Office, Commercial Department, Ground Floor, Mumbai Central, Mumbai - 400 008. Tele : 022-676-44246/44238, Fax: 022-676-44299, Email: cmctgbct@gmail.com

Like us: www.facebook.com/WesternRly Follow us: www.twitter.com/WesternRly

Goa prescribes Ivermectin for all

MAYURA JANWALKAR
PANAJI, MAY 10

Monday announced that it will be starting prophylaxis treatment by administering Ivermectin to all above the age of 18 years in the state, irrespective of the symptoms of coronavirus.

Navi Mumbai Municipal Transport

Admin Dept. E-Tender Notice

Tender. NMMT/TM/ADMIN/01/21-22

TENDER Description :- "Group Health Insurance policy to the employees and their family members of NMMT."

Which is available on Web site <https://nmmc.etenders.in>

S/d
Transport Manager,
N.M.M.T.

मुख्य कार्यालय, विरार

विरार (पूर्व),

ता. वसई, जि. पालघर-४०१३०५.

पाणीपुरवठा विभाग, मुख्यालय, विरार पूर्व

प्रथम वेळ जाहीर ई-निविदा सूचना क्र.

सन २०२१-२०२२ व २०२२-२३ वित्तीय वर्षाकरिता वसई विरार शहर महानगरपालिका पाणीपुरवठा योजनेच्या जलसुद्धिकरण केंद्रामधील क्लोरिनेशन यंत्रणेची देखभाल दुरुस्ती करणे कामाची कोरे निविदा फॉर्म <https://mahatenders.gov.in> या अधिकृत संकेतस्थळावर दि. ११.०५.२०२१ पासून उपलब्ध होणार आहे. ई-टेंडरिंगबाबत अधिक माहितीसाठी ई-निविदा कक्ष, वसई विरार शहर महानगरपालिका, विरार, मुख्यालय येथे संपर्क साधावा.

जा.क्र. वसिराम/साअ/११०/२०२१
दिनांक : ०४.०५.२०२१

Please Visit our official web site (<https://mahatenders.gov.in>)

स्वाक्षरी/-
कार्यकारी अभियंता
वसई विरार शहर महानगरपालिका

WESTERN RAILWAY

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

No. C45/1/SBD/2021/2/SMU Dated 07.05.2021 Divisional Railway Manager (Commercial), Mumbai Division, Western Railway, Mumbai Central invites e-Tender from Individuals / Sole Proprietors for Provision of Catering Services at Special Minor Unit at following stations of A1, A, & B Class for a period of five years.

Sr. No.	Tender Notice No.	Category & Sub quota	Station	Category of Station	Type of Unit	Location	Reserve Price per annum (in ₹)	Earnest Money (in ₹)
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2	C45/1/BDS/2018/TS/6-7/1	Other backward classes	BDS	A1	Tea Stall	Platform No 6/7 between pillar no 16 & 17	3,30,000	34,400
3	C45/1/NDB/2018/TS/1/2	Freedom fighters / war widows & widows of Railway Employees, persons who have been dislocated / displaced due to their land having been taken over by the railways for its own use - women	NDB	B	Tea Stall	PF No. 1(OHE mast Km No.156/5A-156/4A, 15mtr from pole no 156/4A east side near RRI building)	1,62,000	16,900
4	C45/1/BIM/2018/TS/1/1	Scheduled Tribe	BIM	B	Tea Stall	PF. No. 1 (At Chainage 55 meters.)	1,84,000	19,200
5	C45/1/BIM/2018/TS/1/3	Scheduled Tribe	BIM	B	Tea Stall	PF. No. 1 (At Chainage 145 meters.)	1,92,000	20,000
6	C45/1/BCT/2018/TS/3-4/2	Freedom fighters / war widows & widows of Railway Employees, persons who have been dislocated / displaced due to their land having been taken over by the railways for its own use	BCT	A1	Tea Stall	PF. No. 3/4 (between pole no. 22 & 23)	2,90,000	30,200

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After year in jail, father's death, HC bail for activist: 'Imperative'

SOFI AHSAN & ARANYA SHANKAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

A DAY after Pinjra Tod activist Natasha Narwal's father died of Covid-19, the Delhi High Court on Monday granted her interim bail for three weeks, saying her release is "imperative" in this hour of grief and personal loss.

Narwal, who has been in custody since



Pinjra Tod tweeted photo of Narwal on her release

May last year, is facing charges in a UAPA case registered by the Delhi Police in connection with the Northeast Delhi riots of 2020. Her father Mahavir Narwal, a retired scientist from CCS Haryana Agricultural University, passed away on Sunday evening at Rohtak in Haryana. Narwal's application for interim bail on grounds of her father's failing health was filed on Friday. A Division Bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and Anup Jairam Bhambhani said Narwal's bail will remain subject to her furnishing a personal bond of Rs 50,000 and providing her telephone number to the Delhi

Police Special Cell and the police station that has jurisdiction over her residence in Haryana's Rohtak. "The applicant undertakes to comply with all the norms in force in view of the current pandemic and observe all the precautions as stipulated therein... including but not limited to PPE kit at the time of the cremation," said the court, adding she will surrender after three weeks without fail after submitting a copy of her RT-PCR report to the jail superintendent.

The court also said that it is "exempting the applicant from filing surety in view of the circumstances that her lone sibling is currently in self-isolation owing to Covid pandemic, and further, the applicant has already furnished sureties" in another FIR against her.

Earlier, advocate Adit Pujari, representing Narwal, told the court that Narwal's brother had tested positive for Covid on May 7 and was in isolation, and therefore, there was nobody else in the family to perform her father's last rites.

While the Delhi Police did not oppose the bail plea, it submitted that Narwal should not make any comments or tweets about the case. Pujari told the court that Narwal would be advised not to do so.

"All that we are telling you is... we are not recording it but we are telling you she will maintain radio silence. Otherwise, we may be constrained to recall the order at some stage. We are not recording it but we are telling you," observed the court.

Akash Bhattacharya, who teaches at Azim Premji University in Bengaluru and has been a friend of Natasha's for a decade, said, "The bail application was initially filed keeping in mind that her father was not well. The hearing happened after he passed away. These are not normal circumstances. Families are suffering due to Covid, and bails, paroles and release on humanitarian grounds should be considered on an urgent basis."

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- Separate Room with attached toilet.
- Consent letter from a physician advising Home isolation.
- Thermometer, Pulse oximeter, face mask and sanitizer must be available
- Body temperature and oxygen level should be checked and noted 4 to 6 times a day.
- If there are any alarming readings such as mentioned below, immediately consult a doctor and get admitted in the hospital.

Thermometer	Pulse Oximeter
Normal: 97 °F to 99°F or 36.1 °C to 37.2 °C	Normal: 95 or above
Alarming: constantly 100 °F or 37.7 °F or more than this.	Alarming: Oxygen saturation, 94 or below Oxygen saturation.

Important

6 Minutes Walk - test

- Oxygen level should be noted after 6 minutes of continuous walking across the room.
- If it is found to be 94 or below, then the patient should immediately consult the Doctor and get admitted to the NMMC Covid Centre or any private hospital.

Medical consultation and Beds availability Helpline : 022-27567460

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8 THE SECOND SURGE

WHO classifies Indian Covid strain as 'variant of concern'

YOSHITA SINGH
UNITED NATIONS, MAY 10

THE B-1617 variant of coronavirus, first identified in India, has been classified as a "variant of concern" at the global level by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, Covid-19 Technical Lead at WHO, on Monday said that the B.1.617 virus variant had been classified as a "variant of interest" by the WHO.

She said the Epi team and WHO lab team has been discussing with the WHO virus evolution working group this variant, and everything that "we know about it in terms of transmissibility and any studies that are being done in India as well as in other countries" where this virus is circulating.

"In consultation with our virus evolution working group, and our Epi teams and our lab teams internally, there is some available information to suggest increased transmissibility of B-1617; as such we are classifying this as a variant of concern at the global level," she said.

She added that even though there is increased transmissibility demonstrated by some preliminary studies, "we need much more information about this virus variant in this lineage, so we need more targeted sequencing to be done, and to be shared in India and elsewhere so that we know how much of this virus is circulating".

Van Kerkhove said there is need for more information on the epidemiologic studies that are underway, the studies that are evaluating neutralization severity. "So far, from information that we have (is) the public health and social measures work, but we need to work that much harder to control any virus variants that have demonstrated increased transmissibility," she said, adding that the WHO does not have anything to suggest that "our diagnostics or therapeutics and our vaccines don't work".

"We will continue to see variants of concern and we must do everything to limit the spread, limit infections and reduce severe disease and death," she said.

Govt: 13 states distributing free grains under PMGKAY

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

THIRTEEN STATES have started distributing foodgrains under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY), which is aimed at providing free additional 5 kg foodgrains per month to beneficiaries covered under National Food Security Act over and above their monthly entitlement for two months, May and June, the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution said on Monday.

The ministry also said that out of a total monthly allocation of 39.69 lakh metric tonnes (MT) under the PMGKAY, 15.55 lakh MT have been lifted by states and 1.01 lakh MT have been distributed to 2.03 crore beneficiaries till May 10.

The figures were shared during a press conference, which was addressed by Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey through

SUKRITA BARUAH
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

FROM SENIOR professors to para-teachers in rural pockets, from Delhi to Uttar Pradesh, both bearing the brunt of the raging pandemic, all sections of the teaching community are reeling under the loss of colleagues and friends.

Among the institutions that have been hit hard is Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), which has lost close to 50 members in the current wave, including serving and retired teachers, teachers in its school, and non-teaching staff members,

VACCINE HEARING DEFERRED AFTER TECHNICAL GLITCH

On vaccine policy affidavit, SC tells Centre: Express had it before us

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

The Supreme Court will take up the Centre's affidavit on vaccine policy and pricing for hearing on May 13.

A Bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud, L Nageswara Rao and S Ravindra Bhat which sat to hear the matter on Monday via video conferencing could not proceed beyond a few minutes due to technical snags.

The *Indian Express* reported on Monday that the Centre had, in an affidavit filed late on Sunday, told the court that its vaccination policy had been framed with equitable distribution with limited availability, vulnerability, and the

fact that vaccinating the entire country was not possible in one go, "as the prime consideration".

The policy was "just, equitable, non-discriminatory and based upon an intelligible differentiating factor between the two age groups (45 plus and those below)", it had said.

The Centre also urged the court to trust the wisdom of the executive, which it said needed discretion to formulate policies in the larger interest.

As proceedings began on Monday, Justice Chandrachud said although he had got the affidavit late on Sunday night and the other judges had got it on Monday morning, things had been easy as he had read the report in *The Indian Express*, which "had it before us".

As such, "any discussion or a mention of exercise of statutory powers" for granting compulsory licenses for their manufacture "can only prove to be counter-productive at this stage", it said.

"When there is a surge in cases and in demand of patented medicines/drugs/vaccines from all over the world the solution needs to be found out essentially at an

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta who appeared for the Centre, tendered an apology.

The Centre also told the Court that it was "actively engaging itself with global organisations at a diplomatic level to find out a solution" to the surge in demand for vaccines and drugs to fight Covid-19 "in the best possible interest of India".

As such, "any discussion or a mention of exercise of statutory powers" for granting compulsory licenses for their manufacture "can only prove to be counter-productive at this stage", it said.

"When there is a surge in cases and in demand of patented medicines/drugs/vaccines from all over the world the solution needs to be found out essentially at an

executive level engaging at diplomatic levels. Any exercise of statutory powers either under the Patents Act 1970 read with TRIPS (Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement and Doha Declaration or in any other way can only prove to be counter-productive at this stage...," and "would have serious, severe and unintended adverse consequences in the country's efforts being made on global platform using all its resources, goodwill and good-offices through diplomatic and other channels", it said.

Hearing the matter on April 30, the SC had sought to know whether the Centre intended to consider invoking powers under the Patents Act, 1979, to grant

compulsory licences to enable more manufacturers to make the vaccines and essential drugs like remdesivir.

The government also sought to explain how the new "Liberalized Pricing and Accelerated National Covid-19 Vaccination Strategy" which kicked in on May 1, "would further ramp up the pace of COVID-19 vaccination". It said the "differential pricing is based on the concept of creating an incentivised demand for the private vaccine manufacturers in order to instil a competitive market resulting in higher production of vaccines and market driven affordable prices for the same. This will also attract offshore vaccine manufacturers to enter the country."

Bodies of suspected Covid victims found floating in Ganga

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA, MAY 10

SEVERAL BODIES, decomposed, bloated and suspected to be of people who succumbed to Covid-19, were on Monday found floating in the Ganga in Chausa block of Bihar's Buxar district.

"We were alerted by the local chowkidar that many bodies have been spotted floating from upstream. We have so far recovered 15 of these. None of the deceased happens to be a resident of the district," Chausa BDO, Ashok Kumar, told PTI over telephone.

He said, "Many Uttar Pradesh districts are right across the river and the bodies may have been dumped in the Ganga for reasons not known to us. We cannot confirm whether the deceased were indeed Covid-19 positive. The bodies have started decomposing. But we are taking all precautions while ensuring that these are disposed of in a decent manner".

Some news channels claimed the number of bodies to be as high as 100, which the BDO dismissed as "highly exaggerated".

Scare along Yamuna in UP, too

In UP's Hamirpur district, local residents spotted five bodies floating in the Yamuna, which created a scare that these were of Covid patients, an apprehension dismissed by the authorities. The resident had spotted the bodies, including a half-burnt corpse, under a bridge on the Yamuna on May 6, according to an official.

"After speaking to people and looking at the bodies, prima facie, it can be said these were not of Covid-19 patients, as these were draped in a traditional manner and no body was wrapped as done in the case of Covid-19 victims," District Magistrate Gyaneshwar Tripathi said in a statement. He said all bodies were cremated with full respect.



RUSH HOUR AS CURBS KICK IN

Heavy rush at the railway station in Jaipur as Rajasthan imposed a two-week lockdown on Monday. The state recorded 160 fatalities and 16,487 new cases on Monday. Rohit Jain Paras

EXPRESS EXPLAINED.LIVE

Top virologist Dr Shahid Jameel to clear the air on second wave today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, MAY 10

IT IS more than a week that India has been reporting around four lakh new coronavirus infections every day. But this week has also been the first time since April that the upward march of the Covid curve has been interrupted. The daily count of cases has moved up and down, unlike in April when every single day, except Mondays, had brought in a higher number of cases.

Still, it might be too early to suggest that India is finally approaching the peak of the second wave. While the growth of cases in Maharashtra, and possibly Delhi, may have plateaued, states such as Karnataka and

Kerala are still surging, and at least for the time being, are able to compensate for the marginal decline that is being seen in Maharashtra. Some other states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar or West Bengal have the potential to rise.

More than 100 deaths are being reported even by relatively small states such as Jharkhand, Haryana, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh. India has seen over 85,000 Covid-related deaths in the last 40 days, and the daily death count of about 4,000 is likely to continue for some more days, at least.

Dr Shahid Jameel, one of India's topmost virologists, and director of Trivedi School of Biosciences at the Ashoka University, will appear at the

MGNREGS demand in April nearly doubled over last year

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

AMID THE surge in Covid-19 cases, about 2 crore families across the country availed of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in April—80 per cent

higher than the corresponding figure last year, according to the data on the scheme's website.

The April 2021 figure is provisional and likely to be revised upwards. This is because muster rolls data of the last week of the month gets updated over the first fortnight of the following month.

The data, reported by states till

May 9, shows that 1.99 crore families—availed of the NREGS in April 2021, compared to 1.10 crore families in April 2020. The April 2021 figure, however, is also higher than the pre-Covid-19 number of April 2019, when 1.70 crore households used the scheme.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

TRACKING THE SECOND SURGE

435 DAYS SINCE PANDEMIC BEGAN
NEW CASES: 3,25,132
ACTIVE CASES: 37,17,851
TOTAL VACCINATION: 17,01,76,603

DAILY DEATHS 3,790 | TOTAL DEATHS 2,49,906 | WEEKLY CFR 1.19% | OVERALL CFR 1.42%



TESTS TODAY: 16,88,300 | TOTAL TESTS: 30,54,38,377
WEEKLY POSITIVITY: 22.30% | OVERALL POSITIVITY: 7.53%

STATES REPORTING MOST CASES

STATE	NEW CASES	ACTIVE CASES	WEEKLY POSITIVITY	TOTAL VACCINATION
■ Karnataka	39,305	5,71,026	30.89%	1,05,26,921
■ Maharashtra	37,236	5,90,818	20.83%	1,79,70,191
■ Tamil Nadu	28,978	1,52,389	17.14%	64,99,349
■ Kerala	27,487	4,20,029	27.13%	79,34,469
■ Uttar Pradesh	21,277	2,25,271	11.56%	1,35,95,851

STATES REPORTING MOST DEATHS

STATE	TODAY'S DEATHS	TOTAL DEATHS	WEEKLY CFR	OVERALL CFR
■ Karnataka	596	19,372	1.63%	1.42%
■ Maharashtra	594	78,730	1.29%	1.81%
■ Delhi	319	19,663	1.32%	1.88%
■ Uttar Pradesh	278	15,742	0.95%	1.41%
■ Tamil Nadu	232	15,880	1.48%	1.45%

Note: Data as on May 10; vaccination numbers as of May 9. Deaths include those caused by comorbidities.

At 1,000 cases a day, Rlys has lost 1,952 staff so far

113 station masters among dead; unions demand vaccination, insurance

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

INDIAN RAILWAYS has lost 1,952 of its employees, including frontline staff like station masters, to the pandemic since last year, and even now around 1,000 railwaymen are reporting affected on a daily basis, the Railways Ministry said on Monday.

"As of now we have 4,000 beds currently occupied by staff and their families. Our effort is to see that they recover quickly. As of yesterday, 1,952 rail employees have died due to Covid-19 since March last year," said Suneet Sharma, Chairman Railway Board. "Railway is not different from any other state or territory and we are also getting Covid cases... We have to move freight and people. Around 1,000 cases are reported daily. We have augmented the number of beds, we have built oxygen plants in rail hospitals. We take care of our staff..." he added.

So far, 113 station masters have died in the pandemic, most of them in the second wave this year, according to the All Indian Station Masters' Association (AISMA). The Railway Protection Force has so far lost 50 men.

In letters to Railway Board as well as several rail divisions, the association has demanded things like special insurance cover of Rs 50 lakh for each of them, and immediate vaccination of their cadre. It has said that due to many station masters falling sick, the truncated staff have to work overtime, since stations cannot be left without station masters.

Employees' unions of the Railways—the largest commercial utility employer in India—have cited that around 1 lakh employees have been struck by the virus during the pandemic, of which two-third have so far recovered.



Piyush Goyal

"From the beginning of the pandemic and lockdown, we the Station Masters of Indian Railways and other Frontline Staff have been fighting as Corona Warriors and have rendered our services in moving the wheels of the Nation... But, we are sorry to inform that no office has given us any positive response," Sunil Kumar, secretary general of AISMA, wrote in a letter to the Railway Board.

Currently, the focus is on vaccinating the staff, officials said. In several zones and divisions, effort is on to vaccinate staff in batches through coordination with state governments. "It is a top priority for us to get all our staff vaccinated. We are in constant coordination with the state governments," said S C Jain, Divisional Railway Manager, Delhi.

When vaccination opened for frontline workers, railway medical staff as well as RPF personnel got vaccinated. However, other categories like ticket checkers, station masters, drivers and guards were not included in that drive.

A couple of days ago, the All India Railwaymen's Federation, the largest railway union, wrote to Railway Minister Piyush Goyal demanding compensation on a par with frontline workers for railwaymen who lost their lives while working during the crisis. In the letter, they said that these employees deserved Rs 50 lakh compensation, same as that announced for frontline workers and not Rs 25 lakh, which is paid to them.

Delhi to UP, DU to AMU, teaching community battles loss

spokesperson Rahat Abrar said.

At Delhi University (DU), teachers estimate that around 24 members of the teaching staff have lost their lives in this wave. Jamia Millia Islamia has lost four professors, and a total of 15 staff members to Covid, according to its Public Relations Officer.

On Saturday, AMU lost Mohammad Shakeel Ahmed, the dean of its Faculty of Law who had taught there for 12 years and authored two books—one on the uniform civil code and another called *Maintenance of the Muslim Divorcee*.

"He was a passionate and dedicated teacher, and a reputed academician. His vibrant pres-



Mount Carmel School in Dwarka, Delhi, has a Covid centre now, with 100-odd churches pooling in resources. Amit Mehra

ence left an indelible mark," said vice-chancellor Tariq Mansoor.

Some of the other senior professors in the university who lost their battles to Covid in the

last few weeks are Sajid Ali Khan, chairman of the Department of Psychology; Shadab Ahmed Khan, chairman of the Department of Medicine;

and, Khalid Bin Yusuf, former chairman of the Department of Sanskrit. Last week, the community was stunned by the loss of young English teacher Mohammad Yusuf Ansari.

In his thirties, Ansari had a long association with AMU. He had topped his B.A and M.A there, did his Ph.D too, and started teaching in the English department in 2014.

"As a student, he would quickly endear himself to teachers—punctual and polite with extremely neat handwriting. When he started teaching, I was worried that he won't be up for it because he was gentle and quiet. But he was liked by his

students and deeply involved in his work. He was working to get his Ph.D published on the works of Girish Karnad," said Seemin Hasan, his colleague who had been his Ph.D supervisor.

"Given that we have lost several heads of departments, the academic loss for students is great. But even more than that, we are a very closely knit community since it's a residential university and there is a great sense of loss," said Abrar, the spokesperson. In Jamia, the deceased professors include senior academics such as historian Rizwan Qaiser and Shafeeqe Ansari, who was former director of the university's Centre for

Interdisciplinary Research in Basic Sciences. The DU community has also lost those who held senior positions in the central administration such as Sudhir Sharma, who was Joint Registrar, and Vinay Gupta of the Department of Physics and Astrophysics, who was formerly Dean, Examinations.

Some institutes have lost multiple teachers in the last few weeks. Kirori Mal College lost two teachers—Prasad Kumar Singh of the Chemistry department and Arunesh Chaudhury from the Commerce department.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Odisha clears proposal to float vaccine tender

AISHWARYA MOHANTY
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 10

THE ODISHA government on Monday approved a proposal to float a global tender for Covid-19 vaccines in order to expedite the vaccination programme in the state. While the modalities and quantity is yet to be finalised, the Chief Minister's office (CMO) said it was decided that vaccines would be procured in the shortest possible time as cases continue to surge.

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SIMPLY PUT

Behind the clashes at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa

What is the significance of the mosque and its location, and why has it become the site of clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinians over the last one week?

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
MUMBAI, MAY 10

ON MONDAY, Israeli police stormed the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in East Jerusalem, leaving a reported 300 people injured. It came on a day Israel observes as Jerusalem Day, and marked the fourth day of clashes at one of the most revered and the most contested sites of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Week of tensions

On the last Friday of Ramzan last week, more than 150 people were injured when Israeli forces broke up a massive gathering of Palestinian worshippers who had gathered to pray at the mosque, revered as Islam's third holiest site. There were more clashes in the area over the weekend. The stand-off came at the end of a week of tensions over the eviction of Palestinian residents from two neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem, Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, to make way for Jewish settlers.

On Monday, the tensions came to a head again, hours before the annual May 10 Jerusalem Day processions by Jewish groups through the Old City of East Jerusalem to mark the day the territory was captured by Israeli forces during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Israel annexed the territory later and incorporated it into West Jerusalem, captured

earlier, in the 1947 war. For the second time in four days, police fired rubber bullets inside the compound, while Palestinians sheltering inside threw stones and rocks.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry said Monday's incident was the "direct result of incitement by Palestinian terror groups". On Twitter, the ministry posted photos of stone purportedly collected inside the mosque, implying that people inside the compound were planning to attack the May 10 processions. Due to the spike in tensions, the police changed the route of the processions at the last minute.

The mosque & the Mount

The Al-Aqsa is located on a plaza at Temple Mount, which is known in Islam as Haram-e-Sharif. The Mount is also Judaism's holiest site. The most imposing structure on the compound is the Dome of the Rock, with its golden dome. The Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall sacred to Jews, is one side of the retaining wall of the Al-Aqsa compound.

Al-Aqsa is central to the rival claims over Jerusalem. Both Israel and Palestine have declared it their capital. In July 1980, the Israeli Parliament passed the Jerusalem Law declaring it the country's capital. Palestinians declared Jerusalem the capital of the putative state of Palestine by a law passed by the Palestinian Authority in 2000. The 1988



A Palestinian man runs away from tear gas in front of the Dome of the Rock Mosque at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem on Monday. AP

Palestinian Declaration of Independence also declared Jerusalem as the capital. For the present, the Palestinian Authority has its headquarters in Ramallah.

Soon after the 1967 Six-Day War ended, Israel gave back to Jordan the administration

and management of the Al-Aqsa compound. While non-Muslims have not been allowed to worship at Al-Aqsa, Jewish individuals and groups have made repeated attempts to gain entry to the Mount Temple plaza. Since the late 1990s, around the time of the first in-

tifada, such attempts began occurring with a regularity as Jewish settlers began claiming land in East Jerusalem and surrounding areas. It has led to repeated clashes and tensions at Al-Aqsa. Frequently, the Israeli police have backed such attempts.

World concerns

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan called his Israeli counterpart to express "serious concern". The Security Council held a meeting on the situation in Jerusalem, but did not make any statement immediately. UN Secretary General António Guterres expressed "deep concern" over the violence and the possible eviction of Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem. He asked Israeli authorities to exercise "maximum restraint". A spokesperson for Guterres said the status quo at Al-Aqsa should be "upheld and respected".

Last Friday, the US said it was "extremely concerned". A White House spokesman said the US wanted Israeli and Palestinian authorities to "act decisively to de-escalate tensions and bring a halt to the violence". He also said it was "critical" not to aggravate the situation with "evictions in East Jerusalem, settlement activity, home demolitions and acts of terrorism".

The UAE, which recently recognised as Israel a state and sealed a historic peace

agreement to normalise relations with it, has "strongly condemned" the clashes and the planned evictions in Jerusalem over the past week. The statement, issued by Foreign Minister Khalifa al-Marar, asked Israel to protect the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa.

Saudi Arabia, which has given its tacit blessings to the "Abraham Accords" by not opposing Israel's recognition by UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, said it "rejects Israel's plans and measures to evict dozens of Palestinians from their homes in Jerusalem".

On a visit to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday took to Twitter to condemn Israel for "violating all norms of humanity and international law. We must reiterate support for Palestinian ppl. Int community must take immed action to protect Palestinians and their legitimate rights".

Israel response

At a special cabinet meeting to commemorate Jerusalem Day, Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday that Israel would "not allow any extremist element to undermine the quiet Jerusalem", and that "we will uphold law and order...we will continue to safeguard freedom of worship for all faiths but we will not allow violent disturbances".

EXPLAINED THE PANDEMIC

Challenge ahead in vaccinating India

Covid-19 vaccines are being developed at a pace faster than for any other disease, yet there are shortages. India will look forward to procuring more vaccines and a proposed IP waiver from global manufacturers.

EXPERT EXPLAINS

DR VIRANDER SINGH CHAUHAN

From The Indian Express panel of specialists, exclusive insight

COVID-19 vaccines were developed at an astonishing pace. No other disease has seen so many vaccines developed so fast. Out of 250 candidate vaccines that were being developed, at least 10 have already been approved for emergency use in different parts of the world. Most of the first flush of approved vaccines were based on two technologies never used in humans earlier. These include mRNA-based vaccines of Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and the viral vector-based vaccines of AstraZeneca/Oxford University, Sputnik V, and Coronavac of CanSino Biologics from China.

Vaccines based on the time-tested technology of using an inactivated virus include Covaxin of Bharat Biotech-ICMR, Janssen of Johnson and Johnson, and vaccines from Sinovac and Sinopharm from China. All these are safe and efficacious in protecting from severe disease and death but not necessarily from infection. These are given as two jabs, with the exception of Janssen, a single-shot vaccine, possibly a trendsetter for future vaccines.

At least 50 more vaccines are in the pipeline with three or four close to approvals in different parts of the world. Several, including a DNA-based vaccine from Zydus Cadila in India, are in the final stages of development.

So many and yet shortage

With so many vaccines being developed, it may create the impression that it is not very difficult to make efficacious vaccines against a virus like SARS-CoV-2. Far from it! Vaccine development is a highly complex and a specialised enterprise. Under normal circumstances, it takes 10-15 years to develop any vaccine after the scientific rationale has been



Queue at a Covid-19 vaccination centre in New Delhi. Praveen Khanna

worked out. The world over, and now very much in India, the question being raised is that even after so many vaccines having been approved, why is there a huge shortage of supply, and unjustifiable and inequitable access to these vaccines?

First, with about seven billion people to be vaccinated worldwide, with mostly two jabs each, the demand is obviously very high. Second, the rich nations have behaved as they always do. More than 80% of available vaccines have been ordered and/or already stocked by a few countries representing only about 20% of the world population. Even with a WHO-led effort like COVAX, only about 1% of the African population has received vaccines so far.

There are other complexities as well. For example, as of now, only three vaccines — Pfizer, Moderna, and recently Janssen — have been approved by the US FDA. The most affordable AstraZeneca vaccine still awaits approval. With recent reports of Pfizer getting approval for immunising the age group 12-16, and Moderna and Janssen close to completing safety and efficacy trials in this age group, it is clear that western countries, which have already immunised a significant portion of their adult populations, will proceed to vaccinate young children and, per-

haps, even babies. It will therefore become even more difficult to access these vaccines in the free market.

On the other hand, approval for Sputnik V was recently denied in Brazil. Vaccines of China's Sinovac and Sinopharm are not yet approved in western countries. Efficacious and safe vaccines, regardless of their origin, need to be critically but quickly examined and added to the pool.

Shortage in India

India is in the grip of the most ferocious second wave of the pandemic seen anywhere in the world. With more than 4 lakh cases reported per day, there is a serious concern that the virus could mutate into more dangerous variants and if the chain of viral multiplication is not controlled soon, it will become a global problem. New waves of the world over are driven by mutants and although current vaccines seem effective against these, the chances of emergence of immune-escape mutants will only increase if the pandemic is not brought under control.

India, with its inherently fragile healthcare system, has come under immense pressure as never before. There is an acute shortage of medical oxygen, and there is a big gap in the

supply chain of the ambitious programme to vaccinate all its adult population. Although India ranks number three after the US and China in the absolute number of vaccines administered, only about 13% of its population has received a single jab and about 2% fully vaccinated. Many countries have already vaccinated more than half their adult population.

With India being known as the hub of vaccine manufacturing, everybody is asking why it is so, and why is it difficult to ramp up production of the two available vaccines. Vaccines are complex formulations of many components and depend on a seamless supply of raw materials that are mostly imported. From production of the bulk material to filling of the formulation in vials is a highly complex and time-consuming process that cannot be hastened. Ramping up of existing production, even after adequate funds are available, will inevitably take a minimum 2-3 months.

Even if the licence is granted to vaccine manufacturers, actual production will take several months of preparation to kick off. The vaccination drive to cover India's adult population will therefore face a supply chain crunch at least for the next few months, unless a large number of vaccines are imported. This option should be carefully but quickly considered.

With at least three or four more vaccines, including Sputnik V, Janssen, and Novavax, already slated to be produced in India and several more being indigenously developed, India would certainly be producing vaccines to vaccinate major parts of the world, hopefully by the end of 2021. There is a joint proposal of India and South Africa that will be taken up once again at the World Trade Organization, and as per the latest update, the US has already responded positively in support of the proposal when it comes up for consideration sometime soon. Under this proposal, companies already producing COVAX vaccines will be expected to share their IP for at least a given period with enough safeguards of their own interests. That will greatly help in producing high quality and affordable vaccines for the whole world and, hopefully, all this will happen before the virus is able to develop immune escape mutants. The race is on and humanity has no option but to defeat the virus and stay ahead in this race.

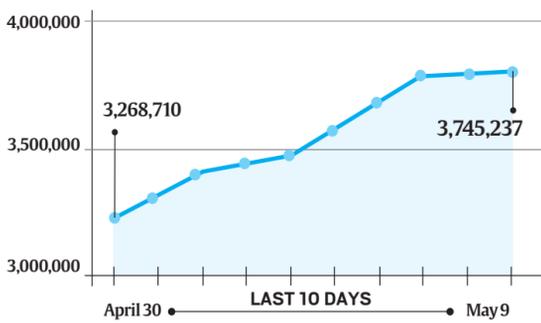
THE EXPERT

DR VIRANDER SINGH CHAUHAN is a former UGC Chairman and a former director of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, where he currently holds the Arturo Falaschi Chair.

CORONAVIRUS DASHBOARD

INDIA ACTIVE CASES

3,745,237



Note: The May 9 figure in this graph is based on the government update on May 10

INDIA TOTAL CASES

22,662,575

Source: Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, updated at 11 pm on May 10

WORLD TOTAL CASES

158,480,718

Source: Johns Hopkins University, updated at 11 pm on May 10

1/3rd of patients hospitalised with severe Covid-19 still show lung effects after a year

A NEW study has shown that most patients discharged from hospital after experiencing severe Covid-19 infection appear to return to full health, although up to a third do still have evidence of effects upon the lungs one year on.

People are most commonly hospitalised for Covid-19 infection when it affects the lungs — termed Covid-19 pneumonia. While significant progress has been made in understanding and treating acute Covid-19 pneumonia, very little is understood about how long it takes for patients to fully recover and whether changes within the lungs persist.

In this new study, published in *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*, researchers from the University of Southampton worked with collaborators in Wuhan, China, to investigate the natural history of recovery from severe Covid-19 pneumonia up to one year after hospitalisation.

Eighty-three patients were recruited after they were discharged from hospital following severe Covid-19 pneumonia and were followed up after three, six, nine and twelve months. At each time point they un-

derwent clinical assessment as well as measures of how well the lungs function, a CT scan of their chest to take a picture of the lungs, and a walking test.

Over 12 months in most patients, there was an improvement in symptoms, exercise capacity, and Covid-related CT changes. By 12 months the

majority of patients appeared to have fully recovered although about 5% of patients still reported breathlessness. A third of patients' measures of lung function were still reduced — in particular how efficiently oxygen is transferred in the lungs into the blood — and this was more frequently found in women than in

men. In around a quarter of patients CT scans showed there were still small areas of change in the lungs, and this was more common in patients with more severe lung changes at time of hospitalisation.

The researchers acknowledged that this study only involved a small number of patients and the findings will require confirmation in additional studies. However they have identified a number of important implications.

Source: University of Southampton



PAPER CLIP

NEW RESEARCH

1 in 7 hospital staff infected after jabs: small study

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

A SMALL-SCALE study in healthcare workers at a private hospital in Delhi found that "breakthrough" infections occurred in 13.3% of them (about 1 in 7), with one requiring hospitalisation. The study was conducted on healthcare workers from Fortis Centre of Excellence for Diabetes, Metabolic Diseases and Endocrinology and has been published in the journal *Diabetes & Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research & Reviews*.

What are breakthrough cases?

People who get infected with Covid-19 even after getting a vaccine shot are known as "breakthrough cases", implying that the infection has broken through the protection

provided by the vaccine. According to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the incidence of such cases in both vaccines in use in India — Covaxin and Covishield — has remained low.

How was the study conducted?

The hospital has 123 employees out of whom 113 had been vaccinated by the time the study took place. The workers included doctors, nutritionists, nurses, paramedical workers, and maintenance staff. The healthcare facility caters to patients of diabetes with or without complications, related metabolic disorders & those requiring non-emergency surgeries.

A detailed database was maintained by the hospital regarding vaccinations and Covid-19 infections of all the employees from January till date. All infections after any dose

of vaccinations were recorded. The study was conducted between January 16 till date. Of the 113 participants, 28 had been administered Covaxin while 85 were inoculated with Covishield.

What were the findings?

Out of the 113 who had been vaccinated, a second dose was administered to 107. Breakthrough symptomatic Covid-19 infections (more than 14 days after the second dose) was seen in 15 persons (13.3% of 113). All were symptomatic with fever and half of them had sore throat and cough. "A few had loose motion and loss of smell and taste. Symptoms lasted from 3-14 days. Except one who required hospitalisation, all 14 persons with breakthrough infections had mild Covid-19 disease," said Dr Anoop Misra, Chairman of the healthcare facility.

What are the implications?

The researchers concluded that high prevalence of "breakthrough" infection is seen in the healthcare facility. Dr Misra said: "Covid-19 infections after complete doses of vaccination will be important morbidity post pandemic, and may become a source of further infections. We need more research and data especially in community dwelling people. 'Breakthrough' infection in India after complete vaccination should be a prime area of research. This is an important area and clearly needs more research. It is reassuring that the majority of breakthrough infections seen in our facility are mild. But a significant area of concern is that asymptomatic infections were missed since RT-PCR test was selectively done in symptomatic patients. These asymptomatic patients are likely to promote viral spread."



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

PLEASE DON'T DENY

Covid surge is going rural. Governments should ensure truth isn't a Covid casualty, howsoever terrible it makes them look

AMONGST THE WORRYING aspects of the pandemic's second wave is the speed at which the virus has spread to large swathes of the country's rural areas. According to a report released last week by the State Bank of India, 48.5 per cent of the caseload burden is borne by the rural districts. The number of deaths has quadrupled compared to the peak of the first wave in September 2020. These disconcerting figures may not convey the scale of the tragedy unfolding in large parts of rural India. Reporting of Covid cases is low, for one, because of a dearth of testing facilities. The mismatch between official deaths and funerals, blurred lines between Covid funerals and Covid protocol funerals, singular lack of testing — all these have helped nervous state governments in dropping the analytical ball. Away from the media spotlight, and with few participants in social media, a crisis more serious than that suggested by official records seems to be playing out.

Last year, it took more than four months for the virus to leave its footprint in the villages. This seems to have fuelled misconceptions about the pandemic being a predominantly urban phenomenon. While several cities took steps, though inadequate, to augment medical facilities, rural centres continue to make do with under-staffed and under-equipped primary health centres. Rural government hospitals in the worst-hit state Maharashtra, for instance, have just two beds per 10,000 people — less than half the number recommended by the WHO. In Muzaffarnagar district, as an ongoing series of reports from UP in this paper revealed, nurses are substituting for doctors and ward attendants are doing the job of nurses. Reports from Odisha also point to a beleaguered health infrastructure overwhelmed by a community spread of the infection, especially in villages that share the border with Chhattisgarh. The country's flagship healthcare insurance programme, Ayushman Bharat, means nothing when there aren't enough beds or oxygen cylinders.

In most parts of the world, official records report only confirmed cases, not actual infections, because several people display mild or no symptoms. But in India, the matter has been compounded by widespread undercounting. Even in pre-Covid times, the disease burden was not accurately counted, and deaths went under-reported in villages because a large number of people died at home without medical attention. But dealing with this notoriously infectious virus requires every detail to be mapped and demands that state governments step up their data collection methods and be scrupulous with facts. Not only will a true picture of the spread help in checking the pathogen's surge, it will also build capacities and strengthen SOPs for the next wave. If every crisis is also an opportunity, this one is for governments to get pandemic surveillance right — the pulse polio success is why there is a formidable network of vaccinators in villages. Maharashtra, to some extent, and Kerala, have recognised the salience of robust data, and other states need to follow suit. Every government should realise and internalise that the only way to flatten and bend the Covid curve is to ensure that truth is never a Covid casualty, howsoever terrible it may make them look.

SARMA'S TASK

New Assam chief minister needs to carry everyone along, as state fights new scourge, while healing old divides

SIX YEARS AFTER he left the Congress, Himanta Biswa Sarma was sworn in as the 15th CM of Assam on Monday. In this short span of time, Sarma made himself indispensable to the BJP's political expansion in the Northeast. He played a key role in the BJP winning Assam in 2016 and piloted the party's success in states including Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura.

For most of his political career, Sarma has been more a behind-the-scenes crisis manager and strategist for the party — first the Congress, and then the BJP — apart from being minister of crucial departments such as health and education in the Tarun Gogoi and Sonowal governments. As CM, he will be expected to lead from the front. His will also be the responsibility of healing a state riven by numerous faultlines — some of which have been deepened by his party's politics. As a border state, Assam bears the scars of an exploitative colonial settlement policy and the Partition. It remains a restive society and is still not at peace with issues of identity and resource distribution. The BJP saw these through a communal prism and amended the citizenship act, reviving old fears and insecurities. The CAA and the National Register of Citizens polarised Assam on ethnic, linguistic and religious lines and Sarma was in the forefront of a campaign that stoked minority insecurities. Though the CAA and NRC took a backseat during the elections, the BJP targeted the AIUDF and its leader Badruddin Ajmal. Sarma, on one occasion, framed the election as a battle between 65 per cent (Hindus) and 35 per cent (Muslims). Before that, as minister, he had denied social and cultural agency to Muslims of Bengali origin by labelling them as outsiders. As CM, Sarma will need to win the trust and confidence of the whole electorate, not just those who had voted for the BJP.

Sarma has promised to turn Assam into an economic powerhouse. This is possible if he can ensure social peace and turn Assam's geography and location — particularly, its border with Bangladesh and the Brahmaputra — into an advantage to further trade, commerce, and tourism. However, the immediate task for Sarma, who has held the health portfolio for many years, would be to lead the administration's charge in the uphill battle against the pandemic.

A BAT OF BAMBOO

Results of a new study point to a possible tweak in the old game. The batsmen are smiling

FOR CENTURIES, THE sound of a leather ball on a wooden bat has been romanticised. If a couple of Cambridge University researchers have their way, it might be time to start fussing about the sound of leather on bamboo. The results from their study on bamboo bats will please the mollycoddled batsmen: Bamboo is 22 per cent stiffer than willow and apparently increases the speed at which the ball leaves the bat. The sweet spot on their prototype performed 19 per cent better than traditional bats and was closer to the toe-end of the bat. In the words of the co-author of the study, Dr Darshil Shah, who was a member of Thailand's under-19 national cricket team, "this is a batsman's dream". The investigations comprised microscopic analysis, video-capture technology, computer modelling, compression, and vibrations testing — and presumably some good-old thacking.

This is also another step towards the de-colonisation of the English game. It can promote sustainability and drastically cut down the cost of producing a bat, further democratising the sport. Bamboo grass is far cheaper than the English willow. There is already a shortage of good-quality English willow, which, like good whiskey, takes up to 15 years to mature. The Moso bamboo matures in five to six years and is abundantly found in India, which is the second-largest cultivator after China, South-East Asia, and South America.

The law specifies "blade shall consist solely of wood". One of the first-ever mentions of a bat was found in an inquest of death in England in 1614. Fearing he might be caught, the batsman whacked the ball again — those days, the batsmen could strike more than once — but ended up hitting fielder Jasper Vinnal, who tragically died. The inquest absolved the batsman of any homicidal intent. Would the result have been less ghastrly if the bat were made of bamboo? That is a question. But certainly, batsmen with a bamboo bat can cause more legal mayhem.



CHANDRAKANT LAHARIYA

IN THE WAKE of the oxygen supply crisis in Covid-19 management in India, the Supreme Court has set up a 12-member National Task Force (NTF) to guide, inter alia, the central government allocation of medical oxygen to the states. The task force will work with senior officials of NITI Aayog, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade as well as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the Indian Council of Medical Research and the Directorate General of Health Services. The Supreme Court has also mandated that the task force may constitute more sub-groups on specialised areas or regions to assist in its work and also to consider, if appropriate, seeking the assistance of experts both within and outside government in areas such as critical care, infectious disease modelling, clinical virology and immunology, and epidemiology/public health. The rationale for setting up the task force has been to facilitate a public health response to the pandemic based upon scientific and specialised domain knowledge.

It is hoped that the establishment of the NTF will help the decision-makers with inputs that can enable them to go beyond ad hoc solutions to the unprecedented challenge. In the 12-point terms of reference (ToR) of the NTF, the first five points focus on oxygen supply, including, deciding on a methodology for the scientific allocation of oxygen to states and facilitating audits (of oxygen supply, distribution and utilisation) by sub-groups within each state and UTs. The task force will also review and suggest measures necessary for ensuring the availability of essential drugs and medicines. The remaining six ToR of the NTF are aimed at the broader pandemic preparedness and response, which include planning and adopting remedial measures to ensure preparedness for present and future emergencies; to facilitate the use of technology; to suggest augmenting the availability of trained doctors, nurses and paramedical staff; to promote evidence-based research and enhance effective response to the pandemic; facili-

A guiding force

Task Force set up by court can shape response to pandemic — and future public health challenge

tate sharing of best practices across the nation to promote knowledge about management of the pandemic and to make recommendations in regard to other issues of pressing national concerns. The tenure of the task force shall be six months initially.

The Supreme Court's order to set up the task force is highly significant, considering that India is struggling to mount an effective response to the second wave of the pandemic. It ensures the participation of independent subject experts in policy decisions, which have often been criticised as being overly led by a techno-bureaucratic process. It is very significant that the Court has considered the supply of medical oxygen in the broader context of the shortage of medicines at health facilities and that the improved supply and provision of essential drugs and medicines has been included as one of the ToRs.

The shortage of medical oxygen in the Covid-19 response reflects insufficient planning, delayed procurement, and weakness of supply chain management — issues which plague medicine supply in the public healthcare sector in India. The only differences are i) that the shortage of medical oxygen is more acute and urgent and ii), while people can buy medicines from the private sector, medical oxygen is short across the board. The root cause of this situation is the insufficient capacity of state health departments in planning, procurement and supply of medicines, an issue which is widely known. This is further aggravated by insufficient government funding. The importance of such a mechanism cannot be underestimated. For instance, Tamil Nadu had set up the medical supply corporation in 1994 and has better supply management than most other Indian states. In recent years, a number of states have set up medical procurement and supply corporations, but their functioning remains suboptimal in the absence of sufficient and trained human resources. As a result, though most Indian states have started free medicine schemes, people continue to spend on medicines from their own pockets. The coexistence of

free medicine schemes and high out-of-pocket expenditure (which accounts for nearly 30-40 per cent of healthcare costs paid by the people from their pocket) on medicines is a comment on the performance of these schemes. The presence of many private chemist shops just outside every government hospital across India, speaks volumes, too. Therefore, looking at the shortage of medical oxygen through a broader lens is a great start.

The work of the NTF will not be without challenges. They have a short time to look at far broader issues. The members of NTF have the needed qualification and expertise to advise on clinical matters and oxygen supply; however, they may need to proactively co-opt members with expertise in medical procurement and supply; pharmacology, free medicines and diagnostics; and public health and emergency health response. Also, considering that the availability of diagnostics has similar challenges as medicines, the NTF may consider including that as well in the scope of its work.

However, the NTF may face a bigger challenge in delivering on its ToRs on the broader pandemic response. All 10 of the 12 independent members of the NTF (the other two are government officials, ex-officio) are leading clinicians, critical care specialists and virologists. They may be the best in their area of work; but a long-term and effective pandemic response needs broader expertise than medical care. The NTF will have the responsibility to ensure that India should not end up with a medicalised response to a public health challenge. The decisions and recommendations of this NTF and how they co-opt members with the right expertise will determine whether India ends up becoming a medicalised care system (which would focus on treating sick) or a healthcare system which can keep people healthy and respond to future epidemics and pandemics.

Lahariya is a public policy and health systems expert. He is the co-author of *Till We Win: India's Fight Against the COVID-19 Pandemic*



SUVENDU ADHIKARI

ON MAY 7, the people of West Bengal marked Tagore Jayanti, an occasion to recall the great thoughts of the man who said, "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high." Unfortunately, in today's West Bengal, the minds of the people are not free and our heads hang in shame at the situation, which is a textbook case of what fascism looks like. A sitting Union minister was attacked by goons associated with the ruling party. This was not an isolated phenomenon. Across the state, violence continues unchecked.

Victory, it is said, brings humility. Shri Ramakrishna taught us all: A tree laden with fruits will bend more. The West Bengal elections have concluded and the results are for everyone to see. The people of the state have given a clear mandate to the TMC to govern and not unleash terror across the state. There is a lot that has to be done on the governance front — Covid has to be brought under control. But TMC cadres, supported by their top leadership, are doing everything possible to destroy the culture of democracy in the state. So busy was the West Bengal Chief Minister in her rallies that she did not find it prudent to attend the recent Covid meetings called by the Prime Minister.

After the results were declared on May 2, TMC cadres got clear instructions to intimidate the political opposition in the state. They went about their work with clinical precision. Dozens of our party workers have been

BETRAYING BENGAL'S MANDATE

Silence is no option. TMC cadres have unleashed terror, BJP will resist

killed, thousands forced to flee their homes. Nobody has been spared — women, children, farmers, poor or the young. TMC has violated every tenet of our Constitution. So ungrateful are the TMC cadres that they have attacked the remaining few offices of the Left and Congress in the state. This, when both parties did everything possible to embolden TMC to defeat BJP, even if it meant their own tally drops to zero.

The people of Nandigram gave TMC and their leaders so much affection. Had it not been for the movement in Nandigram, TMC would never have won in 2011. Today, because Nandigram has seen through the failures of TMC and rejected the party, their cadres are taking revenge on the people here. Elected representatives are being attacked.

Some people who have ideological differences with the BJP were elated over the West Bengal result. But their silence on the TMC-sponsored violence is deafening. Not a word to criticise the aggression of TMC cadres. Not a word on the lives lost. Not a word on the women attacked. They leave no opportunity to talk about their "idea of India" but conveniently shut their eyes and ears while this very idea of a liberal democratic India is being sullied in West Bengal.

Assam is not very far from West Bengal. Did we see such violent triumphalism in Assam after the NDA was re-elected? Did we see such aggression in Puducherry where

the NDA will form a government? The clear answer is no. When the TMC is defeated in an election, they leave no opportunity to blame the EVMs. Did we hear the BJP blame the EVMs in West Bengal? This time, the TMC launched an offensive against the Election Commission and central forces. But, if I remember correctly, the TMC always wanted phased elections so that democratic aspirations can be manifested. TMC always wanted proper security for the voters before they cast their vote. What has changed now? The answer is obvious.

Lord Curzon and H S Suhrawardy would be very proud of the antics of today's TMC. The party is laser-focused on destroying the united fabric of West Bengal. If they are doing so much just after victory, imagine what they can do in the coming days. As for the BJP, our tally has shot up to 77 from three. Certainly, not the result we would have wanted but we are here to stay for the long run and will bring back the glory of West Bengal. Today, silence is not an option. We will continue resisting the money and muscle power of the TMC. If the TMC continues like this, the fate of the Left front awaits it very soon. That is when the dream of a Sonar Bangla will be a reality.

The writer is the newly elected BJP MLA from Nandigram and Leader of Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly



MAY 11, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

MITTERRAND WINS

IN A DRAMATIC upset, the Socialist Party chief, Francois Mitterrand won the French presidential elections defeating the incumbent candidate, Valery Giscard d'Estaing after a close, grueling race. The win appeared all the more sweeter, since it was Mitterrand's third and final bid for presidency. In the last presidential elections, seven years ago, he was beaten by d'Estaing by 425,000 votes. But in the eyes of the 64-year old socialist, the win was inevitable. "Ideas mature as fruits and men," he said. The victory of the first left wing candidate in presidential elections in the Fifth Republic is being considered as much a vic-

tory of style as ideology. Under pressure from d'Estaing that Mitterrand would lean on communists, the president-elect assured voters that he would try for gradual change.

BIHAR SHARIF RIOTS

UNION HOME MINISTER Zail Singh has alleged that the RSS played a role in the Bihar Sharif riots. Some other parties had backed the rioting, he said. He, however, refrained from naming these parties. These parties, he said, were out to malign the government by creating such disturbances. The situation in Bihar Sharif was fast improving after action taken by the government, he said.

VAJPAYEE'S ALLEGATIONS
BJP PRESIDENT, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, said people were again perturbed as they were on the eve of 1977 and 1980 elections. The two elections had proved fatal for the Congress and the Janata Party respectively. The country's mood had changed to one of frustration under economic strain and the ruling party's threat of invoking the National Security Act.

DACOITS STRIKE IN UP
SIX POLICE OFFICERS were killed in an encounter with dacoits in UP's Mainpuri district. The gangs of Chhabi Ram and Anar Singh were involved in the encounter.

THE IDEAS PAGE

The Middle East reset

India and Pakistan long assumed that American role in the Middle East was unchanging. Both must now imagine a region that is not micromanaged by the US



RAJA MANDALA
By C RAJA MOHAN

AS THE LAST American troops begin to leave Afghanistan and the US turns away from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific, there is a scramble to redo the foreign policy maths in the region. Since it replaced Britain as the major external power in Greater Middle East half a century ago, America has been the pivot around which the regional politics has played out.

The old colonial powers of Europe deferred to American leadership in the region. Russia and China, in contrast, sought to chip away at US dominance. Many regional actors sought alliances with America to secure themselves against ambitious or troublesome neighbours. Others sought to balance against America. But as Washington recasts its role in the region, new realignments have become inevitable.

India and Pakistan, like most other regional actors and powers, long assumed that the American role in the greater Middle East was unchanging. Both Delhi and Rawalpindi must now imagine a Middle East that is not micromanaged by the US.

Israel's security, ensuring oil supplies, competing with other powers, making regional peace, promoting democracy, and stamping out terrorism are no longer compelling factors demanding massive American military, political and diplomatic investments in the region. After the costly and prolonged military interventions in the Middle East, Washington has begun to see that it can't fix centuries-old conflicts in the region. Even more important, the US now has other urgent priorities such as the challenge from an assertive China.

As America steps back from the Middle East, most regional actors either need alternate patrons or reduced tensions with their neighbours. Although China and Russia have regional ambitions, neither of them bring the kind of strategic heft America brought to bear on the Middle East all these decades. Learning to live with neighbours has then become an urgent priority.

Turkey has figured that its troubled economy can't sustain the ambitious regional policies of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. After years of challenging Saudi leadership of the Islamic world, Erdogan is offering an olive branch to Riyadh. He is also trying to make nice with Egypt after years of trying to destabilise Cairo by support to the Muslim Brotherhood.

After years of intense mutual hostility, Saudi Arabia and Iran are now exploring means to reduce bilateral tensions and moderate their proxy wars in the region. Saudi Arabia is also trying to heal the rift within the Gulf by ending the earlier effort to isolate Qatar. These changes come in the wake of the big moves last year by some Arab states — the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan — to normalise ties with Israel.

India's emphasis on good relations with all the regional actors without a reference to their conflicts has been vindicated by the turn of events. Barring Turkey, which turned hostile to India under Erdogan, Delhi has managed to expand its ties with most regional actors. Hopefully, the new regional churn will encourage Turkey to take a fresh look at its re-



CR Sasikumar

lations with India.

If Delhi has been pragmatic, Pakistan has struggled to recalibrate its policies towards the Middle East. It is unable to overcome the domestic ideological opposition to establishing diplomatic ties with Israel despite the recognition that a normal relationship with the Jewish state serves Pakistan's interests. Pakistan also fell between the stools in coping with regional rivalries in the Middle East.

When he came to power nearly three years ago, Prime Minister Imran Khan unveiled ostentatious plans to construct a new Islamic bloc with Turkey and Malaysia. His foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi publicly berated the Saudi-led Organisation of Islamic Cooperation for not rallying against India's constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Saudis and Emiratis were quick to remind of Pakistan's deep economic dependence on its Arab Gulf friends by calling in their loans to Islamabad. Abu Dhabi also turned the squeeze on Pakistan's labour exports to the UAE. Since then, the Pak army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa has worked assiduously to mend Pakistan's ties with the Gulf nations.

Bajwa's effort culminated in Imran Khan's visit to Saudi Arabia last week. If religious ideologues in Pakistan had expected a thundering Saudi condemnation of India's Kashmir policy, they would have been deeply disappointed. The Saudi-Pak joint statement simply supported a dialogue between India and Pakistan on all issues, including Kashmir.

Pakistan's about-turn on Saudi Arabia underlines that the Subcontinent does not have the luxury of relying on old ideological tropes like pan-Islamism, pan-Arabism, or anti-Americanism in a region that is undergoing major transformations. Nationalism, economic interest, and regime security have trumped transcendental ideologies.

Whether by design or not, the regional reset in the Middle East has coincided with efforts by Delhi and Rawalpindi to cool their tensions. The ceasefire on the Line of Control in Kashmir announced at the end of February appears to be holding. Pakistan's military establishment is in the middle of a vigorous debate on how to link or delink the question of India's

Delhi and Rawalpindi, for very different reasons, would have liked to see the US forces stay forever in Afghanistan. For Delhi, American military presence would have kept a check on extremist forces and created conducive conditions for an Indian role in Afghanistan. For Rawalpindi, American military presence in Afghanistan keeps the US utterly dependent on Pakistan for geographic access and operational support. And that dependence in turn could be mobilised against India.

2019 constitutional changes in Kashmir from the normalisation of bilateral relations. It is not clear how this debate will conclude and its impact on the India-Pak dialogue.

Meanwhile, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan poses major challenges to the Subcontinent. Delhi and Rawalpindi, for very different reasons, would have liked to see the US forces stay forever in Afghanistan. For Delhi, American military presence would have kept a check on extremist forces and created conducive conditions for an Indian role in Afghanistan. For Rawalpindi, American military presence in Afghanistan keeps the US utterly dependent on Pakistan for geographic access and operational support. And that dependence in turn could be mobilised against India.

But America is leaving Afghanistan. India and Pakistan will have to live with the consequences that include the triumphal return of the Taliban to power in Kabul and a boost to violent religious extremism across the region. The prospect of trans-border links between the Taliban and other extremist forces in the region is a challenge that South Asian states will have to confront sooner than later. Soaring levels of violence in Afghanistan and last week's attack on Mohamed Nasheed, the former president of Maldives, underlines South Asia's enduring challenges with terrorism. Unless the South Asian states collaborate on countering extremism and terrorism, every one of them will be weakened.

Finally, the current turmoil in the Greater Middle East underlines the dangers of the Subcontinent forgetting that *raison d'état* — or nationalist interest of the state — must prevail over all other considerations, including religious ones. In Pakistan, the religious forces empowered over the last many decades have tied Pakistan's foreign policy towards the Middle East, South Asia and Europe into knots. A state that cedes power to extremism of any kind courts the danger of being consumed by it.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The resurgence of militants either in the country or across the border in Afghanistan is a matter of grave concern." — DAWN

Dear members of BJP

We must point to the gross neglect of duty that has worsened our situation. This cannot wait for a post-Covid-19 analysis



TM KRISHNA

I write to you as a citizen of this country. One with socio-political views divergent from yours. You and I may argue irreconcilably, but we should still be able to walk away with mutual respect because humanness must be a common ideal. I am writing to you in this spirit of co-citizenship, believing that all of us love this land: India, that is Bharat.

This country is at a precipice. Thousands are dying every day; there are many beyond our line of vision who are not even counted among the dead. We struggle to keep even the healthy safe. This is unprecedented and we need to plow a way through this darkness. This means that we must recognise our follies and point to the gross neglect of duty that has most definitely worsened our situation. This cannot wait for a post-Covid-19 analysis because a course correction is urgently needed, and now. In battling the pandemic, it was — and is — up to us to act in a manner that is caring and scientific. People's lives are at stake.

Narendra Modi is not just your party leader; he is our prime minister. This constitutional role must matter. You have to see him as the leader of the entire nation, not as a protector of your party's political beliefs. Indulge me, just for a moment. Put aside the fact that Modi is the most powerful leader your party has had in decades, or that he gave your party a complete majority in parliament, not once, but twice.

If Modi belonged to any other political outfit, would you have stood by in silence as he forced thousands of migrant workers to walk and cycle across the country for weeks, without even food, just to get back home? Would you have not accused the prime minister and his government of utter mismanagement and inept planning? Would you have not asked questions of a prime minister under whose watch the vaccination programme has been stuttering, leaving the people at the mercy of a few private companies? Would you not have been aghast that oxygen is unavailable in the capital city? Would you not have been shocked that the Supreme Court has had to direct the central government to supply oxygen?

Would you have not demanded that the government investigate the discrepancy in Covid data that is coming out of some states? Would you have not said that the unscientific nature of governance has led to the ignoring of crucial scientific advice? And in all this mayhem, ministers are busy with perception management and blocking social media commentators. The government, meanwhile, is busy building the Central Vista in the middle of a pandemic.

Forget the controversial manner in

which the state assembly elections were conducted, was it not shocking to hear the prime minister celebrate the huge crowds that gathered to hear him speak even as India's infection numbers were peaking? With him setting such an example, can we blame the citizens of this country for not following Covid protocol?

I cannot believe that you actually buy the argument that the international media is only interested in tarnishing our reputation. The pictures, data, stories are true; those are real bodies burning on pyres. People are struggling to breathe, beseeching help — not of the government, but of other citizens. Aren't you shaken? You and I have lost so many friends in this pandemic, and yet you are unwilling to say that the Union government is responsible for all that is unraveling. Are you more interested in safeguarding your leader's image than saving lives? It is your party that speaks of internal democracy. Why don't we see that in action, especially now?

Of course, state governments are also responsible for dereliction of duty, but the management and responsibility for handling the Covid-19 pandemic lies with the Centre. In March 2020, the Union government called in the Disaster Management Act, 2005. In all the months that followed, the principle of co-operative federalism was nowhere to be seen; the Modi government has only been adversarial. The Centre is far more powerful than any state, and the responsibility for building bridges lies with it. Not once have we heard the prime minister speak in that spirit; he only talks down to his colleagues on the other side of the aisle.

He repeatedly said that he will protect every citizen, that he will take responsibility for all his actions. Having come from a modest background, he claimed to understand hardships of the people who occupy the lowest rungs of India's social ladder. But all we hear is a man who infantilises us. In his Mann Ki Baat, he responds only to pre-cleared questions, and participates only in curated media interviews. Why have you not asked him to hold an open press conference? Every world leader is facing the press, except Modi.

When Covid-19 hit our shores, Modi could have brought all political parties under one roof and shared the burden of decision and action. The pandemic is a once-in-a-century occurrence that no one could have planned for, but we could have fought it together. We, the citizens, have forgotten that we elect members of parliament — not political parties. Modi could have shown the statesmanship that you want us to see in him.

There will be no perfect time to ask difficult questions. Every day that you remain silent, more people die. We now know that, without urgent intervention, without immediate, productive and positive administration action, we will see worse horrors.

If you care for India, you will speak up now.

The writer is a musician and author



JANAKI NAIR

Since 2019, Karnataka has had its own Ajay Bisht aka Yogi Adityanath. His looks, age, educational background — and not least his sartorial style — unsuccessfully conceal the same extreme, intemperate impulses. It was Tejasvi Surya who, even before he turned 28 and was elected to India's Parliament on the BJP ticket in 2019, openly declared his "dread" of women's reservation in Parliament and the legislatures. That tweet has since been deleted, but the people — especially the women — of Karnataka possess longer memories than he credits them with. He successfully evaded a summons to the State Women's Commission on a sexual harassment complaint while on his campaign trail in 2019 — the woman concerned later withdrew the case. But not before he put his legal training to protecting "national interest": He obtained an ex-parte temporary injunction against the publication of "defamatory statements" about him, covering 49 print, television and internet media providers, including YouTube, during the election campaign. Fortunately, the Karnataka High Court thought better of such "prior restraints" and set the injunction aside.

Since his election, Surya has been the battle-axe on behalf of Hindu dharma that he promised to be. He began by asking the National Investigation Agency to set up a full-fledged branch in Bengaluru, which he had determined was the "epicentre of terrorist activities". According to his own account, his request

A saffron battle-axe in Karnataka

An urbane veneer cannot obscure Tejasvi Surya's politics of vitriol

was seriously considered. He often boldly "corrects" history by deciding which "good Muslims" should be taught about in schools — not Tipu Sultan but Shishunala Shariff. Like Ajay Bisht, he compensates for what he lacks by way of knowledge with a high-decibel conviction that his supporters feel no desire to correct or question. He has understood the mesmerising power of repetition, even of untruths.

Surya's public actions during the Covid-19 crisis were singularly unremarkable and unimaginative. If anything, he strictly conformed to what politicians of his ilk have been publicly endorsing, by attending a political rally without his mask, and was lightly rapped on the wrists for that misdemeanour.

But the swashbuckling hero came into his own following the death of 24 Covid patients in Chamarajanagara, Mysore district, on May 2, due to an oxygen shortage. His detective skills and loud assertions rescued the BJP from almost paralysing critique. So, following up reports that had already appeared about beds in Covid hospitals being blocked for those paying bribes, Tejasvi Surya charged into the South Bangalore Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike Covid war room, with battle cries against 16 Muslim men who were employed there. He was aided by three BJP MLAs demanding to know whether this was a madrasa or a Haj committee. Their sensational and dramatic confrontation of the service provider over 16 Muslim employees out of 200-plus telecallers

led to the instant suspension of the young Muslim men.

It is another matter that those eventually arrested in the scam bore no relation to the 16 or their religion. The minor inconvenience of the central government, state government, and the BBMP all being in the hands of the BJP was also sidestepped by briefly dragging in a Congress "hand".

Whether or not he tendered an apology, on which there is now doubt, Tejasvi Surya's "decisionism" mimics his masters' and signals a shift in the career of Karnataka's BJP. The Karnataka BJP, unlike the party at the Centre, has practiced an old-style corruption, allowing money to stick to the hands of its MLAs rather than funnelling it upwards to the party alone. Secondly, many of the party's MLAs such as Basangouda Yatmal and A H Vishwanath, and its ministers — notably K S Eshwarappa and B C Patil — had recently participated in vociferous campaigns for changes to the reservation policy. Thirdly, Yeddyurappa's old style and pronounced "pro-Hindu" stance consisted of courting dominant-caste Lingayat votes, and appealing (Lingayat and other) dominant-caste demands through the symbolics of establishing development corporations.

Tejasvi Surya's "decisionism" challenges CM Yeddyurappa's vacillations and old-style politics. It refocuses the Karnataka BJP on its mainstream national goals. Such "mainstreaming" is subtly happening at other levels that go

almost unopposed. In January 2021, a plaque unveiled to inaugurate the RAF in Bhadravathi used only English and Hindi; apart from the usual outrage among litterateurs and public intellectuals over the complete absence of Kannada, the event has now been forgotten. In February 2021, the cow protection bill was passed by voice vote to become law.

Now Tejasvi Surya has publicly revealed a bias against Muslims. He does this as a practising lawyer, and as a lawmaker, defying Articles 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution that he swore to uphold. But more unfortunate is the "terrorism" tag that has stuck to the 16 men. It serves to normalise an "anti-Muslim" stance. Consider the alacrity with which the service providers and the senior administration acted to suspend the 16 innocent men. But even if they are re-employed, it will be only because they have been "proved innocent".

Surya's "decisionism", apart from revealing his ambitions at the local level, also attempts to seal the wide public cracks in a Karnataka BJP teeming with discontent. His vitriol and misogyny have been made more acceptable in English. Whether he will be allowed to go even further than the UP's man in orange will depend on whether Karnataka's enviable heritage — of developmentalism, secularism and social justice — can be firmly reclaimed. Or we are surely making our way to the UP model.

The writer is former professor of history, JNU

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WOMEN'S VOTE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Her due opportunity' (IE, May 10). The women voters in India are increasingly becoming a consolidated constituency and a reckoning force in different elections. The inspiring women leaders in different walks of life has raised the aspirational level of the common womenfolk. This section of the electorate encourages the politics of progressive ideas and real socio-economic development rather than the politics of hate along caste and communal faultlines. The representation of women in public life has to mirror their actual proportion in the population.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

CREDIT AND BLAME

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Disinformation crisis' (IE, May 10). These are the facts: Crematoriums across the country are over-flowing; there is still an oxygen crisis; requests for hospital beds flood timelines and messages. Here's another set of facts: There is dual, if not triple pricing for vaccines, which are in short supply; the Central Vista project — with all its vanity — is underway; the PM's photo appears on vaccine certificates. This is not a crisis of disinformation but of lives, lakhs of them, being lost. The Centre cannot hope to take credit but none of the blame. Its problem is not propaganda, but inaction and incompetence.

Shantanu Ray, via email

IDEAS ONLINE

ONLY IN THE EXPRESS

● THE SONGS AND STORIES THAT PROVIDE SUCCESS: JYOTI BAWA

● THE RISE OF THE FEMALE VOTING BLOC: SNEHA NARAYANA PILLAI

www.indianexpress.com

WEST RESURGENT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Return of the west' (IE, May 10). With a change in leadership and a robust response to the Covid crisis, the new US president Joe Biden has alluded to regaining and maintaining Western supremacy in the changing global order. China's expansionist approach to destabilise the world order and supersede the West was aided by ex-President Donald Trump's bizarre decision-making over the course of the pandemic. Now, India which missed the bus recently to "seize new strategic opportunities" is facing the heat of pandemic but Delhi will have to come back stronger and set the right tone for the G-7 meet.

Nischai Vats, Sultanpur

12 THE WORLD

TOPOF THE WORLD



Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naem

AFGHANISTAN

Taliban declares 3-day ceasefire

TALIBAN INSURGENTS said Monday they would observe a 3-day ceasefire in Afghanistan for the Eid holiday, starting this week, after weeks of increasing violence that gripped the country. Mohammad Naem, a Taliban spokesman, made the announcement on Twitter. Eid will begin Wednesday or Thursday this week. **REUTERS**

WEST ASIA

Iran confirms talks with Saudi Arabia

IRAN CONFIRMED on Monday that it is in talks with regional arch rival Saudi Arabia, saying it would do what it could to resolve issues between them. The countries have been locked in a rivalry that has played out in proxy conflicts across the region. **REUTERS**

TAIWAN

Taipei seeks invite to WHO meeting

TAIWAN WILL fight to the end for an invitation to a World Health Organisation meeting this month, its foreign ministry said Monday, but China said there was no room for compromise over the island Beijing claims as its own. China considers Taiwan one of its provinces, not a country. **REUTERS**

Oli loses trust vote in Nepal, has room for new coalition

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, MAY 10

THE LONG-RUNNING political crisis in Nepal took a sharp turn Monday when the government headed by Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli lost a vote of confidence in the country's parliament following several months of bickering among factions within the ruling party.

The vote of confidence placed by Oli before the 271-member House of Representatives secured 93 votes in favour and 124 against. At least 28 dissidents from the ruling Nepal Communist Party-Unified Marxist Leninist (NCP-UML), including former prime ministers Jhalanath Khanal and Madhav Kumar Nepal, abstained from voting, and are likely to lose their House seats for defying the party whip. Later, House Speaker Agni Sapkota sent a letter to President Bidhya Devi Bhandari, informing that Oli's government had lost the majority. Oli, meanwhile, presided over a Cabinet meeting and recommended that the House be prorogued with effect from midnight. The recommendation was endorsed by the President even as



K P Oli arriving for the trust vote on Monday. AP

Oli called on her.

Late Monday, the President issued a communique citing article 76(2) of Nepal's Constitution that paves the way for two or more political parties to form a coalition government in the next three days.

The move opens the way for Oli to explore a new political alignment and remain in the fray since he retains considerable support in the ruling party. Sources said the "anti-Oli group" has "informally" proposed the name of former prime minister and leader of the Opposition Nepali Congress, Sher Bahadur Deuba, as their candidate.

For the ruling party, Monday's setback brings to an end 38 months of Oli's turbulent stint at the helm after he assumed power for the second time in 2018. Oli's fortunes have been wan-

ing since December last year when he got the President to unilaterally dissolve the House. The President also announced fresh elections in April and May. However, the dissolved House was reinstated by the Supreme Court early this year. Last week, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) — a key faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" — withdrew support to the government, leaving it without a majority in the House. The party said the Oli government had breached the Constitution and its recent activities posed a threat to the democratic process and national sovereignty.

Oli was also accused by critics of running a "totalitarian" regime.

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com



Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani (right) meets Pakistan Army Chief of Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa, in Kabul on Monday. Reuters

Pakistan Army chief in Kabul, meets Afghan President Ghani

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, MAY 10

PAKISTAN'S ARMY chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa on Monday met the top Afghan leadership in Kabul and reiterated that Pakistan would continue to support the "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" peace process based on mutual consensus of all stakeholders.

Bajwa held talks with President Ashraf Ghani and senior leader Abdullah Abdullah.

According to an official statement, Bajwa said, "A peaceful Afghanistan means a peaceful region in general and a peaceful Pakistan in particular".

Matters of mutual interest, current developments in Afghan peace process, enhanced bilateral security and defence cooperation and need for effective border management between the two countries were discussed. **PTI**

After violence at holy site in Jerusalem, rockets fired at Israel, 9 killed in Gaza

JEFFREY HELLER & NIDAL AL-MUGHRABI
JERUSALEM, GAZA, MAY 10

PALESTINIAN MILITANTS in the Gaza Strip fired rockets toward the Jerusalem area and southern Israel on Monday, carrying out a threat to punish Israel for violent confrontations with Palestinians in Jerusalem.

The Gaza health ministry said nine Palestinians were killed in Israeli airstrikes in the Palestinian territory after the barrages against Israel. The Israeli military issued no immediate comment on any action it had taken in the enclave.

Rocket sirens sounded in Jerusalem, in nearby towns and in communities near the Gaza minutes after an ultimatum from the enclave's ruling Islamist Hamas group demanding Israel stand down forces in the Al Aqsa mosque compound and another flashpoint in the holy city expired.

There were no immediate reports of casualties from the rocket fire in Israel, but local media reported that a house in the Jerusalem hills had been damaged, in the most serious outbreak of hostilities with Hamas in months.

As Israel celebrated "Jerusalem Day" earlier on Monday, marking



Clashes at the Al Aqsa Mosque compound on Monday. AP

Tensions boil over after Al Aqsa clashes

A PLAN to evict Palestinian families from an East Jerusalem area had led to days of protests, raising tensions in the city. These tensions have now boiled over into suspected airstrikes by Israel and rocket strikes by Hamas after the Israeli police clashed with worshippers at the Al Aqsa mosque

EXPLAINED

compound. This compound is situated on a hill that is one of the holiest places in Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Issues regarding access to this site, and Israeli claims to the entire East Jerusalem which contains this site have been some of the major emotive issues in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

its capture of eastern sections of the holy city in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, violence erupted at the Al Aqsa mosque, Islam's third most sacred site.

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said more than 300

Palestinians were injured in clashes with police who fired rubber bullets, stun grenades and teargas in the compound.

The clashes at Al Aqsa had died down by the time Hamas issued the 6 pm ultimatum. **REUTERS**

'Outright lies': China on reports that it had probed weaponising coronaviruses

KJM VARMA
BEIJING, MAY 10

CHINA ON Monday termed as "outright lies" the media reports that its military scientists investigated weaponising coronaviruses five years before the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, and said that it was an attempt by the US to smear the country.

Reports in the media had said the US State Department obtained "bombshell" documents, which were written by Chinese military scientists and senior public health officials in 2015.

Quoting *The Australian*, UK-based *The Sun* newspaper reported that Chinese scientists described SARS coronaviruses — of which the one that causes Covid is an example — as presenting a "new era of genetic weapons".

"I have seen the relevant report... Some in the US have been playing up so-called internal documents to smear China. But eventually, facts proved that they are either making malicious interpretations out of context or spreading outright lies," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told a media briefing

here when asked about the report first released by *The Australian*.

Hua referred to a report published by state-run *Global Times*, which stated that what the US State Department referred to is not an internal document of the PLA but a publicly issued academic book.

The book cited former US Air Force colonel Michael J Ainscough stating that the next generation biological weapons are part of the US programme to deal with weapons of mass destruction, she said. "So this is the US who is undertaking the research in biological war," she said. **PTI**

Myanmar universities suspend 11,000 anti-junta staff

REUTERS
MAY 10

MORE THAN 11,000 academics and other university staff opposed to Myanmar's ruling junta have been suspended after going on strike in protest against military rule, a teachers' group told Reuters.

The suspensions come as the resumption of universities after



Students protest against the junta, in Mandalay, Myanmar, on Monday. Reuters

a year closed due to the coronavirus epidemic prompts a new confrontation between the army and the staff and students who

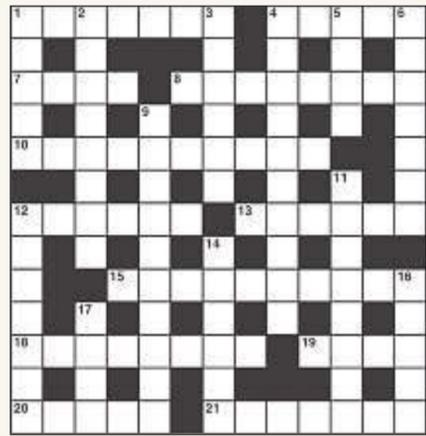
are calling for boycotts over the February 1 coup.

"I feel upset to give up a job that I adored so much, but I feel

proud to stand against injustice," said one 37-year-old university rector, who gave her name only as Thandar for fear of reprisals.

A professor on a fellowship in the United States said she was told she would have to declare opposition to the strikes or lose her job. Her university authorities had told her every scholar would be tracked down and forced to choose, she told Reuters.

CROSSWORD 4426



- ACROSS**
- Challenging in a deft fashion (7)
 - Chance of a rest (5)
 - Dutch half-sovereign (4)
 - Line brought into use when one rings (4,4)
 - Do they stop cars in record time? (4,6)
 - Object I've put into the salad (6)
 - Type of briefs used in the textile industry (6)
 - Final notices (10)
 - Be generous with some incriminating information? (4,4)
 - How a man may be called to give account (4)
 - Presumed a large number read badly (5)
 - Mother loses youth; gets some compensation (7)
- DOWN**
- Outmoded description of St Peter's for example (5)
 - If rebuffed, stay at home (8)
 - Parent gets cut up by surgeon's saw (6)
 - They dance with bears, all in disarray (10)
 - His victims lose heart (4)
 - Magnetic holders? (7)
 - It's beyond the directors to be honest (5,5)
 - I'd bring a form of decorative tape (8)
 - Not free to wed (7)
 - Seaside yarn (6)
 - These are sure to be brisk for beer on board (5)
 - Left in charge (4)

Solutions Crossword 4425: Across: 1 Date of birth, 9 Needles, 10 Quail, 11 Emma, 12 Yodeller, 14 Insure, 16 Stodge, 18 Anisette, 19 Otis, 22 Large, 23 Austere, 24 Spirit level. Down: 2 Abeam, 3 Eels, 4 Fusion, 5 Inquests, 6 Trilled, 7 Undesirable, 8 Emergencies, 13 Free beer, 15 Stirrup, 17 Strait, 20 These, 21 Isle.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

___ is counted sweetest by those who never ___ - Emily Dickinson (7...7)

GEEES

AYSSS

ASCCUU

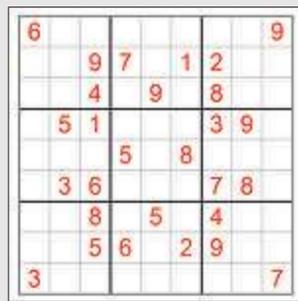
AEECCD

SOLUTION: GEEES, AYSSS, ASCCUU, AEECCD. Answer: Success is counted sweetest by those who never succeed - Emily Dickinson

SUDOKU 4468

Difficulty Level 5s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4467



DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

This is an ideal time to seriously think about implementing a number of long-term reforms. As usual, it's essential for your success that you involve partners in your plans, combining business with pleasure and perhaps organising a family gathering.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

A delicate relationship between Mercury and Venus will help you clear up a complex personal tangle. Friends will be able to appeal to your better nature and you'll be willing to listen to reason. Take extreme care where legal matters are involved and avoid any temptation to bend the rules.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

Important decisions on domestic reorganisation should be settled by now. At least, you should have more idea of where recent developments are taking you. Bear in mind that imagination and intuition will be more use to you than rational argument.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

While Venus and Mars are so active, you'll come out on top every time. Certain professional pressures may have apparently eased up, but if you've been placing too much emphasis on work commitments at the expense of home affairs — or vice versa — correct the imbalance before someone accuses you of letting them down.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

The Moon's subtle association with your sign boosts your closest relationships but does give partners the last word. If you feel restless today then be sure to channel your energy more effectively, and don't let uncertainty at home have a debilitating effect on the more important areas of your life.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

It's a busy moment, and you're bound to feel a little overworked, but then, the more you achieve now, the less you'll have on your plate later in the week. Pay heed to any warning signals that point to an uncontrolled increase in your expenses, probably backed up by little more than the hope that your income will increase accordingly. Don't over-reach yourself.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

The Sun continues its smooth and helpful passage through beneficial regions of your chart, but there's a slight problem on the horizon associated with a nagging doubt or a spot of confusion. Close attention to the facts of the situation will keep you on the straight and narrow.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

It's inevitable that you'll be involved in routine matters, yet don't let this blind you to today's deeper potential. There's great scope for you to put your talents at other people's disposal. Later in the day your mind will start to buzz, and you could come up with a dramatic answer to an old question.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

The time is soon approaching to consider the broader implications of your current personal plans, particularly financial schemes. It will be necessary to collect all the information you need on the legal situation before next month.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

On the whole, you'll do better now and over the next month or two if you see yourself as part of a team rather than a solitary adventurer. There'll be a number of occasions when you'll need moral support but today you could probably do with financial backing; there is now a very high chance of an increase in your income.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

When the Moon assists your sign, as it does today, it heightens your emotional sensitivity, making you feel that the odds are against you. So this might not be the best day to sort out contentious emotional issues — or to get involved in trivial arguments. If you're changing jobs, steer clear of potential muddles.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

In many ways, your intensity and love of the truth as you see it makes you something of a loner. But, at times like these, there's every chance that somebody close to you will fulfil your deep need for genuine partnership. If you feel under pressure today, put off difficult questions for another forty-eight hours.



GOLD ₹47,452 RUPEE ₹73.35 OIL \$66.62 SILVER ₹71,541

Note: Gold, silver rates at Delhi spot market; gold per 10 g, silver per 1 kg; Crude oil (Indian basket) as on May 7, 2021

SENSEX: 49,502.41 ▲ 295.94 (0.60%) NIFTY: 14,942.35 ▲ 119.20 (0.80%) NIKKEI: 29,518.34 ▲ 160.52 HANG SENG: 28,595.66 ▼ 14.99 FTSE: 7,115.39 ▼ 14.32 DAX: 15,371.07 ▼ 28.58

International market data till 1900 IST

DEMAND RECOVERY, SUPPLY-SIDE CONSTRAINTS, LOOSE MONETARY POLICY AIDING RALLY

Commodities in super cycle: Hit highs but cast cloud over recovery, inflation

SUNNY VERMA & SANDEEPSINGH
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

AN ACROSS-THE-BOARD rise in global commodity prices is leading to input cost pressures and is a growing concern, as it is not only expected to have a bearing on cost of infrastructure development in India but also have an impact on the overall inflation, economic recovery and policy making.

In what is being billed as a new commodity super cycle resulting from recovery in global demand (led by recovery in China and the US), supply-side constraints and loose monetary policy of global central banks, most commodities are on an unprecedented bull run that is expected to extend.

Steel, the most commonly used input in construction sector and industries, is at all-time highs, as most metals including base and precious metals prices have gone through the roof over the last one year. Commodities from agriculture — such as sugar, corn, coffee, soybean oil, palm oil — have risen sharply in the US commodities market, the effect of which is being seen in the domestic market, too. Precious metals including gold

ON THE RISE			
Commodity (Unit)	May 1, 2020	May 7, 2021	% Rise
NSE Nifty Metal Index	1700	5500	223
Hot-rolled coil/HRC Steel*	\$478	\$1519	217
Copper (per pound)	\$2.42	\$4.83	99
Brent Crude (Per barrel)	\$24.2	\$68.27	182

Source: COMEX, National Stock Exchange
*Contract of 20 short tonnes

and silver are also on an upward trajectory. Mirinal Singh, CEO & CIO, InCred Asset Management, said the sharp jump in commodity prices is a result of money starting to hide in assets that are store of value as there is an expectation that inflation may rise. So "it is fear of inflation that is leading to jump in prices and it is not demand driven," he said.

Mirroring the surge in prices, the National Stock Exchange's NIFTY Metal Index hit a fresh high of 5,503 on Monday, surging from a low of 1,501 on April 1 last year — a jump of nearly 265 per cent. "I haven't seen such an unprecedented increase in steel prices in just a short span of time, with prices nearly tripling. This has come with volatility and raised construction/production costs significantly. With the economy amid

a slowdown, such a sharp rise is a bit difficult to comprehend," said a mid-sized metals trader. Hot-rolled coil steel futures prices, for instance, have shot up from around \$450-500 in April to over \$1500 now (for a contract of 20 short tonnes).

Prices of copper are also at all-time highs, surpassing the previous peak in February 2011. Copper futures on COMEX have more than doubled from \$2.1 per pound on March 19, 2020 to \$4.87 per pound on May 10, 2021. "Bullish investors bet that demand for copper will increase further as the world economy recovers from Covid slumps and as investments into green energy sectors ramp up," said Sriam lyer, senior research analyst at Reliance Securities.

After bottoming out in April, Brent crude oil prices are also on a

tear, nearing around \$69 to a barrel with any potential rise above \$72 being seen as taking it further up till \$85 a barrel, according to analysts. Compared to other commodities that are hitting fresh highs such as steel, the recovery in crude oil prices though are lackadaisical, with prices barely managing to reach 2019 highs. The domestic prices of petrol and diesel are, however, at record highs as steady increase in Central and state taxes have added to their final price to the consumers.

Economists and experts say the rise in commodity prices have now become a macroeconomic monitoring variable. "The decision makers need to look at the mismatch in supply and demand and they need to find out where to invest, where to incentivise through PJI scheme to prepare ourselves to deal with the situation," said Davinder Sandhu, advisor at Primus Partners and formerly advisor at The World Bank group.

As India has outlined a big infrastructure development plan, Sandhu also feels that the sharp rise in prices of steel and cement is a bit of a worry. "For every percentage point growth in GDP, this would lead to a backward increase in cost on account of in-

crease in price of steel and cement. Also, if we increase the cost of building infra, it will lead to increase in costing of the project and then the toll prices among others," said Sandhu.

CARE Ratings chief economist Madan Sabnavis said commodity prices are going up on account of global cues as recovery in big economies like China and the US are driving the prices of metals, which is also translating into higher agri products prices. "Higher metal prices will lead to higher WPI inflation and so the core inflation may not come down. However, the CPI may not get affected much and hence it won't impact the monetary policy," he said. He added while India is not a huge metal importer, it is a price taker and not a price setter and, in that sense, it will lead to rise in prices and input cost for many companies, ultimately leading to higher WPI inflation.

"Companies will have to decide between passing on the cost to the consumer or absorb the cost. I think most of them would pass it through as they have been facing stress for second year now," he said.

Full report on www.indianexpress.com

Amid Covid effect, bank steps, wilful defaults rise ₹38,976 cr

GEORGE MATHEW & KHUSHBOONARAYAN
MUMBAI, MAY 10

BANKS HAVE added Rs 38,976 crore from 662 borrower accounts as wilful defaulters during the 12 months ended December 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the country's financial system.

With this, total wilful defaults amounted to Rs 2,44,602 crore from 12,917 accounts as of December 2020, as against Rs 2,05,606 crore from 12,255 accounts in December 2019, according to data available from credit information bureau TransUnion CIBIL.

Wilful defaults have now more than doubled from Rs 1,18,130 crore in December 2017.

"Banks are now often using the wilful defaulter status as a weapon to force borrowers to repay loans. Many borrowers pay up fearing the tag, as once they are declared a wilful defaulter, they won't get any more bank funding. Banks used the wilful default tag during the Covid period, so recoveries improved," a banking sector source said. However, recoveries from some of the top wilful defaulters have remained negligible.

In cases such as Winsome Diamonds and Jewellery Pvt Ltd (Rs 8,000 crore), Kingfisher Airlines Ltd (Rs 10,000 crore), Sterling Biotech Group (Rs 15,600 crore), Rei Agro Ltd (Rs 3,871 crore), Pixion Media Pvt Ltd (Rs

'12,917 ACCOUNTS AS OF DEC 2020'

■ With ₹38,976 crore from 662 borrower accounts added in 2020, the total wilful defaults amounted to ₹2,44,602 crore from 12,917 accounts as of December 2020, as against ₹2,05,606 crore from 12,255 accounts in December 2019, as per TransUnion CIBIL

3,000 crore), which were referred to investigative agencies, banks are yet to recover any money.

While the agencies have seized assets of these defaulters under the money laundering law, most of the promoters have challenged the attachment and cases are stuck in various courts. Most promoters, including Jatin Mehta of Winsome Diamonds, Vijay Mallya of Kingfisher, and Nitin Sandesara of Sterling Biotech, have left India and are now locked in legal and extradition battles with the banks and the government.

As per the RBI's classification, a 'wilful default' would be deemed to have occurred if the borrower has defaulted in meeting their repayment obligations to the lender even when they have the capacity to honour the said obligations.

A wilful default happens when a borrower has not utilised the finance from a lender for the specific purpose for which it was availed — and has diverted the funds for other purposes, or siphoned them off, or disposed of or removed the movable fixed assets or immovable property given for the purpose of securing a term loan without the lender's knowledge.

State Bank of India (SBI), India's largest bank, has topped the list of wilful defaulters with 1,792 borrower accounts owing Rs 62,709 crore as of December 2020. Punjab National Bank is in the second position with wilful defaults amounting to Rs 36,684 crore as against Rs 24,062 crore in December 2019. Banks had offered moratoriums and announced loan restructuring in 2020 to various classes of borrowers to mitigate hardships caused by the pandemic.

SBI has declared 1,538 borrowers including companies, with aggregate outstanding of Rs 53,806 crore, as wilful defaulters in respect of loans that were sanctioned before March 31, 2014. Of these 1,538 wilful defaulters, at least 218 have outstanding of more than Rs 50 crore each. The majority of wilful defaulters are in sectors such as iron and steel, textiles, food processing, gems & jewellery, trading, engineering, construction, and infrastructure.

Full report on www.indianexpress.com

INVESTMENT WATCH DOMESTIC INSTITUTIONS

DII holding in listed cos falls but total value rises to all-time high

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MAY 10

THE HOLDING of domestic institutional investors (DII) — domestic mutual funds, insurance companies, banks, financial institutions and pension funds — as a whole declined to a 10-quarter low of 13.03 per cent as of March 2021 from 13.56 per cent as on December 31, 2020.

Net outflows from DIIs was at Rs 23,124 crore during the quarter. In rupee value terms, DII holding rose to an all-time high of Rs 25.75 lakh crore by this March, an increase of 3.27 per cent over the last quarter.

LIC's holding (across 296 companies where its holding is over 1 per cent) slipped to an all-time low of 3.66 per cent as on March 31, 2021, down from 3.70 per cent as of December 2020 and from all-time high of 5 per cent as of June 2012, as per primateinfobase.com of the Prime Database Group.

According to Pranav Haldea, MD, Prime Database, this was on account of profit booking by India's largest institutional investor. In rupee value terms though, it reached an all-time high of Rs 724 lakh crore during the quarter ended March 2021 — a rise of 6.30 per cent over the previous quarter.

The Sensex and Nifty rose by 3.70 and 5.10 per cent, respectively, in this period. LIC also continues to command a lion's share of investments in equities by insurance compa-

EXPLAINED Driven by profit booking

THE SLIP in shareholding of DIIs in listed companies is primarily believed to be on account of profit booking. This is evident from the net DII outflows of Rs 23,124 crore recorded during the quarter ended March. The fall in holdings of insurance companies — which has fallen to a 5-year low — and mutual funds — falling for four straight quarters — has been significant.

nies (76 per cent).

Holding of insurance companies as a whole also fell to a 5-year low of 4.80 per cent by March, from 5.00 per cent last December. In rupee terms, it rose by 3.09 per cent over the previous quarter to a new high of Rs 9.48 lakh crore in March.

Holding of domestic mutual funds in companies listed on the NSE also fell to 7.23 per cent by March, from 7.42 per cent in December 2020.

According to Haldea, holding of mutual funds has now declined for four consecutive quarters, after 24 quarters of continuous rise (from 2.81 per cent as on March 31, 2014 to 7.96 per cent as on March 31, 2020).

BRIEFLY

Fuel prices

New Delhi: With the fifth hike in a week, petrol and diesel prices Monday hit record highs across India with petrol rising by 26 paise a litre and diesel by 33 paise. In Delhi, petrol hit Rs 91.53 a litre and diesel Rs 82.06.

BPCL chairman

New Delhi: The Public Enterprise Selection Board on Monday interviewed prospective candidates and selected Arun Kumar Singh for the position of chairman and managing director of BPCL. PTI

Disclosure requirements under new BRSR issued

New Delhi: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) on Monday came out with disclosure requirements under business responsibility and sustainability reporting, covering environmental, social and governance perspectives, which will be applicable on the top 1,000 listed entities by market capitalisation.

The new report — Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) — will replace the existing Business Responsibility Report (BRR). Under BRSR, listed entities need to disclose about an overview of the entity's material ESG (environmental, social and governance) risks and opportuni-

COVID-19 IMPACT

'Exports, better balance sheets to help cos tide over 2nd wave'

Partial-to-full lockdowns in various states are likely to have a muted impact on overall business environment, given strong export demand and improved balance sheets in the past six months, an India Ratings report said



Risk of stringent lockdown: If there were a stringent lockdown or a protracted normalisation of activities due to the pandemic, the economy in general will have a bumpy road to recovery

'Second wave peak in June may lead to growth falling to 8.2%'

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MAY 10

RATING FIRM Crisil has warned that India's economic growth may slip to 8.2 per cent if the second wave peaks in end of June, but maintained its baseline estimate of 11 per cent uptick in activity.

It said the risks to its 11 per cent growth forecast are "firmly tilted downwards", and presented two likely scenarios. If the second wave peaks in May-end, the GDP expansion will come at 9.8 per cent, and can go down to 8.2 per cent if the peaking happens in June-end, it said. The economy contracted by 7.6 per cent in FY21, because of the national lockdown. There has been a slew of downward revisions in growth estimates after the emer-

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

■ If the second wave peaks in May-end, the GDP expansion will come at 9.8 per cent, and can go down to 8.2 per cent if peaking happens in June-end, Crisil said

gence of the second wave, which has overwhelmed the healthcare apparatus and also led to localised lockdowns across the country.

Crisil said the lockdowns are less restrictive right now, but the expanse of area under such measures is increasing with the ingress of the virus into the rural areas where healthcare infrastructure is weak.

'Budget heading for job spend does not inhibit Centre from using funds'

New Delhi: The Finance Ministry said Monday the provisioning Rs 35,000 crore-expenditure for vaccines in the FY22 Budget under the title 'Transfers to States' does in no way inhibit the Centre from using the funds to buy Covid shots.

The amount of Rs 35,000 crore provided in the Union Budget for FY22 under the Demand for Grants No. 40, titled 'Transfers to States' has been done for several administrative advantages, including expenditure under such heading being exempted from the quarterly control restrictions. ENS

Better balance sheets

Corporate balance sheets have gained resilience, in view of the healthy pre-tax margins and strong cash-flows since the second half of the previous financial year

Export growth

The growth in exports has been reasonably strong in the past 6-8 months and is likely to sustain given the fiscal push across its key exporting destinations

Varying impact

Though supply chain disruptions could play out, overall impact on corporates is expected to be moderate to minimal. However, small businesses and retail borrowers are likely to see stresses

Source: India Ratings/PTI

Users not accepting privacy terms to face limited functionality: WhatsApp

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

WHATSOEVER WILL not delete any account for not accepting its new privacy update, but users not agreeing to the controversial terms after "several weeks" will not be able to access their chat list, and eventually, will not be able to answer incoming phone or video calls over the app.

Last week, the Facebook-owned company had said users not accepting its privacy policy update by its May 15 deadline will not face deletion or lose functionality of their accounts on the said date.

WhatsApp, on its website, said it is continuing to remind those who haven't had the chance to review and accept the terms, and after a period of several weeks, "the reminder (that) people receive will eventually become persistent".

It, however, did not divulge the timelines set for these reminders.

Explaining the course of action after 'persistent' reminders are

Complaints of insurers refusing to offer Covid policies: Irdai steps in

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MAY 10

WITH COMPLAINTS of insurance companies refusing to offer and renew Covid insurance policies on the rise, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) on Monday directed insurers not to deny Covid policy coverage to customers in the wake of rising infection rates.

"It has come to the notice of the Authority that some insurers are not offering Corona Kavach and Corona Rakshak Policies to customers, and some insurers are not renewing such policies," Irdai said. The regulator has been flooded with complaints about insurers refusing to offer or renew Covid policies fearing spurt in claims.

Corona Kavach and Corona Rakshak were launched by insurers under Irdai's guidance

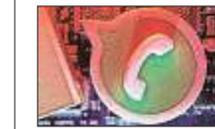
"In the wake of rising infection rates due to the second wave of the Covid-19, the insurable public require appropriate health insurance coverage and it is not correct to deny such coverage to the customers in this crucial time," Irdai said in a letter to insurance companies. All insurers are advised to ensure that wherever Corona specific standard products have been filed and approved by the Authority, the same should be offered to the customers according to the insurer's underwriting poli-

icy, it said.

"Similarly, where the underlying corona specific product enables the insured to renew the policy as specified in the Irdai circular, insurers are advised to renew such policies subject to the underwriting policy of respective insurers," it said. As the pandemic has accentuated the need for health insurance, all insurers are advised to actively promote protection through health insurance so as to develop the much-needed trust and goodwill of the general public, Irdai said.

"Insurers have seen a spurt in claims under the Covid policies. They don't want to take a hit in their books," said an insurance source. Two corona-specific products — Corona Kavach and Corona Rakshak — were launched by insurers under the guidance of Irdai.

WHAT'S AT STAKE



■ WhatsApp said after a few weeks of limited functionality, users, who still won't accept the terms, "won't be able to receive incoming calls or notifications and WhatsApp will stop sending messages and calls to your phone"

eventually become persistent".

Explaining the course of action after 'persistent' reminders are

Outlets closed, auto sales skid

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
CHENNAI, MAY 10

AUTO SALES declined in April and outlook remains bleak with the second wave of the Covid triggering lockdowns across several states leading to closure of majority of dealerships. As a result auto manufacturers like Maruti Suzuki India, Hero MotoCorp and others have not only advanced their annual maintenance shutdowns but also extended them.

The Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (Fada) said the first nine days of May saw extremely lean sales due to lockdown announced by majority of states. It said that even in places where dealerships are open, the walk-ins have dropped to 30 per cent and customers are delaying their purchase decision. According to Fada the second wave of Covid has not only unsettled urban but also the rural markets. FE

Jack Ma makes rare visit to Alibaba headquarters

REUTERS
BEIJING, MAY 10

ALIBABA FOUNDER Jack Ma, largely out of public view amid a regulatory clampdown on the group, made a rare visit to its Hangzhou campus on Monday during the e-commerce giant's annual "Ali Day" staff and family event, company sources said.

The billionaire has kept an extremely low profile since delivering a speech in October in Shanghai criticising China's financial regulators, which set off a chain of events that led to the shelving of what would have been a record \$37 billion initial public offering of Alibaba's affil-



Alibaba founder Jack Ma Reuters file

ate Ant Group.

On Monday, Ma was seen in an open-air campus shuttle bus with a number of Alibaba executives, according to a photograph taken by an employee at the event,

viewed by Reuters. Wearing a blue T-shirt, white trousers and a pair of Chinese-style cloth shoes, Ma was smiling. "It's so exciting to see Jack," said the employee, declining to be named.

"It's a pity there was no chance to take a photo with him."

China's most famous entrepreneur, Ma enjoyed cult-like status among staff even after stepping down as chairman in 2019.

Ma, who is based in Hangzhou, disappeared from public view for three months before surfacing in January, speaking to a group of teachers by video, which sent Alibaba shares surging, but has not made any other public appearances since then, read more

Last month, regulators imposed a sweeping restructuring on Ant Group, while Alibaba was hit with a record antitrust fine of 18.2 billion yuan (\$2.84 billion) after an investigation found it abused its market dominance.

CONCUSSION SPOTTERS AT QATAR WC

Zurich: FIFA is introducing concussion spotters at the 2022 Qatar World Cup to help with the treatment of head injuries and "to make the game a lot safer". Experts will monitor from seats in the stands to identify possible brain injuries that may have been missed and team doctors will also have instant access to video replays. AP

Consider yourself out of England tour if you test positive in Mumbai, BCCI tells players

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, MAY 10

THE BOARD of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has informed its England-bound players that if they test positive after landing in Mumbai before embarking on the tour, they can consider themselves out of the trip. The *Indian Express* understands that Indian team physio Yogesh Parmar has advised the players to try and keep themselves isolated until they reach Mumbai. The players, support staff and their family members going to England will undergo RT-PCR Tests on the first day after checking

in at their hotel. With the contingent coming from all parts of the country, the BCCI wants a secure bio-bubble in place. The Indian team is scheduled to fly out on June 2 to play the World Test Championship final against New Zealand, followed by a five-Test series against England. "The players have been informed to consider their tour over if they are found positive on their arrival in Mumbai as BCCI will not arrange another charter flight for any cricketer," a source in the Indian board informed. Chastened by the suspension of the Indian Premier League (IPL) after several positive tests in various franchises, the board has become more cautious. It has told

the players that RT-PCR tests will be conducted on their family members too before they reach Mumbai. This has been done as a precautionary measure keeping in mind the second wave of the pandemic wreaking havoc in the country. The board has also asked the team members to take the first jab of the Covishield vaccine in India and BCCI will arrange for their second doses in England. As the AstraZeneca vaccine available in England is a version of Covishield, the BCCI can make the second dose available for its players there. "The players, support staff and families will be tested and two negative reports are



Virat Kohli took his first shot of the vaccine on Monday. virat.kohli/Instagram

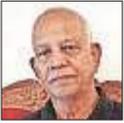
required before they leave for Mumbai. It will be done in order to ensure that they are coming into the bubble without any infection. The players have also been given the option to travel by air or car to reach Mumbai. For vaccination, BCCI has informed the players to take Covishield which they can get in England, and not Covaxin," the BCCI source informed. Players like Virat Kohli, Ishant Sharma, Ajinkya Rahane, Cheteshwar Pujara and Umesh Yadav took their first vaccine doses on Monday while a few players will be taking them in the coming days. The BCCI has asked players to get in touch if they don't have access to the Covishield vaccine, and the Board will

arrange it for them. The BCCI is still to finalise the number of days the Indian players will have to undergo quarantine. The board wants 14 days' quarantine in India and another 10 days in England before they play the World Test Championship final. The players don't want a hard quarantine and want some relaxation while being in isolation in India. The Indian team will play three ODIs and as many T20is against Sri Lanka in July. A second-string Indian team will be travelling to the island nation with the India A support staff as coaches. The Indian team has nearly a one-month gap between the World Test Championship final and the first Test against England.

BRIEFLY

Asian Games football hero Franco no more

New Delhi: Fortunato Franco, one of the pillars of India's last Asian Games gold-winning football team in 1962, died on Monday. He was 84. The AIFF confirmed the news of his death but did not specify the cause of his demise. Franco is survived by his wife, son and daughter. One of India's finest mid-fielders (half-back as per 1960s parlance), Franco was a part of Indian football's golden era between 1960-64. He was a part of the 1960 Rome Olympics squad but didn't get a game but was an integral part of the 1962 Asiad gold winning team in Jakarta. He made 26 appearances for India, including the 1962 Asian Cup, where India finished runners-up, and silver and bronze-winning medal winning sides of 1964 and 1965 Merdeka Cup. But his best performance was in the 1962 Asian Games where Indian witnessed its finest hour beating Korea 2-1 in the final in Jakarta watched by 100,000 people. PTI



Zverev wins second Madrid Open title

Madrid: Alexander Zverev continued his impressive form going into the French Open by winning his second Madrid Open title. After beating top-seeded Rafael Nadal in the quarter-finals and fourth-ranked Dominic Thiem in the semi-finals, Zverev rallied to defeat Matteo Berrettini 6-7 (8), 6-4, 6-3 for his second title this season. The sixth-ranked German also won the Mexican Open in Acapulco in March. Zverev won his first Madrid title in 2018 in a final against Thiem. The win on Sunday gave him his fourth Masters 1000 title, and first in three years. Zverev will be trying to improve from his fourth-round exit last year at the French Open. "To do well at the French Open, you need to be playing well during the clay court season," the 24-year-old Zverev said. "That is in a way important for me, as well. At the end of the day I won a Masters. There's really very little in terms of bigger than this one right here." AP

MIHIR VASAVDA
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

ROB KOEHLER, the director-general of rights group Global Athlete, balked at the 'ridiculousness' of the playbooks for the Tokyo Games. "You go to an Olympic Games," he told the *Toronto Star*, "there's always thousands of condoms in the athletes' village to ensure safe sex. But yet when it comes to a pandemic, they're not willing to provide free medical-grade masks for all competitors. It doesn't make sense." Koehler isn't the only one trying to make sense of how, in less than 75 days, the Games will be conducted in the middle of a pandemic. On Sunday, amidst fake cheers and in front of empty stands, American sprinter Justin Gatlin crossed the 100m finish line in first place during the track and field test event at the Olympic Stadium. After experiencing what the Games would look like in July-August, he said "a lot of athletes are not going to be happy" with the restrictions that have been put in place.

The restrictions, outlined in the playbooks released last month, will be enforced on tens of thousands of athletes, officials, organisers and media to allay the fears of the local population, which wants the Games to be cancelled, according to various Japanese opinion polls. The International Olympic Committee (IOC), nevertheless, is pressing ahead with the Games. According to their plan, tens of thousands of athletes will virtually be airdropped into Tokyo, kept away from the public and airlifted back to their respective countries within 48 hours of their event getting over.

Athletes' safety

Additionally, they have ordered the athletes to restrict their movements only between the village and the venues, undergo Covid-19 tests every day, limit their interactions with teammates, alter meal timings to ensure distancing at the catering hall, and sign waivers. This has raised concerns over the safety of the athletes and the possible impact on their daily routine. Every day, the athletes will have to go to a dedicated testing facility inside the village, where a saliva antigen test will be conducted on each one of them. The timing of the test will be determined by a liaison officer, based on the athlete's event schedule. According to the playbooks, if the result of the antigen test is inconclusive or positive, a PCR test will be conducted from the same sample of saliva.



Officials, wearing face masks, watch a Japanese competitor during the test event for the Tokyo Games on Sunday. AP

In case of a positive test, the athlete will be withdrawn from the event.

'Everything on the line'

However, several questions remain unanswered. If an athlete qualifies for the medal round and tests positive on the morning of his/her event, will all of their opponents from the previous rounds have to isolate as close contacts? What procedure will be followed to replace the Covid-positive athlete in a medal match? What happens if it turns out to be a false positive? Or, what if the athlete misses his/her event while waiting for confirmatory reports? In team sports, if one player tests positive, will everyone have to isolate until reports of others are known? And what happens if they miss the match during the waiting period?

Several athletes have returned false-positive reports in tournaments across sports. However, the flexibility of a standalone tournament gave those organisers a chance to reschedule the matches involving such players. At the Olympics, which have an airtight schedule with no room to push back a match even by a minute, such considerations won't be possible.

Two-time Olympian Nikki Dryden, who is now a human rights lawyer, said everything the athletes have been training for is 'on the line'. "The support of family, community, local business, national sponsors, local and na-

tional governments – everything – comes down to this one moment. If that moment is taken away, it's going to impact not only the livelihood of the athlete... but it's going to impact entire communities," the former Canadian swimmer told *The Ticket* podcast. "Is this process fair? Do athletes trust the fairness and integrity of the system? We need to know who is conducting the tests, and what are their protocols?"

Logistical challenges

The uncertainty goes beyond what will happen on the ground in Tokyo. Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president Narinder Batra said an "additional concern" has come to their notice.

"Right now, a lot of countries have imposed restrictions on travellers from India. If that doesn't change by the time the Olympics come, and they ask our athletes to quarantine for 14 days, then we have to figure out a place to send the athletes 20 or 25 days before, from where they can get direct entry," Batra said. "It's an additional concern that has now come to our notice based on the situation now. Things might change for the better in July, we will wait and watch. But we are keeping in mind all possibilities and preparing for it."

Earlier this month, India's rowing team was allowed into Tokyo for the Asia-Oceania qualifiers without any quarantine. But they got a taste of the tedious process put in place for the

CONCERNS

■ **False positives:** What happens if an athlete tests positive on the day of his/her event, is forced to sit out and it then emerges as a false positive case?

■ **Team sports:** In team sports, it isn't specified whether the whole team will have to isolate until their reports are known, if one player tests positive. It also isn't known what happens if they miss the match during the waiting period

■ **Quarantine:** Will athletes from countries with a high caseload, like India, be forced to quarantine? While that is not the case at the moment in Japan, the Indian Olympic Association is preparing for such an eventuality.

■ **Safety:** Global Athlete, an activist group, has demanded that all athletes be given individual rooms with private bathrooms to avoid being identified as close contacts and catching infection. They've also urged the organisers to provide free medical-grade masks during the Games, as against the current rule that requires athletes to bring their own masks.

Olympics. "We had to get the RT-PCR test results in a specified format, which is different from what we get in India. Each document is verified at the airport and only if everything is fine will you be allowed to board the flight," MV Sriram, secretary-general of the Rowing Federation of India, said.

After they landed, it took them almost five hours to leave the airport, as they waited for Covid test results and while officials checked the mobile phones of each member to ensure the track-and-trace app mandated by the organisers was functional. "If it took so long with a few hundred athletes, I wonder how they will manage during the Olympics when there will be thousands," Sriram said.

Amidst protests that are gathering momentum and strict protocols announced, that's a question on everyone's minds.

Delhi Police issues Look-out-Circular against Sushil

MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

DELHI POLICE has issued a Look-out-Circular (LoC) against the two-time Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar who is absconding after a 23-year-old former junior national champion, Sagar Rana, was beaten to death during a brawl at the Chhatrasal Stadium parking area.

After the incident, an FIR of murder, abduction and criminal conspiracy was registered against Kumar. Additional DCP (North-West district) Dr Guriqbal Singh Sidhu has confirmed that they have issued LoC against Sushil Kumar. "We have recorded statements of all the victims and they all made allegations against Sushil Kumar. We are conducting raids to nab Sushil Kumar," Sidhu said. The victims in their statements have also alleged that Kumar and his associates abducted Sagar from his house in Model Town to teach him a lesson for bad mouthing him in front of other wrestlers, police said.

On Tuesday, Sagar Rana, who had competed in the 97-kg Greco-Roman category, was beaten to death in a clash involving two groups. Rana was a former junior national champion and is part of the senior national camp. "We have found during investigation that a quarrel had allegedly taken place between Sushil Kumar, Ajay, Prince Dalal, Sonu, Sagar, Amit and others in the parking area of the stadium," Sidhu said.

Police recorded the statements of all the victims during which they said that Sagar and some of his friends, including injured Sonu Mahal, who is a close associate of gangster Kala Jathedi, were staying in a house linked to Sushil near the stadium. "They had been asked to vacate recently and were removed from the house forcefully. Sushil later came to know that Sagar had started bad mouthing him in the Chhatrasal Stadium in front of other wrestlers and also threatened him of dire consequences," a senior police officer said.



Double Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar has been named in the murder case of wrestler Sagar Rana. file

Why Istanbul may lose CL final hosting rights

SHAHID JUDGE
MUMBAI, MAY 10

THE VENUE for the UEFA Champions League final might change for the second time in as many years. After the 2020 final between Paris Saint-Germain and eventual winners Bayern Munich originally to be held at the Ataturk Olympic Stadium in Istanbul was moved to the Estadio da Luz in Lisbon due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's Manchester City-Chelsea final on May 29, may again be taken away from the Turkish venue. While a move to England can't be ruled out though the decision is pending, the Turks aren't keen on letting it slip away again.

Why is the change being proposed?

Last Friday, the United Kingdom government placed Turkey on a 'Red List' for travel. So travelling into UK from Turkey will mean 10 days of mandatory quarantine at pre-approved airport hotels – with no exceptions.

So support staff and their 4,000 fans each of both clubs will have to isolate on return to England. This will also hamper England's preparation for the European Championships (the rescheduled Euro 2020). After returning on May 30, their quarantine will end on June 9, and Euros start on June 11.

When was Istanbul given hosting rights?

In May 2018, Ataturk Stadium was

granted hosting rights of the 2020 Champions League final which got shifted due to the pandemic to Lisbon, Portugal.

The 2021 final was to be held at the Krestovsky Stadium in Saint Petersburg, Russia, however UEFA decided to push back the final hosts by a year – Istanbul in 2021 (instead of 2020), Saint Petersburg in 2022.

The Turkish stadium now stands to lose for the second time. Incidentally, the last and only time the venue hosted a final in 2005, an English club came out victors as Liverpool beat AC Milan on penalties – a match dubbed 'The Miracle of Istanbul.'

Is the shift confirmed?

Not yet. The English Football Association (FA) is in talks with UEFA regarding a shift. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has pushed for the change to happen.

"The Champions League is the pinnacle of European club football," he was quoted by *The Sun*. "And with two English teams contesting the final, it would be a great shame if fans were unable to attend. It would be brilliant to host the game here if we can. I want to help supporters of both clubs see their team in action."

UK Transport Secretary Grand Shapps also chimed in: "The UK has a successful track record of hosting matches with spectators so we are well placed to do it," he said according to the BBC. "So we are very open to it, but it is actually in the end a decision for UEFA to make." At the moment, all Premier League matches are being held behind closed doors.

Istanbul recorded 15,191 cases on May

9. The Turkish Football Federation however is firm that it still holds hosting rights.

"UK officials seem to insist but we are moving ahead according to UEFA directions and statements. There were no updates on this from an official channel, we will be hosting the final in Istanbul," a spokesperson said, as reported by ESPN.

Has UEFA said anything about the issue?

Yes, but the body has indicated that Istanbul will host the match as of now. "The Uefa Champions League final will take place in Istanbul on 29 May with a limited number of spectators and we are assured the temporary lockdown which is in force until 17 May (in Turkey) should not have any impact on the match," a UEFA spokesperson said to *The Guardian*.

What does Istanbul stand to lose?

Revenue through tourism, as hoards of travelling fans would book accommodation and dine at local restaurants. Ticket sales bring in some income.

Where can it happen if not in Istanbul? The immediate name that comes to mind is the Wembley Stadium in London. However, the venue will be hosting the English Championship Play-offs that same weekend. In Birmingham however, Aston Villa has shown interest in organising the match at their Villa Park stadium.

There's also a chance the final may move to Lisbon again this year.

Bamboo bats could be cricket's game-changing weapon

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

IN AN iconic photograph shot some years ago, Barry Richards is seen holding a waffer-thin bat he used when knocking 325 runs in a single day of a Sheffield Shield game in 1970 on one hand, and on the other, a bulky willow David Warner had wielded in a Test match.

In many ways, that photograph was a reminder of how bats have become beefier, especially the sweet spot, wresting thus an unfair advantage to batsmen. Now a recent study published in the *Journal of Sports Engineering and Technology* says that replacing willow with bamboo could make the sweet-spot even sweeter.

A research conducted by Darshil Shah and Ben Tinkler-Davies of Cambridge University noted that prototype bats made out of laminated bamboo were 40 per cent heavier and more robust than those made from the traditional willow. It means batsmen will be able to hit the ball much harder because these bats have a bigger sweet spot. "This sweet-spot was about 20 mm wide and 40 mm long, significantly larger than on a typical willow bat, and better still, was positioned closer to the toe (12.5 cm from the toe at its sweetest point)," the researchers said in a statement.

They have also found that the bamboo bat is 22% stiffer than the willow variant, which increases the speed at which the ball leaves the bat. "This is a batsman's dream,"



Researchers say there's a paucity of willow since these trees typically take around 15 years to mature. file

Shah was quoted as saying in *The Times*. "The sweet spot on a bamboo bat makes it much easier to hit a four off a yorker for starters, but it's exciting for all kinds of strokes," he asserted.

Ben Tinkler-Davies said: "Whether you're playing or spectating, you wouldn't notice much of a difference." Going forward, lighter bamboo blades could potentially be in the offering in the years to come, which would only facilitate more sparkling stroke-play.

Despite the inherent advantages it provides to batsmen, what makes bamboo bats such a tantalising option is that it's more sustainable and cheaper when compared with the English willow.

The researchers have claimed that there's a paucity of willow since these trees typically

take around 15 years to mature. In contrast, bamboo, which is grass, takes only seven years to reach maturity, and is found in abundance in China and parts of South-East Asia. "Bamboo is prevalent in countries that are taking up cricket such as China, Japan, South America as well," Shah told *The Guardian*.

MCC unmoved

However, it will not be easy convincing Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), the custodians of the game, about the benefits of the prototype bamboo bat. "The MCC has read with interest the research study from the University of Cambridge, which suggests that cricket bats made from bamboo offer a more suitable alternative to the traditional use of the willow," the MCC said in a statement issued on Monday.

The current Law 5.3.2 stipulates that bats must consist solely of wood, so for bamboo (which is grass) to be considered as a realistic alternative would require a tweak in the law. "MCC's role includes maintaining the balance between bat and ball, and any potential amendments to this law would need to carefully take this into consideration, particularly the concept of the bat producing greater power. The Club has worked hard to ensure that bats aren't too powerful, taking steps in 2008 and 2017 to limit the materials and the size of the bats for this purpose," the statement added.

As things stand, the MCC said this topic will come up for discussion at the next laws sub-committee meeting.