

**WORLD 6**IRAN TESTS ADVANCED  
NUCLEAR CENTRIFUGES**MONEY 7**E-COMM TO ACCELERATE INDIA'S  
AUTO SECTOR GROWTH: REPORT**SPORT 8**SUNRISERS TO FACE  
KKR IN IPL TODAY

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## Violence mars Bengal polls

**4 dead as police open fire on mob attacking booth in Cooch Behar; TMC man kill voter**

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Violence peaked in the fourth round of 8-phase Bengal elections claiming five lives in a blood-splattered polling, but a resolute electorate fought off terror in their own way with more than 76 per cent of them casting their votes when reports last came in at 5.30 pm.

While polling percentage for Hooghly was 76.02, it was 75.03 for Howrah. In South 24 Parganas 75.49 per cent of voters cast their votes whereas in Alipurduar the rate was 73.65 per cent. In Cooch Behar that saw maximum violence the polling rate was 79.73 per cent.

Five people on Saturday lost their lives to Central Forces firing and violence perpetrated by alleged hooligans of the Trinamool Congress, police said. While violence was recorded too in other parts of the 44 seats in five districts that went to polls on Saturday all the incidents of death took place in Sitalkuchi block of Cooch Behar district of North Bengal bordering Bangladesh, Bhutan and Assam.

As the ruling Trinamool Congress struggling hard to retain power in the face of rampant corruption and criminalisation blamed the Central Forces and the BJP for the Saturday's loss of lives, the official reports coming from the Election Commission said the Central Forces opened fire in self-defence.

Four persons Hamidul, Manirul and Samiul (three of



Security personnel keep vigil at a polling station after Election Commission ordered of stopping the voting exercise at polling station number 126 in Sitalkuchi, where clashes erupted between locals and Central Forces, at Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar district on Saturday

PTI

the same family) died when the Central Forces opened fire to disperse a crowd of 300-400 villagers that had attacked booth number 126, following rumours that a child had been beaten to death by the CISF personnel. Five others too were injured in the firing and had been admitted to the local hospital, sources said.

A fifth person, a first-time voter Ananda Barman was shot dead outside a neighbouring booth also at Sitalkuchi by an alleged Trinamool Congress man a panchayat member, sources said.

Incidentally this is the same block where the convoy of Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh was attacked with bombs, brickbats and rods a couple of days ago barely an

hour after a meeting addressed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee where she asked the people, particularly the women to enforce their voting rights by gheraoing the Central Forces.

### Politicians' entry in Cooch Behar banned for 72 hr

**New Delhi:** The Election Commission on Saturday barred the entry of politicians in Cooch Behar district for the next 72 hours to prevent any possible law and order flare-up. The decision came after four people were killed in the district as Central Forces opened fire allegedly when they were attacked by locals who "attempted to snatch their rifles" during voting on Saturday.

## 71 companies of Central paramilitary forces to be deployed in West Bengal

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

After a request from the Election Commission of India (ECI), the Union Home Ministry on Saturday decided to deploy additional 71 companies (7,100 personnel) of the Central paramilitary forces for the conduct of the Assembly polls in West Bengal, with immediate effect. As many as 1,000 companies of the Central paramilitary forces are already deployed there for the conduct of the elections in the State.

"The ECI has requested to deploy additional 71 companies of CAPFs (Central Armed Police Forces)/SAPs (State Armed Police)/IRs (India Reserve) Bns (Battalions) in West Bengal for AE-2021 related duties. In pursuance of the recommendations of the ECI vide order dated April 10, it has been decided to deploy additional 71 coys (companies) of CAPFs.....immediately in the State of West Bengal for Assembly Election-2021 related duties," reads a Union Home Ministry letter faxed on Saturday to the Chief Secretary, Home Secretary and Director General of Police of the State.

The composition of the



TMC candidate Rabintra Nath Ghosh, wearing a helmet for safety, interacts with security personnel during 4th phase of West Bengal polls in Cooch Behar on Saturday

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additional deployments of the Central paramilitary forces will include 12 companies of the Central Reserve Police (CRPF), 33 companies of the Border Security Force (BSF), 13 companies of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), four companies of Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and nine companies of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB).

With the deployment of the 71 companies of CAPFs, a total of 1,071 companies CAPFs, SAPs and IR Battalions will be available in West Bengal for election-related duties.

## Daily Covid cases cross 1.5L mark, and counting

COVID-19 IN MADHYA PRADESH			
Dists	Total	Cases	Fresh Cases
Bhopal	57,334	736	
Indore	77,592	912	
Gwalior	19,330	323	

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

For the first time on Saturday, India recorded more than 1.5 lakh Covid-19 cases as the pandemic marched unchecked across the country. While Maharashtra seemed to stabilise in the range of below 60,000 Covid-19 cases per day, several other States, particularly Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Delhi are recording newer peaks every day.

India on Saturday logged 1,52,383 cases with Maharashtra registering 55,000 plus cases and 309 deaths, Chhattisgarh 14,098 cases and 81 deaths, and Uttar Pradesh 12,748 cases and 46 deaths.

Kerala (6,194 new cases), Karnataka (6,955) Tamil Nadu (5,989) and poll-bound west Bengal reported 4,043 new cases during the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, stopping short of announcing a full-fledged lockdown in worst Covid 19-hit Maharashtra, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said the State Government would have no alternative but to resort to stern restrictions to break the chain of transmission



A medic administers the Covid-19 vaccine dose to a Japanese woman at IMT Industrial Association office, at Manesar in Gurugram district on Saturday

PTI

of the virus in the State.

Speaking at an all-party meeting called to evolve a strategy to tide over the Covid-19 crisis in the State, the CM said, "Our first priority is to save lives. In a health emergency like the one we are passing through, our priorities are the health and lives of the citizens."

"We may continue our war against Covid-19, but the immediate task is to arrest the rapid spread of the pandemic. During last year's lockdown, people were confined to their homes and it was easy for us to trace the patients and their contacts. Now when everything is open and we are facing practical difficulties, a fact that the Union Government should take note

of," he said.

From 9,695 cases a day earlier, India's most populous State Uttar Pradesh on Saturday reported huge jump in infections to touch 12,787 mark, its highest single-day spike of coronavirus infections since the outbreak.

Though the Union Ministry has remained evasive on the query if Mahakumbh can be a "super spreader", health experts have not ruled out further spike in the virus in the State. Meanwhile, with the total number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country crossing 10 crore, the Union Health Ministry on Saturday said India is the fastest nation to administer 100 million doses in 85 days.

## Stick to Covid behaviour or face campaign ban: EC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After polls in four of the five States are over, the Election Commission has woken up to the threat of coronavirus. Taking a serious view of laxity on part of some political leaders in maintaining Covid-19 safety norms, particularly not wearing face masks, saying candidates and star campaigners can be banned from holding campaign rallies if Covid guidelines issued by it last year are breached.

The Commission has advised political leaders to set an example by maintaining social distancing, wearing masks, etc., and exhorting all the local formations who attend their campaign programmes to follow Covid-19 protocol.

In a letter to leaders of all recognised political parties, the EC said, "It is widely known that in recent weeks, Covid cases are being reported in larger numbers. However, instances of election meetings/campaigns have come to the notice of the commission, where norms of social distancing, wearing of masks have been flouted in disregard to the commission's guidelines."

Pointing to the recent rise in



Covid-19 cases, the EC said instances had come to its notice where norms of social distancing, wearing of masks, etc., have been flouted in disregard to the Commission's guidelines dated August 21, 2020, on Covid-19 safe poll campaigning.

"Instances of star campaigners/political leaders/candidates not observing Covid protocols including non-wearing of masks themselves at the stage or while campaigning have come to notice. By doing so, the political parties and candidates are exposing themselves as well as the public attending such election meetings to the grave danger of infection," noted EC.

The poll panel sought the fullest cooperation from the political parties and candidates in strictest observance of the protocols so that all the

Covid guidelines are adhered to by all the participants including organisers in the electioneering.

In cases of breach, the EC said it will "not hesitate in banning public meetings, rallies of defaulting candidates, star campaigners or political leaders without any further reference". The poll panel said it has taken a "serious view of the laxity" in following norms, particularly not wearing masks and not maintaining social distancing by political leaders on the dais or stage.

It asked parties to follow its guidelines with all seriousness. The two-page letter said it is advisable that political leaders and candidates, who have the incumbent duty to control the spread of Covid-19, lead by example.

## CAPSULE

**10 DIE AS TRUCK FALLS INTO GORGE IN ETAWAH**

**Lucknow/Etawah:** Ten people were killed and 40 injured as a truck on which they were travelling fell into a 30-foot-deep gorge in UP's Etawah district on Saturday evening. They all were going to a temple in the district when the accident took place on the Udi-Chakar Nagar road.

**FARMERS BLOCK KMP E-WAY IN HARYANA**

**Chandigarh:** Intensifying their stir against the Centre's three contentious agriculture laws, farmers on Saturday blocked the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal expressway in Haryana.

**100M JABS! INDIA FASTEST VACCINATING COUNTRY**

**New Delhi:** With the total number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country crossing 10 crore, the Union Health Ministry on Saturday said that India is the fastest nation to administer 100 million doses in 85 days. The Prime Minister's Office also tweeted a chart showing India as the fastest country to reach this vaccination milestone.

## Air bubble opens Lanka for tourists

### Now, India has such pacts with 28 nations, says Aviation Ministry

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has formed an air bubble with Sri Lanka, opening yet another overseas tourist destination for those itching to travel after a year of being at home. The Ministry of Civil Aviation on Saturday said India has established a bilateral air bubble arrangement with Sri Lanka for operation of special international passenger flights between the two countries.

Besides, Thailand is also in talks with India for creating an air bubble so that flights can resume between two countries. With this, India now has such pacts with 28 countries,

including Afghanistan, Bahrain, Canada, France, Germany, Iraq, Japan, the Maldives, Nigeria, Qatar, the UAE, the UK and the USA.

Under an air bubble pact between two countries, special international passenger flights can be operated by their airlines into each other's territories under restrictive conditions.

"India has finalised an air bubble agreement with Sri Lanka, making it the 6th such arrangement in SAARC region and the 28th in total," the Civil Aviation Ministry tweeted.

Scheduled international flights have been suspended in India since March 23, 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, special international passenger flights have been operating under the Vande Bharat Mission since May last year and under bilateral air bubble arrangements since July.

## MP Govt extends lockdown in 12 dists

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Pressing the panic button soon after recording 4,986 fresh cases in last 24 hours, the State Government has extended lockdown in 12 districts including Indore on Saturday, in consultation with the district crisis management committees.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and senior officers held video conferencing with the district crisis groups on Saturday. Urban areas of Indore, Ujjain, Shajapur and Rau area will be under lockdown till April 19 by 6am, the Addl Chief Secretary Home Rajesh Rajora said.

Similarly, rural and urban areas of Barwani, Rajgarh and Vidisha will be under absolute prohibitive measures till April 19 morning. Balaghat, Narsinghpur, Seoni and urban areas of Jabalpur will be put



A health worker takes a swab sample from a man for Covid-19 test at a primary health centre, in Bhopal on Saturday

Pioneer photo

under absolute lockdown from April 12 evening to April 22 6am. Several wards in Bhopal are already lockdown till April 19 6am.

Other districts like Ratlam, Chhindwara, Betul, Katni and Khargone are also facing lockdown ranging from seven to nine days.

Indore and Bhopal continue to remain Covid19 hotspots in Madhya Pradesh with Indore reported 912 fresh cases in last 24 hours and five deaths while Bhopal followed closely with 736 cases and Jabalpur remained third most affected district with 369 fresh cases in the same duration.

Indore and Bhopal have recorded test positivity rate of 15% and 16%. With 4986 fresh cases in 24 hours, Madhya Pradesh has attained test positivity rate of 13.2% and registered 24 deaths. The numbers of active cases have surged to over 32,000 in the state and total cases of infections since March last year have gone up to over 3.32 lakh.

However, opposition Congress party and some media reports have put numbers of casualties much above the government figures accusing the administration of under reporting the Covid19 mortalities. State Government issued clarifications on hospitals beds, oxygen supply and Remdesivir injections on Saturday.

Addl Chief Secretary (Health) Md Suleman speaking to the media said that bed occupancy is around 35% in MP with districts like Indore

and Bhopal having 70% occupancy and some districts having around 5%. Whenever bed occupancy surges to 75%, we increase ICU and HDU beds, he added.

We have also issued a Hospital Admission Protocol so that those only in need of hospitalisation are given beds and others could remain in home isolation, said the officer. Private hospitals have provided 13285 beds for Covid19 treatment, said Suleman.

On Oxygen consumption growth, the officer said on March 22, the state consumed only 64 metric tonnes of oxygen while on April 8, it mounted to whopping 234 metric tonnes. Though it was steady at 131 metric tonnes from March 22 to April 5. He said there is no shortage as the state has 277 metric tonnes of supply but he hinted towards hoarding of oxygen.

## India, China agree to defuse LAC stand-off expeditiously

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and China have agreed to expeditiously defuse tension at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) by disengagement of troops from the flash points in Eastern Ladakh. The two sides have also agreed to maintain stability on the ground.

These were the highlights of the meeting of the Corps Commanders at Chushul-Moldo border meeting point on the LAC on Friday. This was the 11th round of talks since the face-offs began in May last year. The meeting lasted for more than 12 hours.

In a statement issued here on Saturday, the Defence Ministry said the two sides had a detailed exchange of views for



the resolution of the remaining issues related to disengagement along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh.

Both sides agreed to resolve outstanding issues in an expeditious manner in accordance with existing agreements and protocols. It was highlighted that completion of disengagement in other areas would pave the way for both sides to consider de-escalation of forces and ensure restoration of peace.

Both sides agreed that it was important to take guidance

from their "leaders", continue their communication and work towards a mutually acceptable resolution of remaining issues at earliest.

The two commanders also agreed to "jointly maintain stability on the ground, avoid any new incidents and jointly maintain peace in the border areas.

The reference to border areas obviously meant Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang valley which still remain friction points.

The first breakthrough came in February when the troops of both the armies pulled back from the southern and northern banks of the Pangong Tso(lake)in Ladakh in a smooth and planned manner.



HOMETHEATRE

BEAR HUG OF FICTIONALISING  
A TRUE STORY

**THE BIG BULL**  
**Disney+Hotstar**  
**\*ing: Abhishek Bachchan, Illeana D'Cruz**  
**Rated: 6/10**

If authenticity was not an issue with this fictionalised account of a real person with a fictional name, *The Big Bull* is quite full of moments in a journey that kept the stocks high, the middle class happy with new earnings and the economy in a constant state of perilous botox.

We all know the Harshad Mehta story, have heard and understood insider trading as a term and concept and are now even somewhat repentant about accusing him of being the sole conspirator of a ₹5,000-crore securities scam, a first in Indian history.

He died in custody and courted controversy both in life and death with allegations of induced heart attack never really settling down. He raised the bar of corruption all the way to the Prime Minister and his office and yet paid the price of oiling the loopholes in the banking system, alone.

The film on his amazing journey comes with both bull and bear runs. Some moments would go right through the roof in tickling your emotional quotient and others would make you question why did such an amazing life story need fictionalisation?

Abhishek Bachchan as Hemant Shah, *aka* Big Bull *aka* Harshad Mehta, is authentic and seasoned with his performance just as he was while portraying Dhirubhai Ambani in *Guru* which was directed to near perfection by Mani Ratnam. Hemant Shah did not look at all like the real Harshad Mehta played by Abhishek, but then authenticity was never the aim of director Kookie Gulati, playing to the gallery was. This one by Gulati is, thus, a green horn in parts and that's where you feel it is as flabby as Abhishek's pillowed paunch which he sports as unapologetically as he does his beliefs and actions.

Gulati can be faulted for raising compassion for his prime character Hemant Shah without lending adequate



evidence of his singular non-guilt. The system, the corruption in high places and the personal betrayal are all placed on the stock market to prop up this man's innocence, or should we say his personal argument.

All other characters are also real people with fake names, including the journalist who unearthed the scam — Sucheta Dalal being called Meera Rao, his lawyer Ram Jethmalani being renamed Ashok Mirchandani and Harshad Mehta himself being called Hemant Shah. The Prime Minister involved in the allegations made by Mehta was P V Narasimha Rao whose visage is shown for a few seconds without any names, perhaps in the spirit of garbing a true story with deliberate ifs and buts.

All said, what's true is that when this biggest bull of the stock market died in jail in 2001, too much time had passed to make it a lead story. But as he had tipped off the nation in the 1980s, India could never fully recover from the bear hug that was given to the stock market in the face of a crescendo that shifted public money investment from real estate and gold to the stock market. His contribution in that can't be denied, as it can't be contested that he made use of loopholes which the system accorded him and never did break any law, except the law of vertical growth.

Where was the comedy?

**HELLO CHARLIE**  
**Amazon Prime Video**  
**\*ing: Jackie Shroff, Rajpal Yadav, Aadar Jain, Shhloka Pandit, Elnaaz Norouzi**  
**Rated: 3/10**

Bollywood should stop making comedies. Given that the makers only know how to either make slapstick or double meaning films that translate into comedy, it is time that they give up making anything under the genre. But if our filmmakers really want to continue to make rib-tickling movies, it is time that they sit down and watch some Hollywood films just to get an idea on what comedy really is.

And it is definitely not stuffing a man into a gorilla suit and putting him in a cage at the back of a truck to only have another real gorilla let loose that was flying all the way from Uganda. Not only this, director Pankaj

Saraswat then loses a set of incompetent people on the 70 mm screen.

You have Adar Jain *aka* Charlie who makes blunders in every job. Who in their senses chases a fire truck and insists that they take the delivery of pizzas? It is not funny. It is downright sad. If this is not enough, you have a billionaire trying to escape the long arm of justice in a motorboat all the way to Dubai.

What was Jackie Shroff thinking when he chose to take up this role? One is sure that he is not that hard up that he would want to end up playing a role where a majority of the time he is in a gorilla suit. His Mona baby is no way as good as Ajit's Mona darling. Adar Jain as the bumbling Charlie is too painful to watch as he destroys everything in his path. But he is the hero, so he has to come out looking like one however incredibly brainless the entire 102 minutes of the movie are.

Stay away from this one. — Shalini Saksena



The genius is on show

**LEONARDO**  
**SonyLiv Drama Series**  
**Episodes 8**  
**Rated: 7/10**

Imagine an artist par excellence who was an expert in Nature, mechanics, anatomy, physics, architecture and weaponry, to name a few, not to mention an even better designer for machines like the bicycle, helicopter, submarine and military tanks much before they were even concepts!

A series on such a clothed genius can be nothing but enervating and *Leonardo* in that context is a thriller, tugger and a puller all rolled into one, well, canvas — a stunning canvas of an artist's life which was full of colours that his brush stroked with eternal brilliance. Illegitimate, unschooled, rebellious and yet one of the foremost Renaissance artists, Leornado's life and times were interesting and so is his story, art and nefarious activities which put him under scrutiny and persecution back in the 15th century.

The series on him, simply called, Leornado captures those times with finesse and keeps up the viewer's longing to continue watching the eight episodes without a break. Sepia shades and smoky environs despicant an underground band of activists and their lives is no mean achievement but Leonardo is simply tasteful and engaging.

The series takes you through the life of an impossible artist by showing you the stories behind his paintings, his continuous search for perfection and his turbulent relationship with his art as much as his life. Aidan Turner as Leonardo Da Vinci is a natural copy of the real man and he lives his moments with authenticity and elan all through the drama that is well put together by director for six episodes Daneil Percival and rest by Alexis Cahill.

The drama, however, is as close to authenticity as it is to replicating Tuscany, Italy, of those syrupy times when existence was being questioned as were norms. In fact, it looks so real that it could be mistaken for a documentary.

TELLY TALE

**MIKA PROPOSES BHOOMI**  
While the competition will heat up during the upcoming episode of Zee TV's *Indian Pro Music League* with all the



teams putting their best foot forward, it seems like Punjab Lions captain Mika Singh will steal the show. Last time around, young comedian Divyansh Trivedi had suggested that Mika Singh get married to Gujarat Rockers' captain Bhoomi Trivedi. While they both had laughed it off, this time around, Mika actually proposed Bhoomi for marriage!

During the shoot of the upcoming episode, the Punjab Lions trio of Mika Singh, Asees Kaur and Rupali Jagga performed on Sajid-Wajid's composition — *Mujhse Shaadi Karoge*. During the act, Mika surprised one and all when he went up to Bhoomi, brought her on stage and continued his performance, while asking her *Mujhse Shaadi Karoge?* After the act, host Karan Wahi also made Bhoomi and Mika dance together and that's when Mika went down on his knees and asked her once again.

After the act, Mika expressed: "Bhoomi, *ab toh bata do, mujhse shaadi karogi? Sab log Bhoomi se juden hai, maine socha main bhi Bhoomi se jud jaun*. What do you guys think about Bhoomi Singh?" Bhoomi replied: "What do you think about Mika Trivedi? But to be honest, I have come here to find a bride for you, it would be injunctive to them." Javed Ali also joked: "This wedding will happen only if Mika leaves Punjab and comes to Gujarat," to which Asees replied: "No, no, *bhabhi* will come to Punjab."

While Mika, Bhoomi and everyone were obviously playing around, viewers will surely like watching the chemistry of these rival captains. You also cannot miss the musical battle between Gujarat Rockers, Bengal Tigers, Delhi Jammers, Mumbai Warriors, UP Dabblings and Punjab Lions

as they go all out to win the fourth super match.

**74TH BAFTA AWARDS ON SONYLIV**  
Lights! Camera! and a lot of Action is about to unfold as we gear up to watch one of the biggest award nights of the year. Celebrating excellence in filmmaking across the globe and bringing an enriching experience for movie lovers, SonyLIV will exclusively stream the British Academy of Film and Television Arts Awards, 2021 (BAFTA). The prestigious awards night will live stream today at 11:30 pm directly from the Royal Albert Hall in London. BAFTA 2021 will be hosted by Edith Bowman and Dermot O'Leary.

The much-coveted ceremony will see seventeen BAFTA winners being announced along with screening of nominated films and behind-the-scenes footage, which will highlight the creative process that went behind curating these masterpieces. Drumming up the buzz further, BAFTA will also honour Ang Lee with the Fellowship this year. The awards night will witness presenters like Asim Chaudhry, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Sophie Cookson, Phoebe Dynevor, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Cynthia Erivo, Hugh Grant, Richard E. Grant, Tom Hiddleston, Felicity Jones, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, James McAvoy, David Oyelowo, Pedro Pascal, Jonathan Pryce, Rose Byrne, Andra Day, Anna Kendrick and Renée Zellweger from London and Los Angeles, respectively.

With praises pouring in from world over for his incredible performance, young Indian talent Adarsh Gourav has been nominated in the Best Actor in a Leading Role category at BAFTA. Gourav will compete against veteran British actor Anthony Hopkins for The Father, French actor Tahar Rahim for The Mauritanian, Riz Ahmed for Sound of Metal, late Chadwick Boseman for Ma Rainey's Black Bottom and Mads Mikkelsen for the Danish language film Another Round.

**MANASI LEARNS A NEW CRAFT**  
*Hindmata* recently released on Eros Now and Actor Manasi Rachhi is glad with the response her character has garnered. The series is set in a fictitious women's prison called Hindmata where Manasi plays the character of Sudha Nath, who is in prison on charges of sedition.

Manasi has portrayed various shades of a woman from being a straightforward girl in *Mujhse Fraandship Karoge*, to a tomboy for student of the year, to a fearless hacker for *24 Season 2* and then a lesbian girl who musters courage to come out of the closet for *Its Not That Simple*



*Season 2*. She performs each character with passion and tries to give it her best. She never shies away from honing her talent and learning new things for the character; be it learning to cycle and swim for SOTY or learning to sew for *Hindmata*.

Ask Manasi and she quips: "Yes, I learnt to use the sewing machine for the series as we had a few scenes where we needed to stitch garments or at least act so. As you can see in the video, I am not a pro but at the same time I like to learn and have fun while doing the same".

She adds: "Also, for the part where I stand for elections in the prison, I did a lot of referencing. A few scenes needed me to be very driven and vocal about certain issues. So, I saw videos of a lot of women politicians in the parliament and even social activists. I studied their body language during rallies and also how these women expressed themselves in public. This helped me etch out my character with a lot more precision."

**CEZANNE KHAN TO PLAY HARMAN**  
COLORS' popular show *Shakti...Astivta Ke Ehsaas Kii* has been enjoying soaring popularity owing to its engaging and interesting storyline. Harman and Saumya's chemistry was something that the audience always enjoyed and rooted for the couple to come together. While they parted ways, destiny has once again brought them together and after Saumya, re-entering the show will be Harman. Essaying the character of Harman will be the popular actor Cezanne Khan.

Harman's entry in Saumya's life will mark the beginning of an extremely passionate love story that the viewers have been yearning for. Talking about playing Harman, Khan said, "Harman's character is extremely interesting. He wears his heart on his sleeves and loves Saumya unconditionally. I am excited to be back on screen and to once again breathe life into it with my style. A lot is set to unfold with Harman's return."

‘The script left me in tears’

SONALI KULKARNI, who is all set to host SET's Crime Patrol Satark: Justice Reloaded, tells MUSBA HASHMI what made her come on board the project and her experience

■ **What does Justice Reloaded have on offer?**

This is a chapter where we are reopening cold cases. It is quite a spine-chilling experience to go through cases that were so challenging and intriguing that they remained unsolved. How the closure finally came about is something that we will be showcasing.

■ **What made you come on board the project?**

I am an ardent fan of Anup Soni. We are friends. I had worked with him when I was yet to become a professional actor. I was in college and we had done *Badalte Rishte*, the only TV show that I have done. I have watched Anup's work since then, and what he does always generates curiosity. So, *Crime Patrol* and Anup have a strong association for me, and the kind of trust and compassion that he has evoked in people's heart, is something special. Taking up this season of *Crime Patrol* is like taking the baton forward from Anup and I hope that I make him proud. The opportunity came through Rakesh Sarang, and I'm so happy that he thought of me as an anchor.

■ **What difference do you aim to make?**

It is too early for me to say that I will bring some change, but for now, I can say, I will bring some change visually as a female anchor. I will take some time to even touch the excellence that the team has achieved with Anup. I don't even dream to beat that, but I would love to take inspiration from Anup's seasons and to, at least, create some awareness amongst people by connecting with them the way he had.



IT IS TOO EARLY FOR ME TO SAY THAT I WILL BRING SOME CHANGE, BUT FOR NOW, I CAN SAY, I WILL BRING SOME CHANGE VISUALLY AS A WOMAN ANCHOR



■ **There have been many crime-based shows on TV, but only a few managed to leave a mark. Crime Patrol is one of them. Why?**

The show always tries to tell people to be responsible citizens, and they always fight against blind faith.

I have been one of the strongest activists of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmulan Samiti. I have worked for around 16 years with Dr Narendra Dabulkar, who has tried to appeal to people that have faith in God and religion, but do not let anyone exploit you emotionally, mentally, economically, physically and sexually. And let no child get abused because we have blind faith. *Crime Patrol* is like a torchlight, which is trying to make us aware and that can be one of the reasons behind its success.

■ **Does it, in any way, bother you to host a crime show?**

I am overwhelmed while shooting crime patrol. The stories are so intense and while reading the script at times I got tears in my eyes. What we see on news channels or social media platforms is just a glimpse, while in the real world there are a lot more crimes happening which we are not even aware of. The stories are so painful that I wish they were fiction and not reality. When I am back home from the shoot it takes time for me to compose. Not to mention that my respect for the police and judiciary is only growing day by day.



# Public support must to tackle Covid spread: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that till Covid is completely under control, the Government and society will have to fight together against it. This infection can be controlled only through public support. Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang was also present on the occasion.

Chouhan said that there will be no shortage of oxygen in the State. Additional arrangements have been made. Sometimes, the trend of stocking increases in the context of reports of shortage. Strict action will be taken against black marketing and stocking. Presently, 180 lakh tonnes is available. Today, we have also discussed with the Chief Minister of Gujarat to arrange additional oxygen for Madhya Pradesh. As much as 90 percent oxygen has been made reserved for hospitals. Only 10 percent oxygen will be given to industries.

Oxygen arrangements will be made on priority for Corona infected patients. Chouhan said that CT scan arrangements are being made in all the districts as early as possible.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was in a discussion with members of the District Crisis Management Groups in a video conference

from Mantralaya on Saturday. Chouhan said that Corona control work is being done in three ways. Practices such as use of face masks, proper distance, frequent hand washing are being encouraged through public awareness. Secondly, every possible arrangement is being made to ensure best treatment and care to patients. At the same time, vaccination work is being paced up in the state.

Oxygen arrangements are being reviewed in the state. A control room under the charge of P. Narhari has also been set up. Every day, the MSME sector of Madhya Pradesh is ensuring the production of oxygen from other state along with the production of oxygen.

Chouhan said that people above 45 years of age should get vaccinated. He said that all citizens should extend support in generating public awareness in the state. The common man is expected to behave in view of Covid.

The public is urged not to leave their houses unnecessarily and cooperate in preventing infection. Chouhan said that I was also sitting on Swasthya Aagraha to prevent infection. Many volunteers are supporting this work. Many warriors are also engaged against all odds in the hospitals. They will be honoured.

Chouhan said that there will be a Tika Utsav (Vaccination fest) in the state from April 11, Jyotiba Phule Jayanti to April 14 Dr. Ambedkar Jayanti. Preparations should be completed for this. People should remain serious regarding Covid. The public representatives should explain the use of the mask to the public. Volunteers working in this area are active. Many voluntary organisations are also working.

Chouhan said that Corona infection is spreading more in rural areas of Betul, Chhindwara, Barwani, Khargone, Alirajpur and Jabua districts. The Kill Corona II campaign will be launched here. Under this, there will be a system of survey and treatment of the affected people at the village level.

The Chief Minister informed that bed capacity is being increased in the state. CCCs are being made more efficient in each district. By the end of this month, even if one lakh come up, arrangements are being made accordingly. About one lakh injections have been arranged and supply also has begun. Additional ventilators are being provided by the Government of India. Arrangements are being made for patients by contracting private hospitals.

## State Capital, other parts of State witness rainfall in past 24 hours



STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Thundery activities and heavy downpour made hot and humid conditions pleasing in the day on Saturday. The State Capital and other parts of the State witnessed rainfall in the past 24 hours.

From the morning, cloudy weather conditions were witnessed in the State Capital and later poured in the afternoon. The temperature was moderate in the evening and due to abrupt change, night temperature dipped further.

The day temperature was recorded at 37.8 degree Celsius and night temperature at 22.8 degree Celsius in the State Capital.

Highest day temperature was recorded at 42 degree Celsius in Khargone. Day temperatures recorded significant dip in Rewa and Jabalpur divisions.

Among the nearby regions Hoshangabad recorded day temperature at 41.1 degree Celsius and Raisen recorded day temperature at 40 degree Celsius.

Met department has issued warning of thundery activities and rainfall, speedy winds in the Hoshangabad, Shahdol and Jabalpur divisions in the next 24 hours.

Two fresh Western Disturbances are likely to occur in the Western Himalayan region. A cyclonic circulation

is above south Madhya Pradesh and adjoining areas.

Due to the above weather conditions, there is a possibility of thunderstorm accompanied by lightning and thunderstorm in some places in east Madhya Pradesh regions which are Sagar, Rewa, Jabalpur, Shahdol divisions districts in the next 4 days. The day is likely to witness an increase of 2-4 degree Celsius is likely to fall in most parts of Madhya Pradesh during the next 4-5 days.

Scattered rain and lightning are expected in parts of south Madhya Pradesh in Bhopal, Hoshangabad and Jabalpur divisions from April 14 to 16.

## Training to be provided to rural youth under Green India Mission

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Through the Green India Mission by the Forest Department, training will be provided to rural youth for skill up-gradation and employment opportunities will be made available to them. It has been decided to organize 14 such training workshops in the state. About 500 rural youths will be imparted training in various fields.

It is noteworthy that to celebrate 75 years of India's

independence at the national level, the 'Amrit Mahotsav of Independence' has started on March 12.

In this episode, the forest department selected under the Green India Mission by the Forest Department will help the rural youth Training workshops are being organised.

The first training under the Green India Mission Scheme has been started at Forest Village Bhatna of Hoshangabad Forest Division.

In this one and a half

month training, young men and women belonging to 35 tribes of village Ranjhi, Bhatna and Lalpani are being trained as assistants, helpers, electricians and motor bindings. Similarly, the second phase of forest division has started in Khamapur Ranje-Chicholi village of West Betul on April 3.

In the two-month training, 30 young men and women of the tribe are being trained in the mode of data entry operator and computer operator.



Roads wear a deserted look in Kolar locality during nine-day complete lockdown due to the rise in the COVID-19 cases, in Bhopal on Saturday. Authorities have imposed weekend lockdown in all cities of the State from 6pm Friday to 6 am till Monday in view of the rising COVID-19 cases

## Govt working with seriousness to face Covid infection: Min

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang said that the Government is working with full eagerness and commitment to face the challenge of Corona infection. Covid Care Centers are being started in every district. ₹104 crore has been allocated to the districts to tackle Corona crisis. With this amount, the district collector will immediately make necessary arrangements to deal with the Corona crisis.

Sarang gave this information while talking to media persons on Saturday. Sarang informed that Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is conducting review every day on the condition of Corona and other arrangements including treatment in the state. He is also constantly interacting with the District Crisis Management Groups also. Action is being taken on the suggestions received from the Crisis Management

Groups. In a meeting with the Cabinet members on Saturday, Chouhan has decided that the decisions should be taken in the district itself as per the situation of the districts.

Sarang informed that the Chief Minister has entrusted the responsibility of arrangements for Corona in the districts to the Ministers. The State Government wants to keep the public updated about all the arrangements with full responsibility. He said that adequate arrangements are also available in the state with adequate beds.

Additional Chief Secretary Health Mohammad Suleman gave a presentation on the status, arrangements and public awareness campaign about Corona to media representatives. Additional Chief Secretary, Home gave information about the lockdown and Corona curfew in the state. Commissioner, Health Sanjay Goyal was also present.

## Webinar on Dance in India held

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A webinar on Dance in India was held on Saturday. It was organised by Sage University of Bhopal city. Rakhi Dubey, Director and Dance Guru of Kalandhika Nritya Natya Sanstha Samiti talked about "Dance in India". In which Sage University Assistant Professor Suraj Sharma was the moderator. In keeping with the idea of Respected Prime Minister's Digital India and due to Corona, this gathering was organised online.

In the Sage Talk, Rakhi Dubey spoke about the dance, what is the contribution of Indian dance and classical dance in India and what are the activities to provide education in it and what is the scope of it in future. He also told that learning and doing dance is very useful for health, which keeps the balance of the body and yoga is hidden in classical dance, there are many such steps, many postures that are done by balancing the fluctuations of blood circulation and breathing.

One good thing is that

## IN BRIEF

### CM PAYS HOMAGE TO DESAI ON DEATH ANNIV

**Bhopal:** Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan, on the death anniversary of late former Prime Minister Morarji Desai, wreathed his portrait in the Chief Minister's residence meeting room. Chief Minister Chouhan, recalled the service to the nation by the late Prime Minister. He said Morarji Desai was the freedom fighter and the fourth Prime Minister of India. Senior leader Muralidhar Rao was also present on the occasion. Rao also paid his tribute to Desai.

### CHOUHAN EXPRESSES GRIEF OVER MIN'S DEATH

**Bhopal:** Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan expressed grief over the sad demise of former Minister Mahesh Joshi. Chouhan has prayed to God to give peace to Joshi's soul and to his grieving family to bear this grief.

### VAN VIHAR NAT'L PARK-ZOO TO REMAIN CLOSED

**Bhopal:** In view of the corona infection and two-day lockdown in Bhopal district, Van Vihar National Park-Zoo will be closed every Saturday-Sunday until further orders. Director of Van Vihar National Park, Ajay Yadav, said that the park will remain closed every Friday as before. Tourist facilities will be available to tourists only from Monday to Thursday. Yadav has urged tourists to apply masks and observe sanitiser and social distancing etc. during the period of commuting in the park during this period.

## Man booked for molesting woman after she tries to save son

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Kamla Nagar police has booked a man for molesting and trying to tear the cloth of a 34-year-old woman when the victim tried to save her son from scuffle in the evening at Mandwa basti on Friday.

According to the police, the victim's son had gone to buy goods and when he was returning, his bag brushed the accused, Anwar, and he started abusing him. Later, his mother and father came to his rescue during which the victim was molested.

The victim's son raised an alarm after which the victim and her husband rushed to his rescue. The accused escaped from the spot. The police have started investigation and registered a case of molestation.

After the complaint was lodged, the accused who works

as labourer escaped from the spot and before leaving threatened her of life and went absconding.

Based on the complaint and after the preliminary investigation, police registered a case of molestation, threatening of life, assaulting the victim.

Meanwhile, Arera Hills police has booked a man for molesting a 42-year-old woman on Friday. Police said that the accused Kumbhakaran came to victim's shop and molested her.

In her complaint, the victim stated that her husband had gone for work and she was alone at her shop.

Based on the complaint, the police registered a case under sections 506 and 354 of the IPC and started search for the accused who went absconding after the complaint was lodged.

## 9-year-old girl dies after scarf noosed around her neck

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A nine-year-old girl died after her scarf noosed around her neck at a shanty near an under construction building under Gandhi Nagar police station area on Friday.

According to the police, Sanjana Vanshkar was found strangulated and was rushed to a nearby hospital where she was declared dead.

Police said that during investigation, it was found that the deceased was swinging at her house using a scarf tied over bamboo and accidentally, the noose was tightened around her neck which caused the death.

After the preliminary examination, the body was sent for the post mortem and a case under Section 174 of the CrPC was registered.

The parents of the

deceased work as labourers and at the time of the incident, they were at work. The father returned in afternoon and found that Sanjana was hanging.

Meanwhile, a 16-year-old girl died after she fell in a well at Bhojpura village under Nazeerabad police station area; deceased went to fetch water in the afternoon and met accident.

Police said that the deceased Rajneja Pardi drowned in a well, family and locals rushed to her rescue and took her to hospital where she was declared dead.

The police have registered a case under section 174 of the CrPC and started further investigation. The water level of well was high and water motor was used to decrease the water level which took around half an hour and later she was rescued.

## Renowned writer, poet Saumya Baijal shares her life stories with audience

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A renowned writer, poet Saumya Baijal shared her life stories with audience on Saturday. The talk marked the 173rd episode on Baaton Baaton Mein.

A talk series 'Baaton Baaton Mein' is being held every day on Instagram. Hosted by renowned art critic Sunil Mishra, the series is being held for the art lovers.

Saumya Baijal, is a writer in both English and Hindi. Her stories, poems and articles have been published on Jankipul.com, India Cultural Forum, The Silhouette Magazine, Feminism in India, Drunk Monkeys, Writer's Asylum, Women's Web among several others. She is also a recipient of the Orange Flower Awards, for hindi writing.

Her writings reflect her

personal and political thought processes, and question existing ideas of set definitions. She trains in Kathak, co-runs her street theatre group, Aatish, and is an Advertising Professional with over 10 years of experience working across the largest worldwide advertising networks.

An avid film lover, she writes on cinema. She has been a guest lecturer at Lady Irwin College and has been invited by Jamia Millia Islamia and Central Institute of Education for talks and lectures around Gender, cinema and popular culture. She enjoys reading, lecturing, decoding fashion and developing her personal style and signature on everything she attempts. A film snob, you can find her in closeted in her home, watching Guru Dutt's films, again and again and again, and, again.

## 3 booked for cheating

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The Kolar police has booked three fraudsters involved in duping a Punjab-based MBBS student to the tune of ₹22.46 lakh in the name of facilitating admission for PG in Advance Medical College.

Police said that the accused Rohit Bhadoria, Vishwajeet and Raj Ranjan who have duped Shubham Sehgal in the name of facilitating admission for PG in Advance Medical College.

The victim was duped after he received information from the college employees who are accused and as he got call from staff he was assured that they could facilitate seat in PG at the Medical College. In his complaint victim stated that he completed MBBS from Punjab and wanted to pursue Post Graduation. He received a call from Advance Medical College later he came to Bhopal and met the three at the college who were staff members of the college.

Online Tender Document “Equipment” for M.P. Police

POLICE HEADQUARTER, M.P., BHOPAL

No. PHQ/15/GPC/900-9/2021

Bhopal, Dated 07/04/2021

“e-TENDER NOTICE”

Online tender are invited by Assistant Inspector General of Police (Provisioning) Police Head Quarter, Bhopal on behalf of DGP MP Bhopal for the following on website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>

S.No.	Name of Item (s)	Qty.	Tender Fees (Rs.)	EMD Paid Online Through <a href="https://mptenders.gov.in">mptenders.gov.in</a>
1	MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER (A4)	748	12,500	4,00,000

1. Cost of tender document (Tender Fee) is non refundable and cannot be exempted in any condition & must submit online through website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>.

2. Tender document can be download from the website of MP Police ([www.mppolice.gov.in](http://www.mppolice.gov.in))

3. Bids shall be submitted online only at MP Tenders website: <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>

4. Critical Date Sheet :

Published Date	08/04/2021 Time 16:00 PM
Bid Document Download Start Date	09/04/2021 Time 11:00 AM
Pre bid Meeting	15/04/2021 Time 12:45 PM
Bid Submission Start Date	20/04/2021 Time 11:00 AM
Bid Submission End Date	27/04/2021 Time 15:00 PM
Bid Opening Date	28/04/2021 Time 17:30 PM

D.S.P. (Provisioning)

For: Director General of Police M.P.

G-11423/21

दो गज की दूरी, मास्क है जरूरी।

# PROCUREMENT KICKS OFF IN PUNJAB

PUNJAB GOVT  
AMENDS SOFTWARE  
TO ENSURE  
CONTINUED  
ARHTIYA  
INVOLVEMENT

**PNS ■ CHANDIGARH**

Wheat procurement kicked off in Punjab on Saturday with the Arhtiyas calling off their proposed strike after Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh ordered various steps to ensure their continued involvement in the process and immediate release of their pending payments of Rs. 131 crores without waiting for dues to come from FCI.

On the Chief Minister's directives, the State Food Department has amended the procurement software so that the Arhtiyas will continue to be involved in the process of release of payments to the farmers, albeit in a modified manner, while farmers get their payments in their bank accounts within 48 hours, as mandated by the state government.

Declaring his commitment to safeguarding the interests of Punjab's Arhtiyas, the chief minister said that despite the Government of India's directives to exclude them from MSP payments, "the Arhtiyas shall always be associated with procurement".

"Till I am there, you will be part of the system, and your role will always remain," he asserted, adding that he will ensure that the Arhtiya Commission and other charges permitted under the APMC Act shall continue.

Commenting on the Government of India's refusal to accept the state's request for deferment of the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system, the Chief Minister said, "We fought hard with the Centre on the issue, but they were adamant, and even went to the extent of threatening not to procure from Punjab if we do not implement the DBT."

The Chief Minister also ordered the Finance Department to immediately release Rs. 131 crore due to the Arhtiyas without waiting for it from the Food Corporation of India (FCI), which had with-



held payments after some Arhtiyas had failed to upload details. These Arhtiyas were probably misguided at that time by people who wanted to play politics, he said, adding that even though the money was yet to come from FCI, his government would release it immediately, without waiting for the same. He also assured the Arhtiyas that his government will take up with the Centre the issue of 30% deduction in labour payments made by the FCI.

Capt Amarinder thanked Vijay Kalra, the president of the Federation of Arhtiya Association of Punjab, for

heeding his government's plea to withdraw their proposed strike and lift the grain as the farmers would otherwise have suffered.

He appealed to the Arhtiyas to immediately start procurement and also take care of Covid norms. The government had to delay procurement this year till April 10 (from the previously scheduled April 1) on account of the second surge of Covid.

The Chief Minister said like last year, farmers will again be issued passes this year to reduce congestion at the Mandis in view of the pandemic situation.

He assured that farmer passes would be issued at the District Level, strictly in consultation with the Arhtiyas who are in the best position to know which farmer has harvested his crop and is ready to come to the Mandi.

Sharing the Arhtiyas' pain, which he said he could feel from the bottom of his heart, the Chief Minister said he failed to understand why the central government was treating them and the farmers in such a shoddy manner. He recalled that the system of Arhtiyas prevailed even when he was a kid, and visited mandis with his grandfather, and said it was inexplicable why the Government of India wanted to ruin it.

The Arhtiyas are not middlemen but service providers, he said, adding that the private sector can function along with the existing system and there was no need to change it.

Pointing to the 72% increase in farmers' earning, he attributed it to the combined efforts of the farmers and the Arhtiyas. "Your contribution to the Green Revolution and filling of India's granaries is unfor-

gettable," he told them, adding that he does not agree with anything that the Centre is doing on Agriculture. He assured that all their concerns would be addressed, and all the commitments made to them will be fulfilled.

Announcing the withdrawal of the strike in the interest of the state and the farmers, Kalra thanked Capt Amarinder and his government for their support in their fight with the Centre.

The Centre, he said, was penalising Punjab for the farmers' agitation. Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Minister Bharat Bhushan Ashu told the Chief Minister the Arhtiyas simply wanted protection for their business and livelihood.

Earlier, a few hours after going on a state-wide strike against the Punjab government's decision to follow Centre's direction to transfer the farmers' crop MSP directly to their bank accounts, arhtiyas withdrew their strike after Capt Amarinder's assurance that they would remain an integral part of the procurement system.

## Covid crisis in State is unprecedented: Chouhan

**STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL**

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the Covid crisis in the State is unprecedented. Conditions are more serious than last year. The state government is constantly active towards arranging for treatment, spreading public awareness, but the real fight against Corona is being fought only by nurses, paramedical staff, anganwadi workers, ASHA workers.

Chouhan was addressing the health sector personnel of all the districts of the state like nurses, paramedical staff, compounders, ward boys, pathology, radiology experts, ASHA workers and Anganwadi workers from the Mantralaya. Chouhan said that health workers are doing great work to save the lives of others by putting their lives at risk.

Chouhan said that the month of April is critical from the point of view of Corona. Therefore, maximum patience, restraint and self-confidence are needed at this time. It is our priority to break the infection chain and prevent new infections from happening. The state government is leaving no stone unturned to raise resources and provide treatment on its behalf. Health workers are working simultaneously on both fronts- first testing, treatment of Corona patients in the hospitals and second vaccinating those

above 45 years of age. In the Corona disaster, victory will be achieved with patience, restraint and mutual support.

The number of hospitals and beds is being increased but it also has its own limits. Our effort should be that the infection is diagnosed early so that the patient's condition is not serious and they do not have to go to the hospital. If the people's condition improves in home isolation, then the burden on hospitals will automatically reduce. This is a time of disaster, so whether it is the government sector or the private sector, everyone will have to work together. Only the strength of both the public sector and the private sector can overcome this disease.

The Chief Minister said that the patient depends on medical advice, treatment and medicines. If he has come to the hospital, then surely it must be due to some serious matter. Therefore, it should be our endeavour to treat the patient with caring behaviour, he should get medicines and treatment at the right time not he may not have to wander from one hospital to the other. Patients may not have to wait for treatment for hours, treatment should be done according to the severity of the disease, only necessary medicines should be prescribed and unnecessary investigations should not be done.

## Haryana reports 2,937 fresh Covid-19 cases, second highest single- day rise in 4 months, 11 more deaths

**PNS ■ CHANDIGARH**

The Covid-19 tally in Haryana surged to 313,441 on Saturday with 2937 fresh cases, the second biggest single-day jump in over four months while the death toll climbed to 3252 as 11 more people succumbed to the disease, a health department bulletin said. State had reported 2994 Covid-19 cases, the highest single- day jump since January, this year, a day before.

Two deaths each were reported from Ambala, Panchkula, Yamunanagar districts and one each from Jind, Fatehabad, Bhiwani, Kurukshetra and Karnal districts, it said. Among the districts that reported a big spike in cases are Gurugram (864),

Karnal (271), Panchkula (217), Sonapat (203), Faridabad (200), Kurukshetra (181), Yamunanagar (168) Hisar (124), Ambala (123), Rohtak (121) and Panipat (104) districts. The number of active cases in Haryana stands at 19,453. The state has a recovery rate of 92.76 per cent, the bulletin stated.

**HARYANA TO REGULATE AND RESTRICT ACTIVITIES, SOPs ISSUED**

Due to the prevailing conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Haryana Government has decided to regulate and restrict various activities and has issued guidelines (SOPs) to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

Financial Commissioner,

Haryana and Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Revenue and Disaster Management, Sanjeev Kaushal has issued an order to all the Administrative Secretaries, Director General of Police, Haryana, all the Divisional Commissioners and all the Deputy Commissioners of the State.

The State Government has decided to declare vacation in all the Government and Private Schools in the State for the classes from Class 1st to Class 8th upto April 30. However, teachers will attend the schools without any change and will do their administrative works such as preparation of results, admissions and other work processes will continue without any change.

## Punjab left with only 5 days of Covid vaccine, says Capt Amarinder

**PNS ■ CHANDIGARH**

With Punjab left with only 5 days of supply (5.7 lakh Covid vaccine doses) at the current levels of vaccinating 85000-90000 persons a day, Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Saturday urged the Centre to share the schedule for supply of vaccines with the States over the next quarter based on their confirmed supply orders.

Hoping that the Centre would send fresh batches of vaccine supply soon, the Chief Minister said if the state is able to meet its target of 2 lakh vaccines a day, then its current supplies will last only 3 days.

He said he had written to the Prime Minister & the Union Health Minister to give confirmed supply schedules.

Despite being a slow-starter in vaccination, Punjab has vaccinated more than 16 lakh persons, at an average of around 85000-90000 per day, he said during a video conference convened by Congress president Sonia Gandhi to discuss the Covid situation. The meeting was attended by chief ministers of the Congress-ruled states, as well as senior party leaders, including Rahul Gandhi.

Capt Amarinder said people in Punjab were still not coming out in large numbers for the vaccination due to the massive anger prevailing against the Government of India on the issue of Farm Laws. Since Punjab has a majority population among the agriculture community, even the common man is affected by the farmers' agitation, he said, adding "this anger is impacting the vaccination drive." He said his government is undertaking an extensive media campaign to address the mis-information regarding Covid and vaccination hesitancy.

Ranking 18th in the country at present in terms of cases reported, Punjab is showing

around 8% positivity, with an average of around 3000 cases per day for the past 15 days, the Chief Minister apprised Sonia. The number of cases is slightly stable, he pointed out, adding that "this shows that the steps taken in the last 3 weeks are in the right direction." Even in the graphs put up by Health Ministry in Prime Minister's review meeting yesterday, the "curve appears to be flattened over the past fortnight," he said, disclosing that the state currently has around 27,200 active cases with recovery rate of 87.1%.

Noting that high positivity is being seen in the younger population and as per reports received from NCDC and IGB, more than 80% samples have been found to be positive for the more contagious and virulent UK variant, the Chief Minister shared with the Congress president the various measures taken by his government to combat the spread. These, he said, included complete ban on political gatherings till 30th April, imposition of night curfew across all districts from 9 pm to 5 am, restrictions on numbers in outdoor and indoor social gatherings and in cinema halls and malls, and closure of all educational institutions and Anganwadi Centres, with school exams being postponed. He said his government had to impose a ban on political gatherings as opposition leaders like Arvind Kejriwal and Sukhbir Badal were holding rallies in the state in violation of Covid norms.

The Chief Minister assured the meeting that the state has all arrangements in place to ensure proper and timely treatment of Covid patients, with sufficient availability of beds, drugs, Remdesivir injection etc. Punjab will do its best to contain and manage Covid as we did last year, he said.

Capt Amarinder also apprised Sonia of his communication with the central gov-

ernment on Covid and vaccine management, including the two letters he has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan, seeking flexibility for states to devise their local vaccination strategies. He added that he had requested the Centre for inclusion of patients with liver & kidney disease below age of 45 and to focus on immunizing all adults in high-risk areas, besides covering all teachers & staff in all educational institutions, besides occupation-based immunization for judges & judicial officers, bus drivers & conductors, elected representatives at all levels, etc.

**PRIVATE HOSPITALS IN PUNJAB TO POSTPONE ELECTIVE SURGERIES TILL APRIL 30**

Principal Secretary Health and Family Welfare, Punjab Hussan Lal on Saturday chaired a virtual meeting with private hospitals of the state for COVID-19 management, urging them to defer the elective surgeries at least till April 30 to meet the rising number of demand for Covid beds.

He directed all the private hospitals to charge at government fixed rates for the treatment and avoid overcharging. There are 213 private hospitals on board for the COVID-19 treatment in the state at present and the Government has provided 230 ventilators to private hospitals which should be used optimally.

The Principal Secretary Health stated that more than 20,000 doses of Remdesivir have been provided to Government and Private hospitals and these were available free of cost.

He reiterated that Oxygen demand and supply must be communicated to the Civil Surgeon of the district so that in case of any additional requirement, the same could be made available from the appropriate source well in time.

## Veteran actor Satish Kaul dies of Covid-19 related complications

**PNS ■ CHANDIGARH**

Veteran Punjabi actor Satish Kaul, 76, who featured in several Hindi films and shows including "Mahabharat", died in Ludhiana on Saturday due to Covid-19 related complications.

According to Kaul's sister Satya Devi, the actor, popular for playing the role of Lord Indra in BR Chopra's "Mahabharat", was admitted to a city hospital after he developed fever six days ago. She said he died in the morning due to COVID-19 at the hospital. He had a fever and wasn't keeping well. He was admitted to the hospital on Thursday.

The actor worked in over 300 Punjabi and Hindi films including "Pyaar Toh Hona Hi Tha", "Aunty No 1" and the TV show "Vikram Aur Betaal".

Kaul moved to Punjab from Mumbai and started an acting school around 2011, which wasn't a success. He fractured his hip bone in 2015 and remained bedridden for two and a half years. He later checked-in to an old age home, where he stayed till 2019, before moving into a rented house.

Punjab CM Capt Amarinder Singh condoled the demise of Kaul. In a condolence message, the CM described him as a versatile actor, who played a pivotal role in the promotion of Punjabi cinema, art and culture. Being a staunch votary of Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiyyat, Satish Kaul would be remembered by one and all for his enormous contribution for making Punjabi cinema popular amongst the people, he said.

## Farmers block KMP Expressway in Haryana as part of protest against farm laws

**PNS ■ CHANDIGARH**

As part of their stir against the Centre's three agriculture laws, farmers on Saturday blocked the 136 km Kundli-Manesar-Palwal expressway in Haryana. They, however, said emergency vehicles such as ambulances were allowed to ply.

The call for a 24-hour blockade was given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of farmer unions spearheading the agitation.

The blockade started at 8 am and will last 24 hours till Sunday morning.

Farmers, including women, carried flags of their organisations and raised slogans against the Government.

They squatted on the expressway while slamming the central government for not repealing the farm laws.

## KOTKAPURA CASE

## Punjab Govt to challenge HC decision

**PNS ■ CHANDIGARH**

Terming the probe into the Kotkapura firing case as totally fair, impartial and unbiased, Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Saturday said his Government will challenge in the Supreme Court any orders of the High Court for quashing the investigation of the Punjab Police SIT or removing its chief.

Reacting to reports in this regard, the Chief Minister said he has directed the state government's legal team in the case to examine the orders of the Punjab & Haryana High Court as soon as the copy is received, and prepare to challenge the same in the apex court if either the SIT probe is directed to be scrapped or its leader is asked to be removed.

He said he had full faith in the state's legal team, headed by

Siddharth Luthra, Senior Advocate from Delhi, that has appeared for the state in the case before the High Court. The case will be taken to its logical conclusion and nobody who is guilty will be spared, irrespective of their political affiliation or position, said the Chief Minister.

Declaring his commitment to fulfilling every single poll promise of his government, including ensuring the much-awaited justice for the families of the victims of the firing case.

Expressing full confidence in SIT chief Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh, and the probe conducted so far under his supervision, the Chief Minister said he was an extremely competent and experienced officer who had been working relentlessly on the case since the Special Investigation Team was constituted.

He pointed out that the investigations were in an advanced stage, with four challans already filed against persons in the 2015 case that followed the Bargari sacrilege incident, with final reports submitted to the sessions court for trial.

**CM USING CASE TO IMPLICATE BADAL FAMILY, SAYS SUKHBIR BADAL**

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) President Sukhbir Singh Badal on Saturday said the Punjab and Haryana high court order quashing the SIT formed by the Congress Government in the Kotkapura police firing case had made it clear that the chief minister was not interested in finding the guilty but was using the case to implicate the Badal family.

He said it was now clear that the SIT was formed to indulge in political vendetta.

## BAU students visit villages to develop infield skills

**PNS ■ RANCHI**

In a bid to provide field knowledge to the students, a total of 204 students of four colleges under Birs Agriculture University (BAU) studying undergraduate agricultural courses for the first time in the State under the uniform agricultural education model across the Country participated in the Student Ready Program for Skill Development.

BAU Vice Chancellor Dr Omkar Nath Singh said that this is an initiative towards upgrading the skills of the students. The main objective of this is to provide practical experience and employment-friendly training to agricultural graduate students, while making them skilled during academic studies, he added.

After the three-year classroom course, the fourth year students have to gain practical knowledge in the field. Despite the coronary period, four agricultural college students of BAU have been successful in completing the Rural Agricultural Work Experience (RAVE) course under this program in the 7th semester. This experience of the rural areas of 24 districts will prove to be helpful in boosting entrepreneurship development among the students and giving impetus to the agricultural development of the State.

Due to the lockdown, the students were instructed to complete the RAVE program in their nearest villages. For the first time agricultural graduate students made direct contact with the farmers in the villages of all the districts of the State. To know the traditional and indigenous farming techniques of villages, the status and resources of agriculture, government planning, other agricultural enterprises, problems and difficulties in agricultural work. The students shared experiences with the scientists

of the local Krishi Vigyan Kendra located in the district. Individual detailed project report (DPR) of this survey has been submitted by the students to the concerned college. Students have mentioned many information and experiences on agriculture related situations in rural areas in their report.

Under the guidance of the course coordinator, Dr Nibha Bada, the teachers of the Faculty of Agriculture evaluated the DPR of the students for five days and took an online interview. In this work, Dr MK Varnwal, Dr Vinay Kumar,

Dr BK Jha, Dr Asha Sinha, Dr Poonam Horo, Dr Irfan Ansari, Dr Nayyar Ali, Dr Neha Pandey, Abhilasha Deepa Minj, Dr SK Singh, Dr Sarvesh Kumar and Dr Neeraj Kumar contributed. In the online interview conducted due to Covid-19, the students presented the experiences collected from the villages to the teachers.

In the survey report, the students have described the change in the agricultural scenario of the villages adjacent to the cities as very positive. The farmer is aware of advanced breed, pest and disease management and some farmers are associated with summer, kharif and rabi season cultivation in a year. Are adopting advanced farming techniques. The area of Rabi crop has increased with crop production. Farmers are also doing commercial floriculture. Cultivation of off-season vegetables is also taking place on a large scale. Unbalanced amounts of vegetable farming and the use of indiscriminate fertilizers and chemicals are affecting sustainable farming. Income of farmers has also increased. Despite this, better results can be achieved by effective and concerted efforts in the field of beneficial agro-technical technology towards the demand and employment generation of the urban population. There is a lot of potential in these areas towards soil health management, drip irrigation, protected cultivation and innovation.

Students have indicated many possibilities in the remote villages of the State with special focus in the field of agriculture. Efforts have been made at the district and block level to spread the reach of agricultural technology to village to village agriculture department, agricultural science centers, regional research centers and stakeholders associated with agricultural activity.

But the percentage of farmers adopting it is low. Farmers are unable to spend on advanced seed purchase, fertilizer purchase and pesticide medicine due to high cost in advanced farming and lack of funds, even if they are aware.

Vegetables are cultivated in limited quantities in remote villages of the State. Similarly, there is also a shortage in improved variety and maintenance of animal wealth. Farmers are unable to bear the benefits of commercial and profitable farming.



# Centre created Covid jab shortage: Sonia



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Saturday blamed the Centre for “mis-managing the situation” of corona pandemic by exporting vaccines. “The Government allowed a shortage to be created in India,” Sonia said at a virtual meeting with the Chief Ministers of Congress-ruled States to review their efforts to fight Covid-19, including the availability of vaccines and access to medicines and ventilators.

Sonia advised the Chief Minister to focus on testing, tracking and vaccination. “Covid is surging and as the principal Opposition party, it’s our responsibility to raise issues and push the Government to move away from PR tactics and act in the interest of the people. Therefore, there must be transparency. Governments must reveal the actual numbers of infections and deaths across States, whether Congress-ruled or otherwise,” she said.

During the interaction, she took on the Centre and said vaccines should be provided to



Indians first and then the Government should think about exporting it to other countries. “We must focus on India’s vaccination drive first and foremost, then only export vaccines and gift them to other countries. We must stress on responsible behaviour adhering to all laws and Covid regulations without exception,” Sonia said in the wake of Centre exporting vaccines to several countries.

Asserting that all parties are united in the fight against Covid-19, the Congress chief said, “Cooperation with States respecting federalism and in turn, for us to be constructive and cooperate with the Government in its efforts to fight the pandemic is equally important. We are all united in this fight.”

She also blamed mass gatherings during election rallies and religious events for the spike in cases. “Mass gatherings for elections and religious events have accelerated Covid for which all of us are responsible to some extent. We need to accept this responsibility and keep the interest of the

nation above our own.”

Pushing for strict action to be taken to control the corona graph, Sonia Gandhi said, “In our states, we need to take strict measures to ensure that the pandemic doesn’t go out of control and ensure testing at large scale, preparation of adequate facilities, setting up temporary ones. We must make all efforts to support those who face the brunt of reduced economic activity as the restrictions become harder and more stringent.”

Taking about the economic situation in the country due to the coronavirus pandemic, Sonia Gandhi asked the State Government to look for the impact of government schemes so far and the next course of action which could be helpful. “Various packages had been announced by the Central government to help MSMEs and stimulate the economy. What impact have these packages had and what more should the Government be doing to deal with the continuing crisis? Do you see economic recovery happening in the manner that is being officially claimed?”

# Allegation to incite voters against Central forces unfounded: Didi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Defending her controversial remarks over the Central forces’ alleged partisan role in the ongoing State Assembly polls, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said there was no attempt to threaten, incite or influence the electorate against the force and any allegations to the contrary were unfounded’ and ‘denied’. Responding to the Election Commission’s notice Mamata said she has the highest regard for the Central forces and ‘commend and laud their contributions to the safety and the security of the country’.

“In my speech, I had only called upon the voters, specifically voters who are women to protect (democratically by gherao) if and when somebody (including CAPF) created any obstruction in their right to vote,” Mamata said adding that gherao is one of the democratic ways of registering public protest.

“Be it noted that multi-dimensional word gherao has been a legitimate entry in the political lexicon of West Bengal since late 1960s...,” she said. In recent years, the word has been used to connote peaceful satyagraha against authorities by silent victims of the situation, she added.

Mamata also urged the poll body to rescind its notice, contending she has not violated the model code or the various sections of the Indian Penal Code. She claimed that a girl was allegedly molested by an unidentified CRPF personnel in the early hours of April 6 at Ramnagar, under Tarakeswar police station and the matter was reported to the



The EC had on Thursday issued a notice to Mamata for her provocative remarks against Central forces

police which lodged an FIR.

“...Till date, no tangible action has been taken or at least an advisory or instruction has been issued by the Election Commission to CAP,” Mamata said, adding several police officers have been removed on “frivolous complaints by the BJP”.

To drive home her point that she did not instigate people to carry out violent acts against the central forces, Mamata also reproduced certain portions of her speech in her reply to the EC.

The EC had on Thursday issued a notice to Banerjee for her prima facie “completely false, provocative and intemperate statements” against central armed police forces, saying her remarks are demoralising the personnel.

The TMC chief again targeted the Centre and the CAPF on Saturday, after four people were killed in firing by CISF personnel allegedly after coming under attack from locals who “attempted to snatch their rifles” in West Bengal’s Cooch Behar district. Mamata said her government will initiate a CID probe into the incident and questioned the central forces’ version of firing in self-defence.

# BJP releases Kishor’s video claiming ‘Modi’s popularity’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid polling for 44 Assembly Seats in West Bengal, a controversy broke out on Saturday as BJP IT Cell head Amit Malviya released an audio clip where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s election strategist Prashant Kishor is purportedly heard saying “PM Modi, Mamata equally popular” in the State.

Malviya, who is also BJP’s deputy-in-charge of Bengal, tweeted four audio clips of what he said was parts of a conversation between Kishor and a group of journalists on the Clubhouse app.

Malviya quoted Kishor as saying that Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s appeal, anti-incumbency against the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC), “Muslim appeasement” of political parties in Bengal over the years and the Dalit vote would likely work favour of the BJP.

Kishor’s rejected the interpretation with ‘selective quotes’ and accused the BJP of “distorted use of parts of the conversation”, and asked the party to release the “full conversation”.

The controversy came on the day 44 of West Bengal’s total 294 seats were voting in the fourth round of an eight-phase polling process.

In the first tweet by Malviya, Kishor could be heard purportedly saying “...Polarisation, Modi, Hindi-speaking people,

SC (Scheduled Castes) — these are the factors.” Former minister Suwendu Adhikari leaving the TMC, or Kishor coming in as the TMC strategist were not the issues of significance at all, he said.

“Modi is popular here, the Hindi-speaking people have over 1 crore votes, Dalits account for 27% (of the population) — and they are fully backing the BJP. Plus, there is of course polarisation,” Kishor said.

“Matusas will be predominantly voting for the BJP but not as unitedly as they did in the Lok Sabha (elections in 2019). I still think 75% of the Matusas will vote for the BJP and 25% for the TMC,” Kishor purportedly said.

“Even our surveys on who will form the Government shows the BJP coming to power. This is because the BJP supporters are claiming the party will form the Government. Of the people voting for the Left — 10-15% — about two-third think the BJP will form the Government. So, the majority view you are hearing is that the BJP is coming to power,” Kishor said.

He said the perception, mostly among people from outside the state, that the BJP did not have workers on the ground in Bengal was not true. “They could be imported from the Left, but they are dedicatedly working for the BJP today,” he said, adding that the Left voters would like to see Banerjee lose.

When asked who was voting for the TMC, Kishor also purportedly clarified that he meant to say “50-55% Hindus are voting for the BJP”.

In the second clip, he said the major problem “we have to accept is that for 20 years there have been efforts to appease the minority”. For example, in Bengal the predominant belief was whoever got the Muslim vote would the elections, he said.

“The entire political ecosystem — be it of the Congress, Left or of Didi (as Banerjee is popularly known as) — has been thinking about that (getting Muslim votes). The first time, Hindus are thinking that they are seeing a chance... There is some element that the BJP is exploiting. And that element is coming from blatant misuse of minority policies by some of these parties... We can’t deny that...,” he said.

In the third clip, Kishor said the Hindi-speaking people in Bengal were Modi’s core voters in Bengal. “Plus, the anti-incumbency is against the state government, not against the Centre.”

“If we do a survey of leaders, Modi and Mamata are equally popular (in Bengal) — which is a very big thing,” he said. “Bengal has not seen a BJP rule. That is a factor. The people who have not seen it (BJP rule) for 30-35 years think they (the BJP) will do something hitherto undone. They want to taste the laddoo they have not yet,” he said.

# Assam polls: EC orders repolling in 4 booths on April 20



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Saturday ordered re-polling on April 20 in four polling booths including Haflong constituency of Assam where 181 votes were cast even though 90 people were eligible to exercise their franchise. The Commission has declared the votes cast at these polling stations on April 1 as void.

In a massive breach of conduct, a polling booth station at 107(A)-Khotlir LP School under Haflong Assembly constituency, located in Assam’s Dima Hasao district, where 181 votes were cast even though 90 people were eligible to exercise their franchise. The presiding and first polling officer in their statements had admitted that they had allowed the voters registered at the main polling station at 107-Mouldam LP School to cast their votes at the auxiliary polling station. The Haflong constituency has witnessed 74 percent polling.

The ECI order said,

repolling will be held at Ratabari (SC) constituency’s polling station number 149 at Indira M V School, after an electronic voting machine (EVM) was found in a car belonging to the wife of a BJP candidate. A magisterial probe was ordered by Karimganj district Deputy Commissioner and Returning Officer to enquire as to why a polling team in Assam carried a polled EVM in a vehicle owned by the wife of BJP candidate and sitting MLA Krishnendu Paul.

Repolling has also been ordered in Sonai constituency’s 463- Madhya Dhanehori LP School polling booth where at least three persons were injured in an incident of firing, following which the state’s deputy speaker and BJP candidate Aminul Haque Laskar was questioned by the police and five police personnel attached to him were suspended. According to the reports, the clash broke out between two groups among after there was alleged mismanagement at Madhya Dhanehari polling station.

# Tomar urges agitating farmers to call off strike amid Covid surge

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

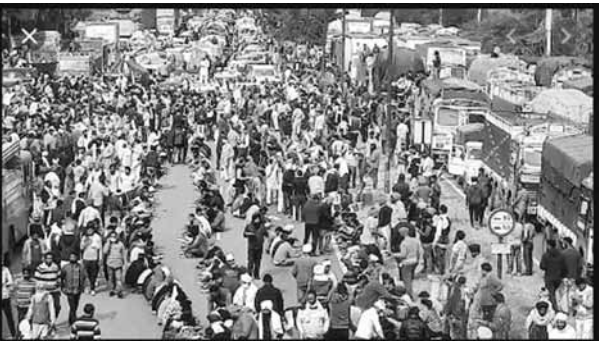
Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Saturday appealed to the farmers protesting at Delhi borders to call off their long-running agitation in view of second wave of Covid-19 cases, saying the Government is ready for a discussion whenever they come with a concrete proposal. Tomar expressed concerns about the farmers’ health and wellbeing as India witnessed a record surge of over 1.45 lakh coronavirus cases on Saturday.

Thousands of farmers have been protesting against the three new agri-marketing laws for nearly five months now, braving the raging pandemic. There has been no headway in the logjam over the issue since January 22, when the 11th and the last round of formal talks happened between the Central government and the protesting farmer unions.

“Now in the second wave of pandemic, the entire nation and the world is following COVID-19 protocols. Even protesting farmers should follow the protocols. Their life is important for us,” Tomar said.

“In the current COVID-19 situation, I urge them (agitating farmers) to call off their protest. The government is ready for a discussion whenever they come with a proposal,” he said.

Stating that there is no “dissatisfaction” among the farming community across the country over the new farm



laws, the minister said many farm bodies in fact are in the favour these legislations, while some are opposing them.

“Ours is a democratic country, be it farmers or citizens, if they have any doubt, the government believes it is its responsibility to clear doubts and find a solution,” he said. The minister said the three laws were not drafted all of a sudden, but there was a long discussion in the past and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken it forward, he said.

He said that normally any protest continues if the government is not ready for talks. But this government has held with open heart 11 rounds of discussion with representatives of protesting farm unions, yet their agitation did not stop, he said.

In these meetings, the gov-

ernment had identified their concerns and offered them a proposal to suspend the laws for 1.5 years and set up a committee to examine them.

“We proposed that a committee be set up to look into these laws and the MSP (issue) also. After the committee submits its report, the Government will discuss. This proposal was welcomed across the country, but the protesting farmers rejected it without citing any reason,” he said.

“We had told farm unions to come up with their own proposal and we were ready for discussion on that also,” the minister said, asserting the government is ready for talks even today. Tomar reiterated that he had appealed to the farmer unions in all 11 rounds of meetings to send back senior citizens and children from the protest sites in view of the pandemic.

The Minister also said the agitating farmers should understand that ordinary citizens are facing difficulty due to their sit-in protest at the border.

# Covid recovered patients not coming forward to donate plasma: Experts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With more and more Covid-19 patients landing into intensive care units, there is a serious shortage of Convalescent plasma, antiviral drug Remdesivir, and Tocilizumab injection being prescribed by doctors for treatment— even as scientific evidence on their efficacy is awaited.

Though the World Health Organization (WHO) does not recommend these drugs and therapies for patients hospitalised with Covid-19, in India medical experts have been using these treatments on an experimental basis for moderately to severely ill patients.

Vasu Goel, a resident of Murad Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, said he had been trying hard for the last two days to get plasma for his grandfather who is admitted to JP Hospital in Noida for Covid treatment.

“I have not lost hope, yet,” he said.

However, Vivek Jain from Kab Welfare Foundation, who had been coordinating with plasma donors to reach out to the needy this time too like last year, said that he has been getting several requests every day for the past few weeks. While the demand is rising, he pointed out, Covid-19 recovered patients were not coming forward to donate the plasma and help those in need.

He echoed the views of Dr

SK Sarin, head of the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences, which houses the city’s first plasma bank. Dr Sarin too recently pointed out that the number of donors was not enough.

“If the pandemic continues unabated, we would need donors who have recovered to come and donate but we would not deny anyone in need of plasma. People should come forward to donate plasma,” he said.

Delhi along with a few other States like Maharashtra had last year set up plasma banks to meet the demand which was at its peak.

Experts say those who are infected now will recover in the next two weeks, after which they will be eligible to donate plasma.

Amid states grappling with stretched Covid facilities and vaccine shortage, there are also reports of shortage of anti-viral drug Remdesivir that is used to treat Covid patients, in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.

In some cities, the drug is being sold in black markets, leaving the patients and their relatives at the receiving end. In some cases that highlight the limited options available to physicians treating Covid-19, doctors are recommending tocilizumab injection too. The doctors believe that the drug reduces inflammation that causes Covid-19 patients to become severely ill, particularly in their lungs.

# CRPF staff’s special children to get school bus facility

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

In a major relief to CRPF personnel parenting specially-abled and autistic children, the Union Home Ministry has cleared a proposal for the provision of a school bus facility to such children to transport them to special school or institution irrespective of the minimum number of such children in a camp.

In an order issued earlier this month, the Union Home Ministry conveyed the clearance of the proposal to the effect.

A Ministry letter with the subject title as “Wellbeing of Specially Aabled and Autistic Children of employees of CRPF in Government Vehicles to School/Institutions,” it said the CRPF proposal dated February 24 has been approved.

“It case of autistic/specially abled children, it has been decided that school bus facility may be provided irrespective of the strength (number) of such children in a camp,” reads the communication.

According to an earlier order dated April 5, 1999 on the issue, the provision of mandatory requirement of number of children as five for Gazetted Officers and non-Gazetted Officers or 12 for the children of all other ranks for free of cost school bus facility was reconsidered for the latest order doing away with the requirement of the number children in a camp for availing such facility, it said.

“This amendment is being issued subject to the condition that no new vehicles would be authorised and CRPF should manage this facility within available resources,” added the letter.

“The move will go a long way in mental succour for parents of specially-abled or autistic children as they need to attend special schools or institutions as part of their educational course. The removal of the fetters of a number of such children in a camp will mean that even a single such child of either officers or those from other ranks will be entitled to free school bus transport. The facility is also expected to help such parents concentrate on their core duties,” a senior official said.

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is the world’s biggest paramilitary force with an operational strength of 3.25 lakh personnel. It is the designated Central force for anti-Naxal operations, counter-terror role, and anti-insurgency operations with significant deployments in Jammu and Kashmir, the Northeast, and Naxal-hit States.

# SC asks Centre, four States to respond on plea seeking repeal of provisions criminalising begging

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has asked the Centre and four States, including Maharashtra and Gujarat, to file their response within three weeks on a plea seeking a direction to repeal the provisions criminalising begging.

A bench of justices Ashok Bhushan and R Subhash Reddy noted in its order that though a notice was issued on the plea on February 10 this year, only Bihar has so far filed its response in the matter.

“Although notice has been issued on February 10, 2021, a reply has been filed by the respondent - state of Bihar - only and other respondents have not yet filed their reply.

Let reply be filed within three weeks,” the bench said in its order passed on Friday.

The apex court has posted the matter for hearing after three weeks.

The top court had in February sought a response from the Centre, and the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Bihar on the plea which has claimed that the sections of the statute criminalising begging are violative of constitutional rights.

The plea filed by Meerut resident Vishal Pathak was referred to the August 2018 verdict of the Delhi High Court which had decriminalised begging in the national capital and said that provi-

sions of the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 which treats begging as an offence cannot sustain constitutional scrutiny.

“The provisions of the statutes criminalising the act of begging put people in a situation to make an unreasonable choice between committing a crime or not committing one and starving, which goes against the very spirit of the Constitution and violates Article 21 i.E. Right to Life,” said the plea, filed through advocate H K Chaturvedi.

Referring to the Census 2011, the plea has said that the total number of beggars in India is 4,13,670 and the number has increased from the last census.



It said that the government has the mandate to provide social security to everyone and ensure that all have basic facilities, as embedded in the Directives Principles of State Policy in the

Constitution.

“However, the presence of beggars is evidence that the State has failed to provide these basic facilities to all its citizens, thus instead of working on its failure and examin-

ing what made people beg, criminalising the act of beggary is irrational and against the approach of a socialist nation as embedded in the preamble of our Constitution,” the plea has claimed.



# Myanmar junta attacks again

AP ■ YANGON

Security forces in Myanmar cracked down heavily again on anti-coup protesters even as the military downplayed reports of state violence.

Reports on online news outlets and social media on Friday said at least four people were killed in Bago, about 100 kilometers northeast of Yangon, in an attack by government troops and police that began before dawn and continued sporadically until after dark. The Bago Weekly Journal Online said a source at the city's main hospital, whom it didn't name, believed about 10 people had been killed.

It was the third attack this week involving the massive use of deadly force by security forces to try to crush active opposition to the February 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

On Wednesday, attacks were launched on opponents of military rule in the towns of Kalay and Taze in the country's north. In both places, at least 11 people — possibly including some bystanders — were reported killed. Security forces



Children flash the three-fingered symbol of resistance as they join an anti-coup protest in Yangon on Saturday

AP

were accused of using heavy weapons in their attacks, including rocket-propelled grenades and mortars. The allegations could not be independently confirmed by *The Associated Press*.

Some of the protesters used homemade weapons, especially in Kalay, where defenders

called themselves a "civil army," and some were equipped with rudimentary hunting rifles.

Most protests in cities and town around the country have been nonviolent, with demonstrators espousing civil disobedience.

Violence by security forces was also reported Friday in sev-

eral other areas, including Loikaw, the capital of Kayah sate in the east, where live ammunition was employed, according to numerous social media posts.

At least 614 protesters and bystanders have been killed by security forces through Thursday, according to the

Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors casualties and arrests.

At a news conference in the capital, Naypyitaw, a spokesman for the ruling junta defended the actions of the security forces.

Brig. Gen. Zaw Min Tun, when asked about reports that automatic weapons have been fired at protesters, replied that if that were the case, 500 people would have been killed in just a few hours.

He challenged the death toll issued by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners and said the Government's tally was 248. He also said 16 policemen had been killed.

Asked about air strikes carried out by Government jets on territory held by guerrillas from the Karen ethnic minority in eastern Myanmar, which reportedly killed at least 14 civilians, Zaw Min Tun said the aerial raids allowed more exact targeting than ground attacks which would have caused more deaths. Supporters of the Karen charge that the army is carrying out a ground offensive as well, including the use of artillery.

# Iran tests advanced nuclear centrifuges

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran said on Saturday it has begun mechanical tests on its newest advanced nuclear centrifuge, even as the five world powers that remain in a foundering 2015 nuclear deal with Iran attempt to bring the US back into the agreement.

Iran's IR-9 centrifuge, when operational, would have the ability to separate uranium isotopes more quickly than the current centrifuges being used, thereby enriching uranium at a faster pace. The announcement carried on state TV came on Iran's annual Nuclear Day.

The IR-9's output is 50 times quicker than the first Iranian centrifuge, the IR-1. Iran's nuclear program is also developing IR-8 centrifuges.

Since January, Iran has begun enriching uranium at up to 20% purity, a technical step away from weapons-grade levels, though Iran's leadership insists the country has no desire to develop a nuclear weapon. Former US President Donald Trump pulled the US



In this photo released by the official website of the office of the Iranian Presidency, President Hassan Rouhani, second right, listens to head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Ali Akbar Salehi while visiting an exhibition of Iran's new nuclear achievements in Tehran, Iran on Saturday

AP

out of the nuclear accord in 2018, accusing Iran of failing to live up to the agreement, opting for what he called a maximum-pressure campaign of stepped-up US sanctions and other tough actions.

Iran responded by intensifying its enrichment of uranium and building centrifuges in

plain violation of the accord, while insisting that its nuclear development is for civilian not military purposes. Israel maintains Iran still maintains the ambition of developing nuclear weapons, pointing to Tehran's ballistic missile program and research into other technologies.

## 12 hurt as hardline Islamist attack devotees inside mosque in B'desh

**Dhaka:** Activists of a hardline Islamist group attacked devotees inside a mosque in northern Bangladesh, injuring at least 12 persons, according to a media report. The incident took place on Friday at the mosque in the Gaibandha district when self-proclaimed Hefazat-e-Islam activists snatched the mic from the Imam and preached about the organisation, Dhaka Tribune reported.

They attacked the devotees who tried to intervene, Imam Motlob Uddin said. At least 12 men were injured in the attack, the report said. A case is being filed at Sundarganj Police Station. Officer in Charge Bulbul Islam said: "Disagreements over the mosque's committee is the reason for this untoward incident."

PTI

## Two Christian nurses booked under blasphemy charges in Pak

**Lahore:** Two Christian nurses have been booked under blasphemy charges in Pakistan's Punjab province following a complaint by hospital authorities, police said, as people staged demonstrations against the duo demanding strict action against them.

According to police, an FIR has been registered against the two nurses, Mariyum Lal and Newish Arooj, working in District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital, Faisalabad, on Friday.

The nurses are accused of removing the stickers inscribed with Islamic verses from the wall of a hospital ward where psychiatric patients are being treated.

PTI

## Djibouti says longtime Prez Ismail on way to winning 5th term

**Mogadishu:** Djibouti's government says longtime President Ismail Omar Guelleh has overwhelmingly won a fifth term, citing provisional results. Home Affairs Minister Mumin Ahmed Sheikh told reporters overnight that Guelleh has received more than 98% of the 177,391 votes cast in the Horn of Africa nation, defeating his sole rival, businessman Zakaria Ismail Farah. Other opposition boycotted Friday's vote. The final results are expected to be announced later Saturday by the electoral commission.

"Thank you for your confidence!" the president tweeted overnight. "Let's continue together!"

AP

## Harry expected to fly in for funeral of grandfather

**London:** The rift in the royal ranks after an explosive interview by Prince Harry and wife Meghan Markle is to be set aside as reports suggest that the Duke of Sussex is keen to fly to the UK to attend grandfather Prince Philip's funeral.

Harry was close to his grandfather and, according to media reports, he is keen to be by the side of his grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, as she mourns the passing of her husband of 73 years. Harry, who is now based in California, is unlikely to be joined by Meghan, who is heavily pregnant with their second baby. "He will, of course, be there, no matter how difficult relations are between the Sussexes and the family," a source was quoted as saying in *'The Daily Telegraph'*.

AP

# Gun salutes honour Prince Philip

## UK enters 8 day mourning

PTI ■ LONDON

Gun salutes in all capitals of the United Kingdom as well as aboard some Royal Navy ships on Saturday honoured Prince Philip, the husband of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh, who passed away aged 99 at Windsor Castle on Friday.

The 41 rounds fired in London, Cardiff, Belfast and Edinburgh at a rate of one shot per minute from midday local time on Saturday mark the start of an eight-day national mourning period.

"The tradition of Gun Salutes being fired throughout



Members of the 104th Regiment Royal Artillery fire a 41-round gun salute in the grounds of Cardiff Castle in Cardiff on Saturday

AP

the country to mark significant national events dates back to at least the 18th century, and there are historical records of salutes taking place as early as

the 14th century when guns and ammunition began to be adopted more widely," a statement on the royal website read. "Similar gun salutes were

fired to mark the death of Queen Victoria in 1901," it notes. They also honour the Duke's strong military links, having served with the Royal Navy in World War II.

"His Royal Highness has been a great friend, inspiration and role model for the armed forces and he will be sorely missed," said General Sir Nick Carter, the UK's Chief of the Defence Staff.

"The Duke of Edinburgh served among us during the Second World War, and he remained devoted to the Royal Navy and the armed forces as a whole. A life well lived, His Royal Highness leaves us with a legacy of indomitable spirit, steadfastness and an unshakable sense of duty. From all of us who serve today and who have served, thank you," he said.

# US unveils new rules for Govt contacts with Taiwan

**Washington:** The State Department has unveiled new rules for US government contacts with Taiwan that are likely anger China but appear to reimpose some restrictions that had been lifted by the Trump administration.

The department announced the changed policy in a statement that said the Biden administration intends to "liberalize" the rules to reflect the "deepening unofficial relationship" between the US and Taiwan. However, the revised guidelines don't include all the changes put in place by former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the waning days of the Trump administration.

Pompeo had lifted virtually all restrictions on contacts with Taiwan, including allowing Taiwanese military officers to wear uniforms and display

the Taiwanese flag at meetings with US officials. Friday's changes were silent on those matters, although the rules do continue to permit US officials to meet their Taiwanese counterparts in federal buildings.

China regards Taiwan as a renegade province and opposes any attempt to treat the island as an independent country. China had condemned Pompeo's easing of the restrictions that had been in place since the US recognised Beijing and dropped formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1979.

"These new guidelines will continue the U.S. Government's longstanding practice of providing clarity throughout the US executive branch of how to implement our one China policy," the department said.

AP

## Earthquake in Indonesia's Java, Bali kills at least 6

**Malang:** A strong earthquake killed at least six people and damaged buildings on Indonesia's main island of Java and shook the tourist hotspot of Bali, officials said Saturday. No tsunami warnings were posted. The US Geological Survey said the magnitude 6.0 quake struck off the island's southern coast at 2:00 p.m. Local time (0700 GMT). It was centered 45 kilometres south of Sumberpucung town of Malang District in East Java province, at a depth of 82 kilometres (51 miles).

Rahmat Triyono, the head of Indonesia's earthquake and tsunami center, said in a statement the undersea earthquake did not have the potential to cause a tsunami.

AP

# Stalled at first jab: Vaccine shortages hit poor countries

AP ■ LONDON

As many as 60 countries, including some of the world's poorest, might be stalled at the first shots of their coronavirus vaccinations because nearly all deliveries through the global programme intended to help them are blocked until as late as June.

COVAX, the global initiative to provide vaccines to countries lacking the clout to negotiate for scarce supplies on their own, has in the past week shipped more than 25,000 doses to low-income countries only twice on any given day. Deliveries have all but halted since Monday.

During the past two weeks, according to data compiled daily by UNICEF, fewer than 2 million COVAX doses in total

were cleared for shipment to 92 countries in the developing world — the same amount injected in Britain alone.

On Friday, the head of the World Health Organization slammed the "shocking imbalance" in global COVID-19 vaccination. WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that while one in four people in rich countries had received a vaccine, only one in 500 people in poorer countries had gotten a dose.

The vaccine shortage stems mostly from India's decision to stop exporting vaccines from its Serum Institute factory, which produces the overwhelming majority of the AstraZeneca doses that COVAX counted on to supply around a third of the global population at a time coron-

avirus is spiking worldwide.

COVAX will only ship vaccines cleared by WHO, and countries are increasingly impatient. Supplies are dwindling in some of the first countries to receive COVAX shipments, and the expected delivery of second doses in the 12-week window currently recommended is now in doubt. In a statement, the vaccine alliance known as GAVI told The Associated Press that 60 countries are affected by the delays.

In vaccination tents set up at Kenyatta National Hospital in Nairobi, many of those who arrived for their first jabs were uneasy about when the second would arrive.

"My fear if I don't get the second dose, my immune system is going to be weak, hence I might die," said Oscar Odinga, a civil servant.

## Saudi Arabia executes 3 soldiers for 'high treason'

**Dubai:** Saudi Arabia executed three soldiers Saturday it accused of committing "high treason," without elaborating on which enemy the kingdom believed the men aided.

The state-run Saudi Press Agency identified the men as soldiers working in the Defence Ministry. It did not elaborate on how the men aided the kingdom's enemies. Saudi Arabia is fighting Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthis rebels. The kingdom also views Iran as a regional archrival.

The kingdom said the three men were convicted in court and a later royal order served as a death warrant. Saudi Arabia carried out the world's third most executions in 2019, according to figures from Amnesty International. The kingdom followed China and Iran, respectively.

AP

## Egyptian archaeologist reveals details of ancient city



A man covers a skeleton in a 3,000-year-old lost city in Luxor province, Egypt on Saturday

AP

**Cairo:** Egypt's best-known archaeologist on Saturday revealed further details on a Pharaonic city recently found in the southern province of Luxor. Zahi Hawass said that archaeologists found brick houses, artifacts, and tools from pharaonic times at the site of the 3,000-year-old lost city. It dates back to Amenhotep III of the 18th dynasty, whose reign is considered a golden era for ancient Egypt.

"This is really a large city that was lost... The inscription that found inside here says that this city was called: 'The dazzling Aten,'" Hawass told

reporters at the site. Archaeologists started excavating in the area last year, searching for the mortuary temple of boy King Tutankhamun. However, within weeks they found mud brick formations that eventually turned out to be a well-served large city.

City walls and even rooms filled with ovens, storage pottery, and utensils used in daily life are said to be present. Archeologists also found human remains that were visible to reporters and visitors on Saturday.

AP

## Iran enforces 10-day lockdown amid fourth wave of pandemic

**Tehran:** Iran on Saturday began a 10-day lockdown amid a fourth wave of coronavirus infections, state TV reported, a worrisome trend after more than a year of the country battling the Middle East's worst outbreak.

Iran's coronavirus task force, charged with determining virus restrictions, ordered most shops closed and offices restricted to one-third capacity in cities declared as "red zones."

AP

## Pakistan OK's emergency use of third Chinese vax despite low efficacy rate

**Islamabad:** Pakistan has approved the emergency use of the third Chinese vaccine, despite its low efficacy rate, as the country struggled to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

The Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) on Thursday granted Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) to CoronaVac, developed by Chinese company Sinovac Biotech, officials said on Saturday.

"This is the third Chinese vaccine allowed to be used in Pakistan," a DRAP official said, adding that the country now has five approved COVID vaccines.

Pakistan has already granted the EUA to China's two-dose Sinopharm and single-dose Convidecia vaccine developed by the Cansino Biologicals Inc. UK's AstraZeneca and Russian Sputnik V vaccines have also been approved by the DRAP.

PTI

**JAIPUR DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**  
Indira Circle, Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg, Jaipur-302004

No.: JDA/EE&TA to Dir.Engg.-I/2021-22/D-35

Date : 09.04.2021

**NOTICE INVITING BID**

**NIB No.: EE & TA to Dir. Engg.-I/25/2021-22**

Bids are invited for works given below in various zones as per details given :-

S. No.	UBN No.	Cost of Work (Lacs)	A&F	Nature of Work	Last Date
1.	UBN : JDA2122WSOB00022	266.00	219/2020-21	EE-11 Road Renewal	03.05.2021

Details are available at Procurement Portal website [www.sppp.rajjasthan.gov.in](http://www.sppp.rajjasthan.gov.in), [www.eproc.rajjasthan.gov.in](http://www.eproc.rajjasthan.gov.in) and [www.jda.urban.rajjasthan.gov.in](http://www.jda.urban.rajjasthan.gov.in)

Executive Engineer & TA to Dir. Engg.-I

Raj. Samwad/C/2021-22/434

**कार्यालय नगर निगम हल्द्वानी - काठगोदाम**

पत्रांक: 63 / P.W.L

**ई-निविदा सूचना**

दिनांक 09.04.2021

नगर निगम हल्द्वानी-काठगोदाम क्षेत्रांतर्गत निम्नलिखित कार्या हेतु पुनः ई-निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा के संबंध में समस्त शर्तें एवं सूचनाएं <http://www.uktenders.gov.in> पर दिनांक 12.04.2021 को अपराह्न 2.00 बजे से दिनांक 24.04.2021 को अपराह्न 2.00 बजे तक उपलब्ध रहेंगी।

क्र.सं.	कार्य का नाम	अनुमानित लागत (रु. लाख में)	कार्य की पर्येक्ष राशि (रु. लाख में)	निविदा फॉर्म का मूल्य	कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि	निविदा की शैली
1.	नगर निगम क्षेत्र के अंतर्गत 20 पार्कों के सौन्दरीकरण एवं तत्संबंधित कार्य	166.68	3.50	5000+18% GST	06 माह	06 माह

(डा. जोगेन्द्र सिंह रोतेला)  
महापौर  
नगर निगम हल्द्वानी

(सी.एस.मन्तोल्या)  
नगर आयुक्त  
नगर निगम हल्द्वानी

**राजस्थान राज्य पथ परिवहन निगम**  
मुख्यालय जयपुर

परिवहन मार्ग, जयपुर-302001 टेलीफोन : 0141-2374652 ईमेल : [pro.rsrtc@rajasthan.gov.in](mailto:pro.rsrtc@rajasthan.gov.in)

क्रमांक: विज्ञापन संख्या 05/2021-22

दिनांक : 08.04.2021

**ई-बोली सूचना**

निगम द्वारा निम्न कार्य हेतु ई-बोली को माध्यम से निष्पत्ति प्रपत्र में ऑनलाइन बोलीयाँ आमंत्रित की जाती है। बोली से संबंधित विस्तृत विवरण वेबसाइट [www.rsrtc.rajasthan.gov.in](http://www.rsrtc.rajasthan.gov.in) एवं <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in> व स्टेट पोर्टल (SPPP) पर देखा जा सकता है।

क्र.सं.	ई-बोली सूचना संख्या	कार्य
1.	01/2021-22	निगम की बसों के माध्यम से लघु पार्सल सेवा संचालन करने हेतु सोल लाइसेंस नियुक्ति का सुनहरा अवसर प्रदान करते हुए लघु पार्सल एवं सामान्य वस्तुओं के परिवहन हेतु निष्पत्ति प्रपत्र में ई-बोली प्रक्रिया द्वारा ऑनलाइन बोली आमंत्रित की जाती है।

राज. संवाच/सी/2021-22/404

कार्यकारी निदेशक ( प्रशासन )

**WESTERN RAILWAY**

**E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE No. S/14/2021 Date 09.04.2021**

S.N.	Short Description of Item	Quantity	T.O.D.
277	Stop valve hand wheel for tank wagons	453 Nos.	19.04.2021
278	Set of Air Brake Pipes	100 Set	23.04.2021
279	Application Form for Reservation	20000000 Nos.	30.04.2021
280	IR-DRDO Bio-toilet tanks	30 Set	30.04.2021
281	Air Brake Hose Coupling for Brake Pipe	3000 Nos	30.04.2021
282	Body Side Lower Panel of Lavatory	1350 Nos.	30.04.2021
283	Air Brake Hose Coupling	2600 Nos.	30.04.2021
284	Disposable HIV Protection Kit	5000 Nos.	30.04.2021
285	Liquid Oxygen for Medical use	477000 CUM	03.05.2021
286	Pipe 32 N.B.	30 Nos.	03.05.2021
287	Set of Air Brake Pipes	700 Set	03.05.2021
288	Compreg packing	10400 Nos.	03.05.2021

Regarding detailed notice EMD, Purchase restrictions and detailed tender conditions, please visit website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) and [www.wr.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.wr.indianrailways.gov.in).

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For Principal Chief Materials Manager

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# E-comm to accelerate India's auto sector growth: Report

■ NEW DELHI

Strong acceptance of e-commerce and digitisation is expected to accelerate the growth of India's auto sector, advisory firm Grant Thornton Bharat said.

Accordingly, India's automobile market is estimated to grow more than '2.3X' from \$222 billion currently to \$512 billion by 2026.

Notably, the analysis by Allied Market Research, Market Line, Reserve Bank of India and Grant Thornton Bharat showed that e-commerce portals focused on the automobile market, such as Droom, Cardekho, and Olx have put consumers and the user experience in the spotlight helping the manufacturers attract more users.

Besides, the growing base of internet and smartphone users will further boost the digital transformation, and lead to an increase in expanding the market size of the e-commerce portals.

"The strong emergence and acceptance of the online channel have provided an impetus to seamless solutions, price discovery, transparency,



digital real-time payments along with certification on the quality of the vehicle for the consumers in the auto sector," said Rahul Kapur, Partner, Growth at Grant Thornton Bharat.

According to the analysis report, since last year, Maruti Suzuki saw a five-fold increase in sales through digital means which now stand at 20 per cent of their total sales.

"These changes in consumer's buying and research preferences signal a shift for the auto sector, as Covid19 played a big part in the online channel gaining traction."

Technology-enabled innovations like secure digital

payments, hyper-logical logistics, analytics-driven customer engagement, increasing consumer awareness and digital advertisements are likely to support the growth going forward."

As per the report, other factors such as rising middle class and young population with increasing disposable incomes will contribute towards growing the sector.

Furthermore, ease of owning a vehicle through the availability of multiple financing options as well as reduction in vehicle ownership tenure due to regulatory rules in some states, cited the report as other growth inducing factors.

# Petrol, diesel prices remain unchanged

■ NEW DELHI

Fuel prices in the country remained unchanged on Saturday with oil marketing companies continuing on the pause mode and keeping petrol and diesel prices static for 11th consecutive day.

Accordingly, pump price of petrol and diesel remained at previous days level of Rs 90.56 and Rs 80.87 a litre, respectively, in the capital.

Petrol and diesel fell by 22 paise and 23 paise per litre respectively last week on Tuesday in wake global softening of oil prices. OMC have decided to pause price revision as they want to watch the crude price movement that has now fallen to around \$62.5 a barrel from remaining above this level in much of the last week.

Across the country as well the petrol and diesel price remain static on Saturday but its retail levels varied depending on the level of local levies on respective states.

In Mumbai, petrol continues to be priced at Rs 96.98 a litre and diesel at Rs 87.96 a litre. Premium petrol, howev-



er, continues to remain over Rs 100 a litre in the city as is the case with several cities across the country.

The OMCs went on price cut for the first time this year on two consecutive days - March 24 and 25 after keeping oil prices steady for past 24 days. It again reduced the price on March 30.

Thereafter, fuel prices have remained unchanged.

Earlier, petrol and diesel prices increased 26 times in 2021 with the two auto fuels increasing by Rs 7.46 and Rs 7.60 per litre, respectively, so far this year.

Officials in public sector oil companies said that retail price may rise again if crude and product prices pick up but for now it will fall or remain static for few more days.

# Petrol pumps closed in Rajasthan as dealers demand rollback of VAT on fuel

■ JAIPUR

People faced difficulty across the state due to a one-day strike called by Rajasthan Petroleum Dealers Association of fuel stations on Saturday with the demand of a rollback in VAT on fuel in the state.

Around 7,000 petrol pumps remained closed in the state due to the strike.

However, fuel pumps that are company owned and company operated were open for the public.

Association president Suneet Bagai said diesel and petrol sales remained closed on the day.

"The State Government increased VAT during the coronavirus pandemic and generated extra revenue.

The sales volume in the state has declined by 34 per cent because the fuel prices are comparatively low in neighbouring states," he said.

The association has already submitted a memorandum of demands and we would go on an indefinite strike from April 25 if there is no positive decision by the Government, Bagai said.

# Mid and small caps best performers, gold slumps in 1st quarter

■ NEW DELHI

Mid and small cap stocks are the best performing asset class for the quarter ending March 2021 while gold is the worst performer.

Mid and small cap stocks delivered returns of 14 per cent in the quarter while gold under-performed with negative 11 per cent returns. Gold is the biggest under-performer for the first three months of 2021 vs. the other asset classes. Gold prices are down by 11 per cent in rupees and 10 per cent in US Dollar in the last three months. Apart from 'Risk on' trade, rising bond yields are now short term negative for the gold prices

As per Axis Securities, gold proved to be one of the best performing asset classes in 2020. In the last 10 years, Nifty outperformed the Emerging market in five years and developed market in four years.

The performance of small-caps is highly volatile versus other asset classes. Small-cap ranked at the bottom in 2018 and 2019 and recovered sharply in 2020, outperforming the other asset classes in the first quarter of 2021.

NIFTY50 delivered a healthy 15 per cent return which was significantly better than the 2019 return of 12 per cent. While NIFTY Midcap 100 and Nifty Smallcap 100 delivered 22 per cent and 21 per cent returns respectively in 2020, the returns for mid and small-cap indices were negative in 2019.

"We expect the broad-based rally of 2020 to continue well into 2021 (already visible in Q1 2021) as we believe a strong earnings revival across the board is on the cards. A lower interest rate environment and higher fiscal spending will continue to support the equity markets," Axis Securities said.

It said that asset allocation and sector rotation will be key to generate out-performance in 2021. An equity market is likely to be the best performing asset class for the next one to two years.

It said that trading at a 10 per cent premium to large caps From a valuation perspective, the midcaps look attractive vs. large caps.

Historically, during the bull phase of 2017, midcaps were trading at a 45 per cent premium to large caps. The recent spate of IPOs and their success clearly indicates the appetite for mid and small-cap stocks, the report said.

Since November 2020, small and midcaps are picking up steam and they should deliver solid returns in 2021 as economic uncertainties will reduce and volatility will decline.

The report said that top 10 stocks domination is dwin-



dling in the market. Since December 2017, Nifty has delivered a return of 40 per cent. Out of which, the top 10 stocks by free-float market cap have delivered a stellar return of 58 per cent while the remaining 40 stocks had delivered only 17 per cent. This divergence has started narrowing in recent months. Based on the top 10 stocks, the adjusted Nifty value works out to 16,647 while the remaining 40 would lead NIFTY to just 12,354.

This indicates Nifty is better valued beyond the top 10 names. Long term risk rewards are better in the next 40 names vs. the top 10, the report said.

Broader rally since November and broad-based market performance was seen in the month of March despite higher volatility signifying intact overall risk appetite towards mid and small stocks. Stocks ranking from 101-200 rallied by 2 per cent in March, and 98 per cent in the last year which is superior to the large-cap performance.

Stronger FII flows since November continue to drive the momentum FIIs are net buyers; FIIs have added \$7.8 billion while DIIs have pulled out \$3.1 billion from the Indian equity market in the last 3 months.

Since Jan 2020, FIIs have bought a massive amount of \$30.9 billion while the DIIs have sold \$8.6 billion from the Indian equity market.

Highest ever FII inflows seen in the current financial year: \$37 billion, higher than FY10/11/13 levels.

The fiscal year ended on a strong note for the equity markets with all the sectors delivering positive returns.

The report said metals and IT registered the strongest gains while FMCG grew the slowest. Autos and Realty also delivered solid returns during the fiscal.

While FY21 was strong which was aided by cheap valuations and a low base, March performance was a mixed bag. The high beta sectors such as BFSI witnessed a profit booking while defensives such as FMCG and Pharma registered marginal gains.

The report said now the investors are betting higher on riskier assets like equity. Sentiments are improving further with increasing optimism driven by vaccine development and faster than expected economic recovery.

# Strong bounce back witnessed for toll road assets: ICRA

■ NEW DELHI

India's toll roads are likely to witness a 14-15 per cent growth in collections in FY22, ratings agency ICRA said in a report. Accordingly, this growth will be achieved on a low base following an estimated decrease of 5-7 per cent in FY21. "Road traffic has witnessed

a marked improvement in H2 FY2021 after subdued traffic witnessed in the initial months, post resumption of tolling from April 20, 2020.

This has been driven by increased movement of both - passenger and commercial vehicles, resulting in growth of around 10 per cent on a YoY basis."

# China slaps record USD 2.78 billion fine on Alibaba over anti-competitive tactics

■ BEIJING

China's antitrust regulators on Saturday slapped a record fine of USD 2.78 billion on Alibaba Group, the world's biggest e-commerce company, for abusing its dominant market position as Beijing tightened the screws on the country's tech giants.

Closing a months-long investigation that began last Christmas eve, China's State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) slapped a fine of 18.23 billion yuan (USD 2.78 billion) on Alibaba, headed by the country's top billionaire Jack Ma, setting a precedent for the ruling Communist Party to use the anti-monopoly rules to regulate tech giants.

The SAMR said that it had made an administrative penalty decision under China's anti-monopoly law, ordering Alibaba Group to stop illegal activities and imposing a fine of 4 per cent on its 2019 domestic sales of 455.71 billion yuan, totalling 18.23 billion yuan.

The market regulator concluded the four-month investigation, alleging that Alibaba has been abusing its market dominance since 2015 by prohibiting merchants from opening stores or participating in promotional activities on other competitive platforms, state-

**The move is a new setback for Alibaba and its billionaire founder Ma following a November decision by regulators to suspend the stock market**

run CGTN TV reported.

The SAMR said that Alibaba's "pick one out of two" requirement restricted competition among online retail platforms and infringed the legitimate rights of the merchants, at the same time hurt consumers' interests.

The move is a new setback for Alibaba and its billionaire founder Ma following a November decision by regulators to suspend the stock market debut of Ant Group, a finance platform spun off from the e-commerce giant.

Ma, one of China's most prominent entrepreneurs, disappeared temporarily from public view after criticizing regulators in a speech in November. That was followed days later by the Ant Group suspension.

In a statement on Saturday, the company said "Alibaba accepts the penalty with sincerity and will ensure its compliance with determination."

It pledged to strengthen its operations in accordance with the law, step up the building of a compliance system, and bet-

ter fulfill its social responsibilities, the CGTN report said.

It also vowed to introduce a series of measures to lower platform operating thresholds and reduce platform operating costs to create a more transparent and efficient platform environment for businesses, the report said.

The fine sends a clear message to the world that China will crackdown harshly on any monopolistic behaviour if Big Tech companies such as Alibaba breach the law with their monopolistic business models, said Zhai Wei, executive director of the Competition Law Research Centre at East China University of Political Science and Law in Shanghai.

"This is the biggest impact, way more important than the penalty," Zhai told the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post owned by Jack Ma.

He said small businesses which previously had to pick sides among Big Tech companies may benefit from the implementation of anti-monopoly law.

"The space for their free development has obviously been maintained and expanded," he said.

Observers say the fine shows China intends to move against internet platforms that it thinks are too big and aimed at serving warning to them.

# JioMart activity scaling up

■ NEW DELHI

JioMart activity is scaling up as per a report by JP Morgan research which found brisk online activity across stores and formats it visited in Mumbai in the last week of March that could have been nudged further by rising Covid-19 cases.

"We found the delivery infrastructure to be a mix of bike-based delivery executives, similar to e-commerce/food O2O, and van-based batched delivery that peers use (e.g., Bigbasket, DMart, Grofers). Our conversations suggest that there has been an evolution from bikes to largely vans at several stores, reflecting higher value, and heavier and more complex orders delivered with

greater efficiency. Bike-based delivery ensures short turnaround times for lighter, low-value orders, improving customer experience," JP Morgan said.

The note said most delivery staff identified themselves as being from JioMart or Grab (a delivery firm acquired by Jio in 2018), although few were JioMart or Grab branding, and the vans and drivers were largely outsourced.

This is unlike the branded fleets maintained by peers (Bigbasket, DMart Ready, Swiggy) that provide free publicity.

The report notes that the current infrastructure can support \$8-11 billion in annual gross merchandise value (GMV).

# IFC proposes \$50mn debt finance for Thar Surya solar power project



■ CHENNAI

International Finance Corporation (IFC) plans to debt finance the construction of Thar Surya 1 Pvt Ltd's 300 MW solar power project in Bikaner, Rajasthan by \$50 million.

Apart from lending \$50 million, IFC will also mobilise \$100 million debt through parallel lenders.

According to IFC, the total solar power project cost is estimated at \$200 million.

The solar power project is sponsored by Enel Green Power India, one of the step-down subsidiaries of Enel Green Power S.p.A., an existing IFC client.

Enel Green Power is one of the largest renewable energy developer in the world with 49 GW installed capacity across wind, solar, geothermal and hydropower projects, and with presence in 28 countries.

Enel Green Power is a subsidiary of Enel S.p.A., Italy.

The solar power generation project was awarded by Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI).

The power generated by Thar Surya will be sold to SECI under 25 year Power Purchase Agreement (PPA).

Rewa: A view of the Ultra Mega Solar Power project in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa that was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from New Delhi via video conferencing on July 10, 2020. Union Power Minister RK Singh and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan were among the dignitaries present on the occasion.

The 750-MW solar project is said to be Asia's biggest. The Rs 4,000-crore project has three units of 250 MW each at a solar park spread over 1,500 hectares developed by Rewa Ultr.

# India's OEMs accelerating shift towards EVs: HDFC Securities

■ NEW DELHI

India's automobile OEMs are accelerating their shift towards EVs by investing in startups and enhancing collaborations, HDFC Securities said.

"Along with developing electric products in-house, OEMs are open to collaborations, to reduce the speed-to-market as well as maintain capital efficiency," HDFC Securities said in a report.

"Part suppliers are attempting to be segment agnostic, developing components for ICE, hybrid and EV products."

Further, the report cited that other OEMs are adopting different methods towards electrification such as investing in startups and ramping up production of EVs in their portfolios. Besides, it said that passenger vehicle OEMs such as Maruti are expected to introduce hybrid models, which will enable the company to transition towards EVs in the medium term (FY25-30).

"However, as we look further ahead i.e. beyond 2030, the outlook becomes cloudy as the longer-term threat from BEVs and the resultant competitive dynamics will impact the traditional business models in different manners."

# Apple likely to use 120Hz ProMotion display in 'iPhone 13' lineup

■ SAN FRANCISCO

The next-gen iPhone 13 Pro lineup will reportedly come with 120Hz ProMotion display for the first time. According to AppleInsider, low-temperature polycrystalline oxide (LTPO) displays have been rumoured for the iPhone for about two years.

However, the report claims that the displays will finally arrive on the iPhone, granting the device a 120Hz refresh display for the first time. Citing "industry sources," supply chain monitor DigiTimes claims that Samsung and LG are converting iPhone-only production lines to LTPO tech production.

The report claims that this migration will end shortly, allowing both to provide the screens to Apple in time for use in 2021. Apple is said to be using the displays in its higher-end "iPhone 13" likely in the so-called "iPhone 13 Pro" and "iPhone 13 Pro Max". Display panel orders for lower-end "iPhone 13" models are expected to be filled by OLED suppliers LG Display and BOE.

Apple was reportedly working on a battery-saving technology for LTPO thin-film transistors prior to release of the iPhone 12.

## SUMMER SPECIAL TRAINS

**Northern Railway will run following summer special express trains as per the programme mentioned below:-**

04074 New Delhi - Darbhanga Jn. Special Express Train		2 Trip
STATIONS ↓	Train No. 04074	
	Arr.	Dep.
New Delhi	--	23:15
Kanpur Central	05:25	05:30
Aishbagh	06:50	07:00
Badshahnagar	07:25	07:28
Gorakhpur	11:45	11:55
Deoria Sadar	12:55	12:57
Siwan Jn.	13:58	14:00
Chhapra	15:15	15:25
Sonpur Jn.	16:30	16:35
Hajipur Jn.	16:50	16:55
Muzaffarpur Jn.	17:45	17:50
Samastipur	19:10	19:40
Darbhanga Jn.	21:00	--

**Days of Run:** 04074 Ex New Delhi from 11.04.2021 (Sunday) & 15.04.2021 (Thursday)  
**Accommodation:** Sleeper, Reserved 2<sup>nd</sup> seating, Chair Car

04076 New Delhi - Darbhanga Jn. Special Express Train		1 Trip
STATIONS ↓	Train No. 04076	
	Arr.	Dep.
New Delhi	--	23:15
Kanpur Central	05:25	05:30
Aishbagh	06:50	07:00
Badshahnagar	07:25	07:28
Gorakhpur	11:45	11:55
Deoria Sadar	12:55	12:57
Siwan Jn.	13:58	14:00
Chhapra	15:15	15:25
Sonpur Jn.	16:30	16:35
Hajipur Jn.	16:50	16:55
Muzaffarpur Jn.	17:45	17:50
Samastipur	19:10	19:40
Darbhanga Jn.	21:00	--

**Days of Run:** 04076 Ex New Delhi from 13.04.2021 (Tuesday)  
**Accommodation:** Sleeper, Reserved 2<sup>nd</sup> seating

**Note:** All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind of Information such as detailed Time-Table and Stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <http://www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

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## COVID -VE REPORT MUST AT WANKHEDE

The Mumbai Cricket Association has asked its Apex Council members to produce a Covid-19 negative certificate in order to enter the Wankhede stadium, which will host 10 matches of the 14th edition of the IPL. "Dear Apex Council members, As per BCCI's protocol, all the officials who would be attending the IPL 2021 matches at Wankhede Stadium are required to produce a Negative report of RT-PCR test conducted within 48 hours of the match day," MCA secretary Sanjay Naik, wrote in a note to all the members. "The tests are mandatory even for those who have been vaccinated. The report will have to be produced at the time of entry to the stadium on each match day."



# the pioneer agenda



**A rare Jugalbandi**  
A book that provides the political account of Vajpayee & Advani, and steers through the major events of right-wing politics



**Controlling monkey mind**  
Pursuing *Dhyana*, with focus on Lord Hanuman, would inspire the seeker to imbibe his spirit

I'm afraid of everything. But maybe when you're afraid of everything, it sort of seems like you're scared of nothing  
— Natalie Portman



Street artist and co-founder St+art India, Hanif Kureshi, Bombay Sapphire's Stir Creativity, Serendipity Arts Foundation and the Corporation of the City of Panaji join hands to paint Goa's dry waste sorting stations and turn them into works of art. NAVNEET MENDIRATTA speaks to the artist

You just cannot miss the beautiful mural painted in colours of Goa as you drive past the busy road in Dona Paula, Panjim, Goa. It's an unusual canvas. Painted in bright hues, mostly blue, this work of public art is painted on Goa's dry waste sorting stations, making for an attractive selfie point.

Called Goa Glitch, this mural is a joint initiative of Bombay Sapphire's Stir Creativity, Serendipity Arts Foundation, the Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP) and St+art India co-founder Hanif Kureshi. The idea being to tap into the imaginative spirit of those passing by. The mural features geometric visuals in beautiful hues of the Bombay Sapphire blue, representing the spirit of adventure and the openness of Goa, and bringing to life the endless coastlines, and the expansive blue skies of the city.

"The mural is about exploiting the colours of Goa, like a glitch," says Kureshi in a candid conversation post the unveiling of the mural. "I visualised it as glitching of the colours of Goan skies — in summer, monsoon, winter; morning, afternoon and noon... Different shades of blue that could also be interpreted as colours of water, more specifically the ocean. It's like the glitch of both skies and the ocean and that's why Goa Glitch," he says.

Kureshi has been working with Serendipity Arts for the last four years or since it started. In the first edition, Kureshi participated as an artist and then from the next edition onwards he worked as a curator, where he brought in St+art India and put together street art editions in Panjim. Bombay Sapphire's Stir Creativity platform aims to revive and enable creative self-expression amongst the audience. For over three decades, the

brand has collaborated with designers, artists, architects, and individuals from outside the creative industry to create artworks that reawaken creative potential.

"Each mural has a story. It's interesting when you work on the street, you find that there are so many stories that are waiting to be told. As for this, I am kind of familiar with Panjim's landscape and whenever a new structure comes up, we look at it as a possible canvas," he shares. This, or shall we say, these canvasses have been particularly interesting. "Not many are aware that these new structures are actually dry waste sorting stations. This is where CCP segregates the waste of dry kind such as paper, plastic, sharp objects, glass, steel and metal. These sheds play a very important role in the whole recycling scheme of things. Our idea was to bring attention to the process and promote recycling. We wanted to give it a new life and make it not look like a dustbin. And we thought what better than art to get the conversation started," he says, speaking of the collaboration.

Considering Dona Paula is one of the busiest public areas in Goa, the mural highlights the artist's message on the importance of sustainability and recycling very effectively. In India, Goa is one of the cities that recycles 80% of their waste with a strong model created for waste management and sustainability. In addition to stirring creativity among the community, the collaboration builds awareness for environmental sustainability and encourages people to be more conscious of their actions, he shares. Besides this shed, Kureshi is collaborating to paint at least three more in a year.

An alumni of Baroda School of Art, Kureshi started painting on streets in 2008. He began with Graffiti and gradually moved on to the world of street art which he says, he finds "more free". "The difference between Graffiti and Street Art, you could say, is the sense of style. While Graffiti can

NOT MANY ARE AWARE THAT THESE NEW STRUCTURES ARE ACTUALLY DRY WASTE SORTING STATIONS. THIS IS WHERE CCP SEGREGATES THE WASTE OF DRY KIND SUCH AS PAPER, PLASTIC, SHARP OBJECTS, GLASS, STEEL AND METAL. THESE SHEDS PLAY A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE WHOLE RECYCLING SCHEME OF THINGS. OUR IDEA WAS TO BRING ATTENTION TO THE PROCESS AND PROMOTE RECYCLING

be likened to vandalism, Street Art is more positively thought out and refined. So, yes, you could say that I sought an expression that is more positive and would provoke people to think," he shares.

From getting German street artist, Hendrick ECB to paint the 150 ft mural of Mahatma Gandhi at the Police Headquarters in New Delhi, as part of the St+Art Delhi street art festival in January 2014 to commemorate the martyrdom of the Father of the Nation, to putting together Street Art festival in Shahpur Jat and Hauz Khas in Delhi, the entire process evoked the idea on gentrification in the city. "The awareness regarding the street art grew as we moved towards Lodhi Colony and worked with the government properties. However, working at a central location like Lodhi Colony, we realised that there is no room for gentrification there. We have been doing similar work in Chennai and Mumbai," he shares.

While Kureshi shares that the response and reception to street art has grown in the past decade, the element of planning in the urban-scape continues to elude in the country. "There's no urban planning element to street art as of now. And that's why, I feel, it becomes more important for art to cover up for all that is not planned," he avers. Delhi's Lodhi Colony perhaps is a case in point but then there is a catch. "Maybe at some point, Lodhi Colony will be demolished and there would be high rises instead. But I still feel the art that found place there would leave a lasting impact. I think about the children growing up in Lodhi Colony and their imagination and what they would like think about art and perhaps, choosing art as a career option," he says.

On the subject of Street Art versus vandalism, Kureshi has a take: "There is a thin line between vandalism and street art. Personally, when I set out to do graffiti, I could have gone on to become a rebel. More so in principle, as there is a school that produces rebels and is more of a breeding ground where you adopt a bottom down approach. Street art, on the other hand, takes a top down approach where you get on the ground with more voices on the street to inspire more people to express themselves. You can be vocal about issues with the same amount of rights which any other company has in terms of putting in money and making an ad and

putting on the face. If carried out properly, with requisite permissions, even the people start owning street art. That's when the real change takes place."

This is also not the first time that Kureshi has lent his creativity to a cause. Kureshi has recently partnered with Art For Change, a virtual art challenge and exhibition, as one of the jury members. The initiative aims to change the narrative by turning the focus away from the victim and putting the spotlight on the perpetrator. Organised by Gordon Thomas Honeywell-GA & Ogilvy India in partnership with UN Women India, Girl Up (UN Foundation), reputed academic institutions like National Institute of Fashion Technology, Delhi (NIFT) and Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Pune (SIMB), this initiative seeks to unleash the power of creativity to transform the way our society deals with survivors of rape & sexual violence, shifting the accountability from the survivor to the perpetrator.

"Art for Change is a project all about violence against women, which includes domestic abuse. It is about inviting ideas about how we can change the situation so the project moves people to act instead of being mute spectators," he says.

Besides Delhi, Kureshi has been working a lot in Chennai. "We did a district called Kannagi Art District. I find cities in south India to be much more welcoming than the cities in north India. The art culture is there and people understand and respect the art as well as the artist," he shares.

Similarly, Kureshi-led St+art has worked on creating Mahim Art district in Mumbai; Ukkadam Art District in Coimbatore and Maqtha Art District in Hyderabad. "Different cities have different styles. So in Maqtha, which is predominantly a Muslim district, we try not to paint portraits. The focus is to be more abstract in that space, trying to be more sensitive to the surrounds. It is also about encouraging people to own the art and the space," he shares.

Ask him about the dream city to paint, Kureshi says: "We are okay with the metros that we are painting. There really is no dream city as such in our mind. The idea, however, is to go to cities where people are excited and reach out to the grassroots of India. For that is where the real artist would love to leave their mark.







# CHINA’S GAME ON NORTH KOREA

China has spread its tentacles across almost all corners of the world. With North Korea, China has employed a unique strategy both to support stability and to have a grip over the nuclear gear of this mysterious land.

Successive Chinese leaders have maintained three distinct strategies towards North Korea: first, not to provoke a war; second, to maintain the status quo; and finally, no to nuclear arsenal.

Succinctly, China is North Korea’s all-weather friend. Thus, though Beijing ostensibly condemns North Korea’s nuclear developments, it avowedly opposes harsh global sanctions on that mysterious nation. And China’s strategy is aimed at addressing two major critical concerns: to obviate massive refugee influx across 870-mile border area that it shares with North Korea and prevent an immediate collapse of the Kim rule.

The relationship between China and North Korea can aptly be described through this Chinese proverb: “Chun wang chi han” (If the lips are gone, teeth will be cold). It rightly indicates that both the countries are intimately interdependent. Beijing’s support for Pyongyang dates back to the historic 1950-53 Korean War. Those were the days, China under Chairman Mao, was more than eager to aid its northern Communist ally North Korea, against the capitalist South Korea. Its support to North Korea continues irrespective of whoever comes to power in Pyongyang.

Kim Il-sung from 1948-94, Kim Jon-il (1994-2011) and now Kim Jong-un since 2011 till date, China has been offering both political and economic support to various regimes of Kims.

On record, China is North Korea’s biggest trade partner till date. In fact, from 2000-2020, the bilateral trade between both the nations have increased almost ten-fold. Even amid tougher international trade

sanctions against North Korea, the long China-North Korea border is still open for established trade routes in commodities such as mobile phones, silkworms, fuel, seafood, etc.

Much beyond these regular economic activities, China has established a high-speed railway link between its border cities like Dandong and Shenyang so as to boost trade with North Korea. Both the nations have also opened a cargo and container shipping route to enhance the supply of coal from North Korea to China. China also offers aid to North Korea primarily in food and energy sectors.

Besides China, the US, Japan and South Korea provided more than 75 per cent of the food aid to North Korea since 1995. The country’s severe famine was caused by heavy floods and droughts that took lives of more than million people in the 1990s. Unfortunately, the country has not been able to come out of this prolonged food crisis till date. Thus, Pyongyang is fully dependent on China and its goodwill.

As per the estimates revealed by the UN agencies, more than 43 per cent of the country’s population is malnourished. Though Kim Jong-un is focusing on rapid economic development, the country has not been able to attract any foreign investment because of severe international sanctions. Its only hope is China and the country is looking for robust economic ties with the former.

However, China’s continued support to Pyongyang came under severe strain when the latter tested a nuclear weapon in October 2006. Subsequently, Beijing had to back a UN Security Council Resolution No. 1718 that led to the imposition of severe sanctions against North Korea. And for the first time, the international community witnessed transition of China’s tactics from sustained diplomatic support to outright punishment towards its Northern



Communist neighbour.

When in November 2017, Kim again tested a missile, Beijing called on Pyongyang to restrict all actions that create tensions in the Korean Peninsula. These all clearly

demonstrate that China is wary of North Korea’s belligerent moves that may militate against the mutual interests of both the countries.

Beijing has played the role of a powerbroker during all

high-profile global negotiations on North Korea. After two crucial summits between then US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, international policy makers have so far

focused mainly on denuclearisation steps, immediate measures towards peace in the Korean peninsula and finally, corresponding sanctions relief.

However, Pyongyang has been becoming an Asian tinder box. Kim’s madness and clandestine nuclear programme could turn the entire Korean peninsula into a serious war zone of the continent.

Probably, China knows best how to tackle Kim dynasty. But then at times some foundational questions arise as to whether North Korea is a strategic liability or an opportunity for China. The Communist leaders in Beijing must have realised the fact that its northern neighbour is to be tamed and to be used for all possible gains both domestically and internationally.

The world brands North Korea as a pariah state, but Beijing takes the Kim regime otherwise. Though apparently China has backed the UN sanctions against North Korea over its incessant efforts to become a formidable nuclear state, its financial and trade support directly and effectively facilitated Kim’s nuclear machine for long. This has also helped North Korean economically survive so far. Further, these Chinese efforts are indirectly dashed the hopes of the reunification of both the Koreas.

The US is literally pressuring North Korea to abandon its nuclear programme. Washington says once it is done, there could be a guarantee of trade, diplomatic relations, aid and normalisation of ties with the rogue state. Though the US and China both are interested in denuclearising North Korea, their approaches to the same goal are completely different. America wants China to use its economic leverage to pressure or convince Kim to abandon it nuclear ambition. Thus Washington officials look at China as a part of the solution but unfortunately Beijing is fast becoming part of the Korean conundrum only. For Xi, the

Chinese President, who is now a life-time leader, wants to use North Korea to win brownie points at the domestic front. US President Joe Biden is fully aware that only China can maintain stability in the region if not solve the Korean puzzle for now. Certainly, Beijing will use this opportunity to turn in his favour other vital issues that are constantly pestering Xi, like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang and South China Sea.

What is the problem with Kim? Kim wants to sustain his family rule. And for him, the nuclear button is the only guarantee for him to maintain both his hereditary regime and to threaten the neighbours and the world. Despite the leverage over North Korea, China and South Korea have failed to bring Kim to a negotiating table. Kim is totally against bringing reforms in his country. As such reform measures might bring down the curtain on his rule. The elites in North Korea know very well that its central problems lie within, not outside. Thus, they, along with Kim, ensure no reform takes place, in order to solidify their control over its impoverished populace.

Clearly, hollow summitry will not work with Kim. He demands serious negotiations on the nuclear front. It is better for Biden to extend grand gestures the way Trump did. At times, Beijing’s bosses have displayed stern attitudes towards Kim Jong-un. But Western nations, particularly, America will never ever believe the intentions of China. Because nowhere Chinese leadership has indicated its commitment towards implementing even the limited trade restrictions over this reclusive nation. And the whole world knows that only China keeps North Korea going and precisely surviving against all odds. Many in the West have accused China of circumventing global sanctions against North Korea.

(The writer an expert on international affairs)

**Though the US and China both have voiced concern over North Korea’s nuclear ambition, their approaches to the same goal are distinctly different. America wants China to use its economic leverage to pressure Kim to abandon nuclear ambitions. However, China under Xi, is willing to do only what suits its interests**



MAKHAN SAIKIA

## PERSPECTIVE

# No Olympic participation: Kim’s message for Biden

North Korea has become the world’s first country to drop out of the Tokyo Olympics, ostensibly because coronavirus has spread its deadly tentacles. It is true that the rogue nation is extremely sensitive about Covid-19, knowing that a widespread outbreak in a country with an already battered health system could be disaster.

However, North Korea also has previously used big sporting events to set up diplomacy with the United States meant to win it much-needed sanctions relief in return for nuclear disarmament pledges. Some see pulling out of the Olympics as the North sending Washington a message.

Purportedly, there is legitimate coronavirus fears. A state-run website has claimed that North Korea’s Olympic Committee has decided not to take part in the Tokyo Games slated to begin in July “to protect players from the world public health crisis caused by Covid-19.”

North Korea has previously boycotted Olympics and other international sports events for political reasons or failed to appear when none of its athletes or teams qualified. But this is the first time North Korea has pulled out of a major international sports event citing an infectious disease, according to Seoul’s Unification Ministry.

Pyongyang has developed a reputation for withdrawing from talks with Seoul and Washington before returning at the last minute to boost its bargaining power. But given that the country has been on high alert over Covid-19, experts say there is little chance that it will



In this Feb. 15, 2019, file photo, North Korea’s Olympic Committee President and Sports Minister Kim Il Guk, left, and South Korean Sports Minister Do Jong-hwan attend a meeting with the IOC for their bid to co-host the 2032 Summer Olympics, at the IOC Headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland

reverse its Olympics decision.

North Korea has shown “a coronavirus-related neurosis since it declared an emergency anti-virus system in January last year,” said Park Won Gon, a professor of North Korea studies at Seoul’s Ewha

Womans University.

Park said it is highly unlikely that North Korea will secure enough vaccines for its 26 million people or report major progress in its anti-virus fight by July.

North Korean officials

know how disastrous a major virus outbreak would be in a nation with public healthcare infrastructure that has been in a shambles for decades. North Korea has so far taken some of the world’s most draconian anti-virus steps, including a 15-



month-long closure of its international borders and the departure of foreign nationals.

North Korea still officially claims to be coronavirus free, an assertion many foreign experts dispute.

North Korea’s decision to skip the Olympics shows that it “thinks contact with foreigners is the most dangerous thing now,” said Seo Yu-Seok at the Seoul-based Institute of North Korean Studies.

However, there is certainly a message for US President Joe Biden. The North Korean announcement, three months before the Games begin, could signal that Pyongyang is rejecting a repeated push by Seoul to use the Olympics to create a mood for dialogue. It could also show a determination to boost pressure on the new US administration of President Biden.

North Korea is sending the message that it wants to deal directly with the US now rather than using the Olympics as a venue to reach out to Washington for talks, said Kwak Gil Sup, head of One

Korea Center, a website specialising in North Korea affairs.

Now-deadlocked nuclear talks between Pyongyang and Washington began in 2018 after a reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula following North Korea’s participation in the Pyeongchang Winter Games in the South earlier that year.

During those Olympics, athletes from the Koreas marched together under a single unification flag during the opening ceremony and formed the Korea’s first-ever joint team in women’s ice hockey. Kim Yo Jong, the influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, became the first member of the North’s ruling family to visit South Korea since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War.

There’s been little progress in nuclear talks the past two years. North Korea recently fired two ballistic missiles into the sea in the first such weapons tests in a year. Kim Yo Jong has warned Washington not to “cause a stink” and called South Korea’s president “a parrot raised by America.”

Experts say North Korea eventually wants talks with the Biden Administration to win sanctions relief and achieve better ties because its economy has been devastated by the pandemic, US-led sanctions and natural disasters last year.

Analyst Seo said North Korea likely wasn’t sure about the benefits of attending the Tokyo Games because Biden has made it clear that he won’t engage in made-for-TV summits with Kim Jong Un like his predecessor Donald Trump did.

“They knew that they would return home empty-handed from Tokyo,” Seo said.

But North Korea’s domestic difficulties may push it to pursue talks with the United States soon. Seo said North Korea could perform big weapons tests, such as an intercontinental ballistic missile launch, in coming months if it’s not satisfied with the Biden Government’s North Korea policy review expected to be completed soon.

(With inputs from AP)



