

**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

Established 1864

Published From  
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL  
BHUBANESWAR RANCHI  
RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD  
VIJAYWADA

BHUBANESWAR, SUNDAY APRIL 11, 2021; PAGES 8-4 ₹4



sunday pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



# Violence mars Bengal polls

## 4 dead as police open fire on mob attacking booth in Cooch Behar; TMC man kills 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,



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

Manirul and Samilul (three of 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

PTI

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

### Maha plans severe curbs; UP, Delhi, TN, Karnataka hit newer peaks

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 of the virus in the State.



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

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 election-eering.

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.

## 171 new Covid cases in BBSR

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Capital city Bhubaneswar on Saturday registered as many as 171 new Covid-19 cases, with which its total positives' tally surged to 33,364.

Out of the new cases, 126 were local contacts and 45 were from quarantine. Out of the new cases, 16 were from Khandagiri, 11 from Delta, six each from Tankapani and Old Town, five each from Chandrasekharpur and Patrapada and four from Niladri Vihar. Currently, the active cases in the city stood at 883. Till now, 250 patients have succumbed to the virus and 32,210 have recovered in the city. Notably, the city had registered 150 cases on Friday.

## 2 more die of Covid in State

- Year's highest daily spike of 1,374 +ve cases reported
- Maximum 355 cases in Sundargarh
- Total reaches 3,48,182
- 403 more recover

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Two more patients succumbed to Covid-19 on Saturday, increasing the total death toll to 1,926 in the State. The two deaths were reported from Kendrapada and Balangir districts.

And on the day, as many as 1,374 more people tested positive for the virus in 28 districts and the State pool, the highest single-day rise in 2021. With this, the total positive tally rose to 34,812 in the State.

Of the new cases, 812 were reported from quarantine and 562 were local contact cases.

Sundargarh district reported the highest 355 cases followed by Khorda with 193, Nuapada 135, Sambalpur 77,



Bargarh 59, Jharsuguda 52, Cuttack 51, Rayagada 47 and Kalahandi 45.

Besides, 45 cases were reported from the State pool.

Currently, the active cases in the State stood at 7,003 and the cumulative samples tested were 93,38,708 samples, including 33,996 on Thursday.

However, 403 patients recovered on the day, taking the total recoveries to 33,9,603 in the State.

## Naveen to review depts' progress cards from May 15

From May 15 Ministers to appraise CM about achievements

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Ahead of completion of the second year of his Government's fifth term on May 29, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Saturday told his Council of Ministers about his decision to review the progress of works of different departments from May 15 to 25.

During the review meetings, the Ministers in the presence of the concerned department Secretaries would appraise the Chief Minister about the achievements of their five major programmes. The CM wrote to



the Ministers in this regard.

Also, the Ministers would inform the CM on how the 5T initiative and 'Mo Sarkar' programme were carried out by their departments. In what way the 5T and 'Mo Sarkar' have improved the functioning of the departments would also be discussed during the review meeting, a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office mentioned.

The CM said, "People are

masters in a democratic system. We have to tell the 4.5 crores people of Odisha how far we have succeeded to keep the promises given to them. This will strengthen the faith of people in democracy."

The Council of Ministers on May 29 would discuss the success of each department so that the progress card would be subsequently presented before the people, the CMO statement added.

## Gangster Haider flees from SCB



PNS ■ CUTTACK

Notorious gangster Sleiman Haider of Kendrapada district on Saturday evening escaped from police custody while he was undergoing treatment at the SCB Medical College Hospital here.

While it could not be immediately ascertained, the gangster reportedly fled after

intoxicating the guard parties at the surgery ward of the hospital, where he was admitted a week ago for treatment.

"All exit points of the city have been sealed to nab the culprit," said Cuttack city DCP Prateek Singh.

Haider was lodged in the Jharpada jail of Bhubaneswar after he was convicted in a murder case.

## Rape victim undergoes MTP in 23rd week of pregnancy

PNS ■ CUTTACK

Following an express order from the Orissa High Court and the subsequent opinion from a medical board, doctors at the SCB Medical College Hospital here on Saturday medically terminated the pregnancy of a 14-year-old rape victim, who was pregnant for 23 weeks.

The High Court had on Friday directed the Superintendent of the referral hospital to constitute a board of three medical experts and examine the minor girl and go for medical termination of pregnancy "at the very earliest" if the board suggests so without waiting for any court orders. "The process of MTP has already begun as per the suggestion of a three-member Medical Board," informed

Hospital Superintendent Prof. Lucy Das on Saturday afternoon.

On being urgently mentioned, a Division Bench comprising Chief Justice S Muralidhar and Justice BP Routray had taken up a writ petition filed by a native of Puri who had prayed for medical termination of pregnancy of his daughter as per the MTP (Amendment) Act of 2021.

The Puri District Headquarters Hospital had referred the girl for abortion to the SCB Hospital on March 26 noting in the referral sheet that her pregnancy was 21 weeks old. The referral hospital on March 30 wrote a letter to the Director of Medical Education and Training (DMET) stating that since the pregnancy was more than 20 weeks old, the

MTP could only be done with permission from a court.

But since the MTP Act has been amended recently allowing termination of pregnancy by medical experts where the length of pregnancy has exceeded 20 weeks but has not exceeded 24 weeks and if two registered medical practitioners formed an opinion that such pregnancy shall constitute a grave injury to the mental health of the pregnant woman and where the pregnancy is alleged to have been caused by rape.

Considering the amendment and a recent judgment of the Supreme Court in the Chandrakant Jayantilal Suthar case, the High Court directed the SCB Hospital to form an opinion by Saturday noon and proceed to arrange for the MTP at the very earliest.

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

Slice of resilient life

**MINARI**  
**Amazon VOD**  
**\*ing: Steven Yeun, Han Ye-ri, Alan Kim, Noel**  
**Kate Cho, Youn Yuh-jung, Will Patton**  
**Rated: 7/10**

Minari may be a Korean plant in real meaning but the movie by this name is larger than life, a slice of life replete with dreams, aspirations, struggles, resilience and sunshine even in its deepest darkest moments.

It is surprising that the film got its Golden Globe nomination (it won the best foreign language film award eventually) in the foreign film category despite being directed by an American and unfolding in America, actually deep into rural America. That it did not meet the Globe guideline of at least 50 per cent of it being in English language explains it, even though it would stand tall in the Best Feature film, Best direction, Best musical score and many more categories.

A family of Korean immigrants moves from California to the rural pocket of Arkansas to "live once again", as the main protagonist puts it. The couple Jacob and Monica and their son and his maternal grandmother move to a makeshift house in a trawler to get used to a new life full of firsts and struggles in rugged terrain far removed from the bright lights of California, only to find leaking roofs, a barren land to till and a farming community that is new and alien to them.

The story is as much about resilience as it is about hope with an underlying sense of gratitude to life itself, life despite all its challenges. The film is engaging though slow but when has life unfolded so beautifully and in such real terms on the big screen?



Pathos is aplenty, but lining it up well is humour, be it around the chubby child who is forced to sleep with his snoring granny or their conversations which depict the absolute contrast in local American and immigrant Korean cultures. For one, as the impudent child puts it, American grandmothers do not use cuss words or wear men's underwear — as his granny does.

The film is a must-watch not because of its reality bytes but because it is laid out so simply that it tugs at your heart from all quarters, it grows on you, it immerses you and it makes you laugh and cry at the same time.

The music is haunting as much as the story this award-winning director Lee Isaac Chung brings to you from the depth of his heart and craft.



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...Astitra 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.

# 47 silver bricks recovered from Emar Mutt

Lawyer: Mahant to file contempt plea against excavation

SAROJ KUMAR MISHRA ■ PURI

As many as 47 silver bricks were recovered from the famous Emar Mutt of Puri on Saturday. The recovered materials also included ornaments, utensils and swords which had been kept beneath the floors of rooms.

Excavations were still going

on and would continue on Sunday with officials starting inventory of the recovered materials and their valuations. Each silver brick weighed 30 kg with logo of the East India Company printed on them.

The excavation was conducted by officials of the Endowment Department, a newly-formed trust board of the mutt and police. During the excavations, Emar Mutt chief Mahant Ramanuja Das was present though he has been discharged of all powers within the mutt by the Endowment



Department with the appointment of the trust board members.

The trust consists of heads of various mutts and monasteries in Puri. They would look after the mutt onwards.

Notably, as many as 522 silver bricks of same weight each had already been recovered from the Emar Mutt in 2011 and are now in the locker of district administration.

Except the endowment officials, new trustees and police, nobody was allowed inside the mutt. Even the lawyer of Mahant Ramanuja

# 16 new positives in Brahmapur

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

At least 16 more corona positive cases have been identified in Brahmapur city.

Among them, one is a male from Dharmanagar, one female from Gajapatnagar III Line, two males from Gajapatnagar 7th Line, two females and one male from the MKCG Medical College Hospital, one female from Sidharthanagar 1st Lane; one female from Police Colony,



one female and one male from Premnagar 6th Lane, one male from Baikunthanagar II Line and one female and two males from Jyotinagar.

An official said that a total of 1,441 persons were administered Covid vaccine in the city on Friday.

# Plainclothes cops to enforce Covid norms

20 teams to be deployed in BBSR

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A day after Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik launched the 14-day 'Mask Abhiyaan', the Commissionerate Police (CP) on Saturday formed special teams for strict enforcement of Covid appropriate behaviour in the twin cities of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar.

Bhubaneswar DCP (Security) Nirmal Satpathy said that 20 teams have been formed by police to strictly enforce the mask-wearing norm in Bhubaneswar. The teams would be engaged for surveillance in various crowded

places, including Market Building and other busy markets here.

"Plainclothes police personnel will conduct raids to nab violators of the norm and stringent action will be taken against them," he warned.

Notably, on Friday, the State Government doubled the penalty for not wearing mask. Violators would have to pay Rs 2,000 for first two violations and Rs 5,000 for subsequent offences. Earlier, the fine amount was Rs 1,000 for first two violations and Rs 5,000 for subsequent offences.

In the last 24 hours, Odisha police acted against 12,145 violators and collected fine of Rs 38,98,250 for flouting masking and physical distancing norms.

# Migrants' return: 'State can tackle situation'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

With migrants returning to the State amidst the Covid resurgence throughout the country, the Odisha Government on Saturday asserted that it is all prepared to tackle the situation.

Speaking to mediapersons, Labour Minister Susanta Singh said migrants are returning to Odisha from some highly-infected States and they are being tested.

All district administrations have been asked to keep Temporary Medical Camps (TMCs) ready to meet the eventuality. A detailed guideline for migrants returning to the State would be issued

soon.

He further said checking at border checkpoints has also been intensified. People with negative RT-PCR test report (not more than 72 hours old) are being allowed to enter the State. Those not producing the negative report are being sent to home isolation.

"Fear for the virus has reduced among the people as compared to last year. The number of cases in Chhattisgarh has increased manifold, leading to rise in infections in western Odisha districts.

However, bus services to and from Chhattisgarh have been completely suspended," Singh added.

# Pipili Cong candidate Covid +ve



PNS ■ PIPILI

With less than 10 days left for the by-election in the Pipili Assembly constituency in Puri district scheduled on April 17 and when the campaigning for it has reached feverish pitch, Congress candidate Ajit Mangaraj has tested positive for Covid-19.

Mangaraj took to his social media handle to share the news.

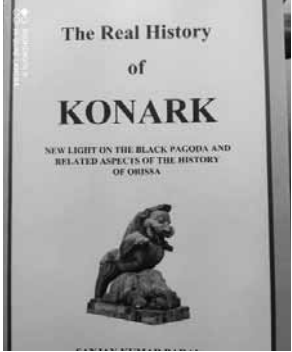
Moreover, he urged Congress workers not to create any rumour and focus on how the party would perform well in the by-election.

# 'THE REAL HISTORY OF KONARK' Book throws new light on the origin of Sun Temple

ANIL DHIR ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Sun Temple at Konark has an intriguing history which has left many awed and curious. While the beauty and grandeur of the edifice is spell-binding even in its ruins, the missing links in its life cycle have remained a jigsaw puzzle which very few have been able to decipher. Shrouded in mystery, the Sun Temple is unique with many legends and theories on its construction, consecration and subsequent collapse.

Historians have been debating on the origins of the temples since the last two centuries, but there is no unanimity yet on whether the temple was ever completed or how it was reduced to ruins. The sheer quantum of research has raised



more questions than answers.

Sanjay Baral's book "The Real History of Konark" attempts to answer many unresolved questions which have puzzled scholars and archaeologists. Whether the temple is actually a 13th-Century edifice as believed or had the con-

struction begun much earlier in the 9th Century? The author has analysed the sociopolitical conditions of Odisha during the 13th Century and questioned the probability of it being made during that period. The Buddhist relevance and influence prevalent in the area too has been studied by the author. The Konark region was originally a well-known centre of Tantrayana Buddhism, particularly of the Kalachakrayana and Sahajayana sects. Quite a few scholars have opined that the temple has imprints of Buddhism iconology. The book explores new avenues for objective fact-finding.

The author, who stays near the temple, spent three years in researching its unknown aspects.

# SCB Nursing College closed

PNS ■ CUTTACK

In view of the surge in Covid-19 cases across the State, the SCB College of Nursing in Cuttack was closed on Saturday until further orders. As per the order of Health and Family Welfare Department Secretary, the College of Nursing, SCB Medical College and Hospital, is hereby closed until further orders, a notice issued by the college Principal stated.

All the students were directed to vacate the hostels by 5.00 pm of the day, failing which they would be evacuated with help of the district administration, the notice stated.

# '1,032 Ganjam villages child marriage-free'

All-out efforts on to prevent underage marriage: DM

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAPUR

The district level task force committee meeting of "Nirbhaya Kadhee" and "Mo Gelha Jheeta" was held in virtual mode through video conferencing here on Friday afternoon in which the Ganjam district Collector Vijaya Amruta Kulange presided.

Kulange in his address said that, daughter is neither a dangerous entity nor a liability to the family, but she is the most valuable asset. The birth list of all the female children are already available with the Anganwadi workers. Information will be collected from them through

the District Social Welfare Officer for induction in the list for future use, he added.

The district administration has decided to focus on far flung remote and rural areas first in order to check and prevent the child marriage menace. In the process, the administration has also decided to observe "Oath Child Marriage Week," he added.

All information about the female child between the age group of 14 years and 18 years who leave education midway will be maintained in a database. As of now, 1,032 villages of Ganjam district have already been declared "Child marriage-free village" which is quite encouraging, Kulange pointed out.

The district administration would give more emphasis on the good health of the female children and will sensitize them that in event any of their parents compels them to

marry before 18 years against their will, they can immediately inform the district administration for prompt and appropriate action to prevent the marriage, he said.

Notably, the district administration has clearly stated that each family or parent having a girl child will have to give a declaration or an undertaking in writing to the effect that they will not marry off their daughter below the age of 18 years. Similarly, the priests who perform wedding ceremony also will have to give an undertaking or declaration to the effect that they will not cooperate with those parents who go for underage marriage.

The Ganjam Collector has urged the Anganwadi Workers and ASHAs to sensitize the parents of female child to celebrate the birth day of their daughters as a token of their love and good will towards them.

# Thakuran Ghata Jatra held amid Covid protocol in Brahmapur

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The famous Maa Budhi Thakurani Ghata Jatra was conducted on Friday night amidst strict Covid safety protocols as the entire area was under Section 144 CrPC from 6 pm of Friday to 6 am of Saturday.

The traditional ritual of the Devi's journey from Maa Budhi Thakurani Temple to the temporary pandal at her parental house in Deshi Behera Sahi was conducted in the midnight along the way, which traditionally used to draw crowds.

Strict prohibitory orders were in force in six streets that come between the routes. As per the decision, a maximum of 25 priests, servitors and authorised persons of the Jatra management committee participated in the procession.

The goddess will stay in parental house at temporary



**Strict prohibitory orders were in force in six streets that come between the routes**

pandal for seven days. Adequate police personnel were deployed for smooth conduct of the procession.

Thakurani Jatra host P Durgaprasad Desibehera coordinated the smooth conduct of the Ghata Jatra.

# 'AIIMS BBSR OPD not closed'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Amidst a buzz doing the rounds on social media platforms that the outpatient department (OPD) services at the AIIMS Bhubaneswar were suspended from Saturday, the Director of the premier medical institution Dr Gitanjali Batmanabane has cleared the air. She said that some messages in this regard being circulated on many WhatsApp groups are not true. "This is false news. The circular which is supposed to have been sent by the Joint Medical Superintendent is a hoax. He has never signed anything like this," she said.

There are some reports in media, including TV channels, with photograph of the AIIMS Bhubaneswar that the institution has suspended its OPD services till further orders.

Dr Batmanabane said, "I want all public to know that we have not closed our OPD services as of now."

# Bodies of lovebirds seized from Kendrapada beach



# Murder suspected

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

The Rajnagar police on Friday seized bodies of two juveniles, including a girl and a boy in Chinchiri-Jaudia mouth near Pentha sea beach.

While the deceased boy's family earlier had lodged a missing report at Nayapalli police station at Bhubaneswar, the deceased girl's family had lodged a missing complaint at Rajnagar police station.

According to police sources, the deceased boy, Prasant Patra is the son of

Pabitra Mohan Patra of Ostia village under Rajnagar police limit. Pabitra is working in PHED at Bhubaneswar and staying at Nayapalli. Prasant was a student of plus two first year arts at Rajdhani College. The deceased girl Purnima Mahanty was the daughter of Nirmala Mohanty of Chandan Nagar in Pattamundai police station. The deceased girl was studying at Pattamundai Women's College.

Prasant on last Wednesday had left his house by informing his family that he was going to attend a marriage function of his friend at Puri and did not return. Purnima also had left her house by informing her parent that she was going to attend practical examination to the college and did not return

on that evening.

However, two days later, the bodies were found lying at the sea coast of Chinchiri-Jaudia mouth by the forest personnel on Friday afternoon.

It seems the deceased who were distant relatives were in love with each other and they might have been killed, said police. Injury marks were found on the bodies. While cut marks were found on the throat of the Prasant and blood was oozing from his mouth, ear, eye and nose, Purnima's right hand had been amputated from her shoulder.

Notably, some youths of Rajnagar earlier had threatened Prasant to kill him and in this regard a case earlier had been lodged at the Nayapalli police station.

# 4 cinema halls sealed in Peralakhemundi

PNS ■ PARALAKHEMUNDI

Even though the coronavirus graph has shown an upward trend in the State, many people are flouting the norms of the Government, forcing the authorities to act.

On Saturday, police sealed two cinema halls in Paralakhemundi of Gajapati district for violating the Covid rules and two for not renewing licence.

The Jai Maa and Laxmi cinema halls have been sealed until further orders by the administration. The enforcement team found a huge crowd

thronged the cinema halls violating the social distancing rules. Police also resorted to a lathicharge to disperse the huge crowd which had thronged the cinema hall to watch a Telugu movie.

Later, two more cinema halls AJ Cinema and Natraj Cinema hall in the town for not renewing the licences to exhibit films, said Paralakhemundi Tehsildar Achyutananda Jani.

Besides the four cinema halls in Paralakhemundi, one cinema hall in Rayagada was also sealed for violating Covid-19 norms on Friday.

# Jail Adalat in State prisons from Apr 24

Plea bargaining cases, petty offences to be taken up

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Special Jail Adalats will be organised for first time in Odisha in coordination with the State Legal Service Authority (SLSA) and State Prisons and Correctional Services Administration.

Accordingly, the first Special Jail Adalats will be organised on April 24 in all the prisons across the State, said sources.

Thanks to proactive initiative of DG Prisons, Santosh Upadhyay, such efforts are being taken up for the benefit of inmates. DG Prisons Upadhyay has directed all the Jail Superintendents in this regard and directed to hold the same in their respective prisons.

States like Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand have followed the practice of holding Jail Adalats inside prisons on plea bargaining cases, petty offences which are compoundable as per CrPC.

This will help prisoners to get due court orders in petty cases, inside jails.

Beginning from April 24, the Jail Adalats will be organised every month and it will be

like Lok Adalat inside prisons.

Around 381 prisoners are in jails due to want of bail conditions/surety, though granted bails by courts.

All the details will be shared to the SLSA for issuing advisory to the District Legal Service Authority (DLSA) for appropriate revision orders by the higher courts. The Jail Superintendents will coordinate with the Secretary DLSA for facilitating identification of suitable cases for consideration by the Special Jail Adalats.

In the Jail Adalats, cases of petty criminal offences or criminal compoundable offences and also Under Trial Prisoners (UTPs), who want to avail the benefit of plea bargaining will

# SDMO HECKLING CASE OMSA threatens stir in Baleswar

If culprits not arrested in 72hrs

PNS ■ BALESWAR

The doctors under the banner of Orissa Medical Services Association (OMSA) have threatened to embark on agitation if the people involved in heckling the Nilgiri Sub-Divisional Medical Officer (SDMO) are not brought to book within 72 hours.

The decision has been taken by the doctors following

a meeting held on Friday. According to reports, the situation erupted after a group of people abused and heckled SDMO Ajay Samal asking why Union Minister Pratap Sarangi was not invited to the inauguration function and why there was no name of the Minister on the plaque.

The inauguration function was held on Wednesday as the local truck association donated two cabins to Rogi Kalyan Samiti in the SDM.

After the inaugural meeting a group barging into the chamber of SDMO Samal besides abusing the latter in slangs also heckled Samal in

the presence of CDMO and other medical staffs.

Later, they broke the plaque in public glare. SDMO Samal, however, maintained that in the earlier meeting it was decided by all attendees who would be invited and it was decided the local MLA and the district collector would be guest. Under the circumstances, what was his fault?

However, following his hacking in abusive languages, Samal went on leave since then where the medical staff began protest demanding arrest of all culprits by wearing black badges.

Project, the State Prison Administration has issued one laptop to each jail to take care of eMulakat, video conferencing with courts and other projects under ePrisons.

Under modernizing jails, the Prison Administration has issued organic compost machines, vacuum cleaners, power sprayers, eKiosks and washing machines in 20-21.

In the meantime, extra 870 capacity of wards sanctioned by the State Government in 2020-21 for various jails and 135 new staff quarters have been sanctioned. Steps are being taken for introduction of eCustody certificates to be issued to courts, after training by the NIC, said sources.

# OHRC to probe in K’pada whistleblower murder

RAJESH BEHER ■ KENDRAPADA

The Odisha Human Rights Commission (OHRC) handed over Dalit rights activist Ranjan Kumar Das’s alleged death case to the Additional DG of Police –cum-Director Investigation, OHRC to personally inquire into the matter and submit report within six weeks, in view of the seriousness of the allegations in the case.

The direction was made following the SP of Kendrapada submitted an inquiry report and response submitted by Sanjukta Panigrahi, one of the signatories to the complaint.

Having considered the facts stated in the report and the reply on behalf of the com-

plaints, the commission felt that the inquiry of the matter be handed over to OHRC investigation wing. The divisional bench has been conducting an inquiry in the alleged matter.

Notably, the OHRC on February 2020 had directed the SP of Kendrapada to submit his reaction on the murder case of RTI activist Das, before March 2. One Debesh Das and other RTI activists earlier had filed a complaint before the OHRC, seeking the latter to intervene in the case following the inaction of police in the case.

The complainants alleged that on February 1 morning, activist Das was found lying dead on road side of Beruhan village under Marshaghai police station. Hundreds of

locals, family members of the deceased, friends and relatives of the deceased suspected Das’s death as cold blooded murder over vengeance.

The police did not reach the spot on their own. After strong resentment by an angry mob along with staging a road blockade, the Marshaghai police were forced to arrive at the spot. But, they did not examine whether the person was dead or alive.

Only after an FIR was lodged by the deceased’s brother-in-law at around 12 noon, the police team led by the SP of Kendrapada prepared the inquest report, recovered the body and dispatched it for autopsy to the SCB Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack, the complainants alleged

# State capital foundation day on April 13

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A preparatory meeting was held on Monday at the Capital High School here for celebration of the State capital foundation day. Owing to Covid restrictions, this time the usual three-day-long celebration from April 13 to 15 would be limited to one day only on April 13.

It was decided that people would gather at the Capital Foundation Stone site. BDA and PWD Division-1 have been requested to make the site attractive. A special event would be organised in the evening to felicitate 13 eminent

citizens with ‘Rajdhani Gourv’ honour. The State Assembly Speaker has been invited to grace the occasion. Various institutions like commercial establishments, towers and prominent Government buildings would be illuminated to mark the foundation day.

The meeting was chaired by Rajdhani Pratistha Utstav Committee president Pradosh Patnaik, The Bhubaneswar ADM, representatives of BDA, BMC, CRPF, Traffic police and PWD and HMs of various schools were present. Committee vice-president Pradyumna Mohanty proposed a vote of thanks.

# Crorepati clerk arrested on DA charges



PNS ■ CUTTACK

Vigilance officials on Saturday arrested a Senior Clerk posted at the office of Chief Conservator of Forest (Kendu Leaf), Cuttack on the charge of amassing disproportionate assets amounting to over Rs 1.50 crore.

During raids conducted on Friday, the anti-graft agency had found properties worth over Rs 3 crore in the name of the clerk Dillip Kumar Jena, a native of Ratanpur village under the Gandia police limits in Dhenkanal district. He was staying at Government quarters at Ghatikia in Bhubaneswar.

Properties detected include a triple-storied building worth Rs 1.8 crore located at Mallick Complex in Jagmara and gold jewellery, vehicles, cash amounting to over Rs 2 crore.

The disproportionate assets were estimated to be 252 per cent higher than his income. Further investigation was underway, said an official.

# RPDAC meet: MCL areas’ issues discussed

RAJ KUMAR SHARMA ■ JHARSUGUDA

A meeting of the Rehabilitation and Periphery Development Advisory Committee (RPDAC) was held on Friday in the Jharsuguda DRDA conference hall under the chairmanship of RDC (Northern Division) and Chairman of the committee Anil Kumar Samal.

Various issues relating to the Mahanadi Coalfields Limited’s (MCL) Ib Valley, Orient and Lakhanpur mining areas were discussed threadbare.

RDC Samal told media that displacement issues were discussed in the meeting. Besides, MCL CSR funds would be utilised for converting some high schools into



smart schools in the district. It was also decided to give due compensation to the displaced families within a reasonable

timeframe. Further, more job opportunities would be created for local unemployed persons.

Steps would be taken to convene RPDAC meeting at least once in every two to three months, Samal said.

# IN RAYAGADA

# OMOA threatens stir against apathy

PNS ■ RAYAGADA

The Odisha Ministerial Officers’ Association (OMOA), Rayagada unit held its meeting here and discussed its various demands.

They expressed their anguish over the status of their grade pay, house rent allowance, restructuring of cadres, pay structure, growing work load, promotion and facilities to their children, etc.

The members lamented



the apathy shown by the Government towards them and warned to resort to agitation if the demands are not met.

District president OMOA Kali Rath, secretary Rama Chandra Rath, advisor Rup Keshari Dalei, among others were present. It was unanimously resolved to approve the working committee constituted last year. President of Odisha Non-gazetted Officers’ Coordination Committee, Rayagada Unit Niranjana Nayak advised to strengthen the association.

# ‘Shift BU Journalism exam date’

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

Demanding shifting of the date of internal examination, students of the PG Department of Journalism and Mass Communication of the Berhampur University on Friday submitted a memorandum to the Chairman PG Council.

The students cited the delay in issuance of the Library Card which was much after the classes began. They got cards only on Thursday. Earlier, the university authorities had notified to conduct the internal examinations from April 15 to 17.

Due to the delay in issuance of library cards, the students alleged that they were not able to take course books and other learning materials. The student delegates met Chairperson of the PG Council Prof Arundhati Rath and requested her to shift the scheduled date of examination.



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Niladrivihar Youth & Cultural Association (NYCA), a socio-cultural organisation has greeted Dr Bidisha Panda, a House Surgeon, for receiving gold medal and citation from Odisha Higher Education Minister Aruna Kumar Sahoo in the presence of Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu in

the 50th Convocation ceremony of Utkal University.

Bidisha, daughter of senior member of the association and an employee of KIIT University Biswanath Panda and Manorama Panda, has secured highest mark in FMT section in final MBBS from the SCB Medical College.

NYCA president Dr Prakash Chandra Panigrahi, secretary Biswajit Pattnaik and

members of the association expressed that Bidisha has proved how hard work, dedication, devotion and determination move a person to achieve pinnacle of success.

Bidisha is also recipient of various awards like Rajiv Gandhi Sadhabana Samman, Mother terrace peace award and Vivekananda International Award.

# CS reviews Covid situation in Kalahandi

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

To assess the Covid spread and to take stock of the ground situation in bordering districts, Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra along with Health and Family Welfare Additional Chief Secretary Pradeep Kumar Mohapatra visited Kalahandi district on Saturday.

The high-level team visited district Covid hospital and

looked into the treatment facility, availability of medicines, beds, ICUs and other facilities there. Then after Chief Secretary Mohapatra reviewed preparedness of the district with District Collector Gavili Parag Harshad and Officials for containing spread of the second surge of Covid; and gave necessary directions for enforcement of Covid appropriate behavior, increasing the RTPCR test, reactivating Covid

**The high-level team visited district Covid hospital and looked into the treatment facility, availability of medicines, beds, ICUs and other facilities there**

Care Centres, minimum seven days isolation of the people coming from outside States, etc. The CS also assessed the

available infrastructure and resources in the district. He assured the district administration to provide specialist Doctors and Life Support ambulance to the district.

The delegation included Health Director Dr Bijoya Mohapatra and DMET Dr CBK Mohanty. The meeting was attended by Superintendent of Police Sravan Bibek, CDMO Dr Pratap Behera, Public Health Officer Rakesh Sahu.

# Chandigarh to have wildlife census

## From May 1 to June 30

MANOJ KUMAR ■ CHANDIGARH

Chandigarh will have a wildlife census from May 1 to June 30 this year to determine the animals and birds in the Union Territory.

Chief Conservator of Forest and Chief Wildlife Warden Debendra Dalai on Saturday said that Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun has been asked to carry out a wildlife census in Chandigarh along with Haryana which would carry out wildlife census from May 1 to June.

Talking to ‘The Pioneer’

over the phone, Dalai said that to prepare an inventory of wild animals, the UT Forest and Wildlife Department has planned to carry out a second wildlife census in Chandigarh.

The first wildlife census was held in 2010. “We earlier had a verbal communication with the director of WII, Dehradun, to carry out the wildlife census in Chandigarh along with Haryana. Now, we will soon write a letter to WII, Dehradun, regarding the same. If our proposal is accepted then the wildlife census in Chandigarh would also start along with Haryana from May 1,” he said.

Dalai further said that the availability of funds is no longer an issue. The department

would not need a large fund to carry out wildlife census in Chandigarh.

The wildlife census would be carried out in the Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary, spread over an area of 26 square kilometres in the catchment area of the Sukhna Lake.

It would take nearly a week to complete the wildlife census exercise in Chandigarh. The master trainers of WII Dehradun will give adequate training to all the staff in Chandigarh and those who would be part of the wildlife census exercise.

The Chandigarh Chief Wildlife Warden said that the first wildlife census was carried out in the Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary a decade ago. The second census could not be carried

out in the last year due to the pandemic and Covid-induced lockdown in the country, he added.

Another senior officer of UT Forest and Wildlife Department said that a team of experts from the WII, Dehradun, environmentalists, representatives of NGOs and biology and zoology students from Panjab University took part in the first census held in 2010. The team took three days to count nine species of mammals and 65 species of birds by using direct evidence, including animals and birds spotted in the area, and indirect evidence such as footprints and animal faeces.

He further said that by using direct evidence, including the animals and birds spotted

in the area, and indirect evidence like foot-prints and animal faeces, nine species of mammals and 65 species of birds were accounted for. As per the first census report prepared by the WII, Dehradun, the population of sambar in the sanctuary was between 1,000 and 1,200 and peafowl population was between 900 and 1,100.

However, leopards were not spotted directly, but their footmarks were found. Main animals spotted in the sanctuary include sambar, chital, pangolin (anteater), wild boar, jackal, small Indian civet, jungle cat, porcupine, Hanuman langur, rhesus monkey, Indian hare, common mongoose and three-striped palm squirrel, he added.

# Indian adults struggling with obesity on the rise, says Report

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The rising population of adult obese in India has exceeded the total population of Australia and rising obesity cases several other health problems amongst adults.

Recently, the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020 report has brought out that more Indian adults became obese during 2012-2016 as the number of adults (18 years and above) who are obese grew from 25.2 million in 2012 to 34.3 million in 2016, thereby growing from 3.1 per cent to 3.9 per cent.

Dr Anupam Goel, Consultant Minimal Access Metabolic & Bariatric Surgery,

Max Super Speciality Hospital Mohali, said, “Obesity is arguably the most pressing public health problem we face and increasing rate of obesity amongst adults is a grave issue as it brings a host of other diseases and they constitute the largest chunk of the population”.

On the treatment of obesity, Dr Goel said the conventional treatment methods like diet, exercise and medications for certain BMI range has shown fruitful results. However, when it comes to long term weight loss, Bariatric surgery or weight loss surgery has proven to be the most effective. The main purpose of bariatric surgery is making changes in the digestive system which helps

in long term and healthy weight loss.

On the insurance coverage of Bariatric surgery, he said, as per IRDAT’s (Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India) latest guidelines, Bariatric or weight loss surgery has been included under medical insurance cover helping patients in need of financial assistance. One of the methods in Bariatric surgery is Laparoscopy, which is a minimally invasive technique requiring small incisions, making wound healing faster, less pain and early recovery.

This also helps in the early discharge of the patient and making them get back to their routine faster.

# 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 Dhanehari 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

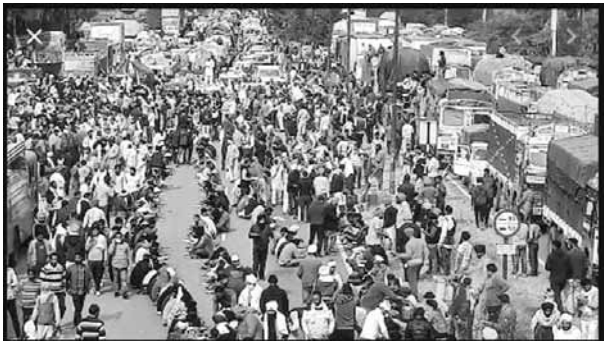
Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Saturday appealed to the farmers protesting at Delhi borders to call off their long-running agitation in view of second wave of Covid-19 cases, saying the Government is ready for a discussion whenever they come with a concrete proposal. Tomar expressed 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. Archeologists 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.rajabasthan.gov.in](http://www.sppp.rajabasthan.gov.in), [www.eproc.rajabasthan.gov.in](http://www.eproc.rajabasthan.gov.in) and [www.jda.urban.rajabasthan.gov.in](http://www.jda.urban.rajabasthan.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 कार्यों 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 कैला
1.	नगर निगम क्षेत्र के अंतर्गत 20 पार्कों के सौन्दर्यीकरण 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.srtc@rajasthan.gov.in](mailto:pro.srtc@rajasthan.gov.in)

क्रमांक : विज्ञापन संख्या 05/2021-22

दिनांक : 08.04.2021

**ई-बोली सूचना**

निगम द्वारा निम्न कार्य हेतु ई-बोली के माध्यम से निर्धारित प्रपत्र में ऑनलाइन बोलियाँ आमंत्रित की जाती है। बोली से संबंधित विस्तृत विवरण वेबसाइट [www.srtc.rajasthan.gov.in](http://www.srtc.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 निर्धारित प्रपत्र में ई-बोली प्रक्रिया द्वारा ऑनलाइन बोली आमंत्रित की जाती है।

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).

0013

For Principal Chief Materials Manager

Like us on :

[facebook.com/WesternRly](https://www.facebook.com/WesternRly)

Follow us on :

[twitter.com/WesternRly](https://twitter.com/WesternRly)

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

IAN S ■ 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

IAN S ■ 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

PTI ■ 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

IAN S ■ 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

IAN S ■ 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

PTI ■ 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

IAN S ■ 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



IAN S ■ 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

IAN S ■ 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

IAN S ■ 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 rumored 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.

**RailMadad Helpline No.**

**139**

Please join us on



821/2021

**Visit RailMadad website:-**

[www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in)

**Download RailMadad app.**



**NORTHERN RAILWAY**

Always at your service

Visit us at : [www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in)

Serving Customers with a Smile

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Mrs. Vinlesh Gupta is the owner and in possession of Property bearing No. 460/3 area measuring 126.66 sq. yds., built on Plot No.3, out of Kharsa No. 22/2/2/35, situated in the area of Village Chandrawali alias Shirdara, in the abadi of Gali No.17, Block No. 25-A, Vishwas Nagar known as Shola Nath Nagar, Ilaga Shikharda, Delhi. "Said property" by virtue of Sale Deed dated 27.09.2018, duly registered as Document No. 8240, Further, Original Regd. Relinquishment Deed dated 10.07.2000 executed by Mr. Sushil Kumar Arya, Vijay Kumar Arya & Mrs. Sevita Agarwal in favour of Mrs. Sharda Devi in respect of the said property is lost. All persons are hereby informed that above mentioned owner intends to take loan from our client i.e. DCB Bank Ltd., by mortgaging the said property to our client, if anybody has any objection's upon said property its ownership & Title/ its Sale and Mortgage, kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 15 days of the present.

**Kumar & Associates (Advocates & Consultants)**  
200, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 23, Shivaji Marg, Moti Nagar, N. Delhi-15  
Ph : 011-41112527-28 kumarassociatesadvocate@gmail.com

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

This is to inform you that Late Shri. Sunil Singh S/o Shri. Ratan Singh R/o Village- Shajapur Govardhanpur, Post-Dadri, Distt. G.B. Nagar U.P. has a plot in Noida whose no. is Plot No. GT-70, Sector-145, Noida G.B. Nagar (U.P) is registered at sub registrar office Dadri in Bahi No. 3, Jld No. 65, at page no. from 405-408 on 06.03.1995 at serial no. 65. So above plot is being transferred to the name of Pravin Kumar S/o Late Shri. Ranveer Singh, Tajveer Singh S/o Late Shri. Ranveer Singh, Lokesh Chouhan S/o Khillu Singh R/o Village- Shajapur Govardhanpur, Post-Dadri, Distt. G.B. Nagar U.P. on the basis of registered will. So all related people is informed that if someone has any objection about transfer of above plot, then he submit his objection in Noida Authority Residential department with all document proof within 30 days from the publishing date of this information.

**Shri Pravin Kumar**

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."



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

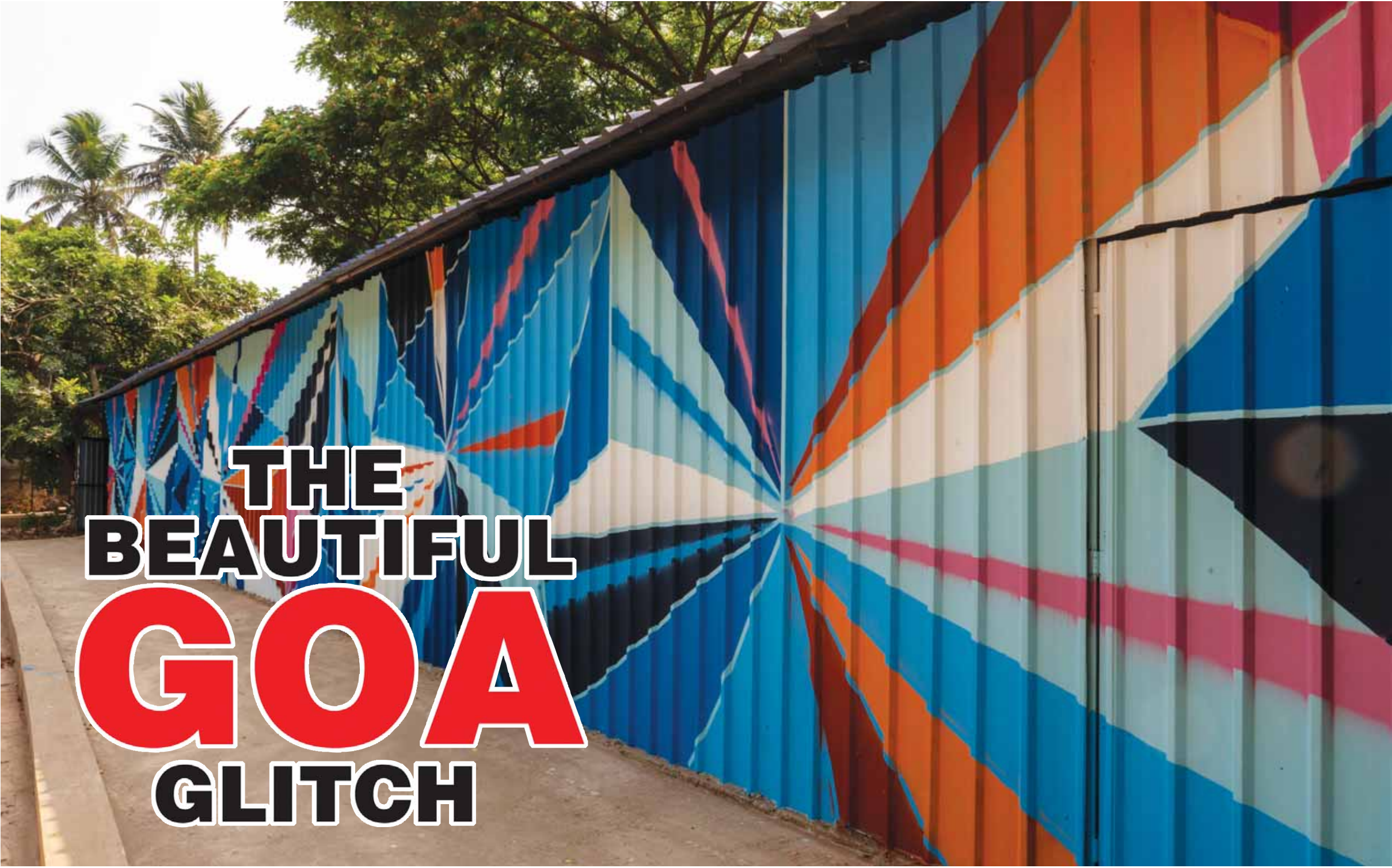
2



4

**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

AP

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)

