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SOCIO-ECONOMIC
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BHUBANESWAR, FRIDAY APRIL 16, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹4



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DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Weekend lockdown in Delhi

Fresh Covid cases soar to over 17,000 on Thursday

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the Covid-19 situation in the national Capital turned grimmer with the number of daily cases rising to staggering over 17,000, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced imposition of weekend curfew to break the chain of coronavirus infection.

The Chief Minister announced that weekend curfew will be implemented in Delhi along with a closure of malls, gyms, swimming pools, and auditoriums. The cinema halls will function at 30 per cent capacity and restaurants will not be allowed to cater to dining — only home delivery and takeaways will be allowed.

The weekly markets will be allowed at one weekly market per-day-per-zone format and the Delhi Government will also monitor crowds at weekly markets and the markets and public places will see stricter implementation of Covid norms.

Kejriwal appealed to the people of Delhi to not insist on getting admitted to a particular hospital as beds will be made available in other facilities if required as Delhi has more than 5000 beds vacant.

Addressing the media, he said, "Corona cases are rising in Delhi but the hospital management in Delhi is under control. There is no dearth of

beds in Delhi as more than 5,000 beds are available. We met with the Lieutenant Governor and have unanimously decided to put a weekend lockdown in place. Our understanding is that people need to travel during weekdays for work and other essential activities; however, weekends are usually reserved for leisure and entertainment activities — activities that in the given situation can be curtailed and restricted," he said.

Keeping in mind the essential nature of work and jobs done during weekdays, the Government has decided to issue curfew passes.



A health worker collects swab samples from a man as coronavirus cases surge across the national Capital in New Delhi on Thursday
Ranjan Dimri / Pioneer

India crosses 2-L daily count

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW

The emergence of several States as new Covid-19 hotspots besides Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Kerala continued to push the daily count of fresh infections to newer peaks as several States imposed new lockdown like restrictions on Thursday to battle the alarming surge that saw India recording over 2 lakh cases during the last 24 hours.

While Maharashtra's tally rose marginally from the previous day, ending at 61,695 new cases and 349 deaths, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh,

Gujarat, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, and Bihar have seen alarmingly higher spikes on daily basis.

After Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh has emerged as the third-highest contributor of new cases on a daily count. The State reported 22,339 new cases and 104 deaths during the last 24 hours.

Uttar Pradesh was followed by Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. While the southern States reported 14,738 new cases and 66 deaths during the last 24 hours, MP reported 10,166 cases and 53 deaths.

Gujarat recorded 8,152

new cases and 81 deaths, while Tamil Nadu clocked 7,987 cases and 29 deaths.

Meanwhile, in view of the alarming surge in the Covid-19 cases and high occupancy of patients in the Dedicated Covid Hospitals, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Thursday converted famed Jaslok Hospital into a dedicated Covid-19 hospital.

Mumbai Municipal Commissioner IS Chahal said, "Additional 250 Covid beds in Jaslok Hospital will come on BMC's online dashboard by Saturday morning to help needy patients."

Covid-19 IN INDIA
TOTAL CASES: 1,42,72,484 (+2,01,386)
DEATHS: 1,74,200 (+1,047)
RECOVERED: 1,25,31,990 (+1,05,837)
ACTIVE: 15,60,465
MAHARASHTRA: 36,39,855
KERALA: 11,97,302
KARNATAKA: 11,09,650
TAMIL NADU: 9,62,935
DELHI: 7,84,137 (+16,669)

ASI closes monuments for visitors till May 15

New Delhi: All Centrally protected monuments, museums and sites under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have been closed with immediate effect till May 15 due to the surge in coronavirus cases in the country, the Union Culture Ministry said on Thursday.

An order to this effect was issued by the ASI and it was tweeted by Culture Minister Prahlad Patel on Thursday evening.

24-hr campaign ban imposed on Bengal BJP prez Dilip Ghosh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Thursday evening imposed a 24-hour campaign ban on the BJP's West Bengal president Dilip Ghosh for his "there will be Sitalkuchi in several places" remarks.

The commission "sternly" warned Ghosh and advised him to desist from using such statements while making public utterances during the period when the Model Code of Conduct is in force, the order said.

Four people were killed in a firing incident by CISF personnel in the Sitalkuchi Assembly seat during the fourth phase of polls in West Bengal on Saturday. Officials had said the jawans opened fire after they came under attack from locals.

The ban on Ghosh will be in effect from 7 pm April 15 to 7 pm April 16, during which Ghosh will not be allowed to campaign.

Related story on P5

Covid curfew extended from 8pm to 7am in UP

Board exams postponed, all schools closed till May 15

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amid the surge in corona cases and subsequent panic setting in across the State, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has ordered extension of "Covid curfew" from 8 pm to 7 am in districts with more than 2,000 active cases and also announced postponement of the UP Board Exams for Class 10 and 12. The new dates of UP Board examination will be announced later, the CM said and also ordered the closure of all Government and private schools till May 15.

"The corona curfew will be effective from 8 pm to 7 am in all 10 districts with more than 2,000 active cases, including Lucknow, Prayagraj, Varanasi, Kanpur Nagar, Gautam Budh Nagar, Ghaziabad, Meerut and Gorakhpur.

This order should be implemented with immediate effect," Yogi said while reviewing the current situation of the State virtually with the Team-11 officials on Thursday.

At present, corona curfew is being enforced in these districts between 9 pm and 6 am. To prevent the spread of



People stand in queues to cast their votes during local elections in Kurvarpur village in Uttar Pradesh on Thursday
AP

the disease among the children and safeguard them from the second wave of coronavirus infection, the CM said schools up to Class 12 should be closed till May 15.

He instructed the officials to make all necessary arrangements in view of the changing situation every day in all the districts of the State. Yogi assured the State was successful in fighting the first wave of Covid-19 and similarly, this time the second wave will also be controlled soon.

"For this it is required that all citizens strictly adhere to Covid protocols such as masks, sanitizers and social distancing. Not only this, it is better that people include this protocol in their lifestyle. People should be made aware about this," he said.

In a bid to ensure an effective Covid-19 management

system, Yogi said inflow of patients from other districts in Lucknow is natural. Therefore, we need to make additional arrangements here. In such a situation, KGMU and Balrampur Hospital should be prepared as a dedicated Covid Hospital, he said.

The Chief Minister instructed the officials to conduct this work in a phased manner. Also, the non-Covid patients should also be taken care of so that no inconvenience is caused to them.

"The TS Mishra Hospital, Integral and Hind Medical Colleges in Lucknow should be converted into dedicated Covid hospitals. In the next two days additional beds should be provided in these hospitals," said the Chief Minister.

Haider nabbed in Hyderabad



PNS ■ CUTTACK

More than five days after he fled from custody while undergoing treatment at the SCB Medical Hospital here, the Cuttack city police on Thursday evening apprehended notorious gangster Sheik Haider with the help of the Telangana police from the neighbouring State's capital Hyderabad.

Cuttack-Bhubaneswar Commissioner of Police Saumendra Priyadarshi told reporters that the fugitive gangster was intercepted by a team of the Cuttack city police, which was already camping in Hyderabad.

"Haider was travelling by a bike in the evening when our police team with the help of the Telangana police intercepted and nabbed him," he said. "He will be brought here after obtaining a transit remand from a local court," Priyadarshi said. He also maintained that all angles of his escape, including conspiracy would be investigated thoroughly.

Govt postpones NEET-PG in view of rising Covid cases

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In view of a spike in the number of Covid-19 cases, the National Eligibility-Cum-Entrance Test (postgraduate) (NEET-PG), which was scheduled to be held on April 18, has been postponed, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Thursday.

The decision was taken keeping the well-being of the young medical students in mind, he added. "In light of the surge in #Covid19 cases, GoI has decided to postpone #NEETPG2021 exam which was earlier scheduled to be held on Apr 18. Next date to be decided later. Decision has been taken keeping well-being of our young medical students in mind," Vardhan tweeted.

Earlier on Thursday, a group of student doctors moved the Supreme Court asking for postponement of the NEET-PG medical entrance exams. A bench headed by Chief Justice of India SA Bobde was scheduled to hear the matter on Friday.

Kumbh sees 0.7% Covid positivity rate

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Confirming the fears of the experts that the mega religious congregation of Kumbh in Haridwar would accelerate the pace Covid-19 infection, the authorities on Thursday confirmed that 1,700 people were tested positive for the disease from April 10 to 14 in the Mela area.

The Kumbh Mela which is considered as the biggest religious congregation in the world officially started on April 1.

The medical workers conducted 2,36,751 tests during the five-day period (April 10 to 14) in the Mela area. Out of these, 1,701 samples came out positive for Covid-19, that means 0.7 per cent positivity rate.

It is learnt that in the Kumbh area a number of the Sadhus belonging to different Akhadas and sects have been reported positive for the disease.

The death of Mahamandaleshwar Kapil Dev Dass Naga belonging to the Akhil Bharatiya Nirvani Akhada due to Covid-19 has come as a shock among the members of the Akhada. The ascetic belonging to Chitrakoot



in Madhya Pradesh was in Haridwar to attend the Kumbh. The ascetic was admitted in a private hospital in Dehradun after he was found positive for Covid-19 in Haridwar on April 12.

Meanwhile the condition of the president of Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad (ABAP), Narendra Giri admitted in All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Rishikesh is improving. He was admitted in hospital April 12 after testing positive for Covid-19.

The Public Relations Officer (PRO) of AIIMS Rishikesh Harish Thapliyal said that the condition of Swami Narendra Giri is improving and he is on room air and he doesn't have a fever now.

Two more die of Covid-19 in State

2,989 MORE TEST +VE, HIGHEST DAILY SURGE THIS YEAR

MAX 631 CASES IN SUNDARGARH

837 MORE PATIENTS RECOVER

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Two more Covid-19 deaths were reported in the State on Thursday, with which the total toll rose to 1,935.

The casualties were reported from Kalahandi and Keonjhar districts, the Health and Family Welfare Department said. Meanwhile, the State registered the most number of positive cases in 2021 when as many as 2,989 persons tested positive in 29

districts and the State pool on the day. With this, the total positive tally surged to 3,58,342. Out of the new cases, 1,733 cases were reported from quarantine and 1,256 were local contacts.

Sundargarh district reported the maximum 631 cases followed by Khordha with 438, Kalahandi 260, Cuttack 208, Nuapada 151, Sambalpur 148, Bargarh 126, Puri 112, Jharsuguda 84, Baleswar 83, Keonjhar 77 and Angul 65.

Besides, 94 cases were reported from the State pool. The active cases in the State stood at 14,621 and the cumulative samples tested were 94,61,720. However, 837 patients recovered on Thursday, taking the total recoveries to 34,2,570 in the State.

379 new Covid cases in BBSR

Max 17 in Gopabandhu Chhhack

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Covid-19 cases continued to rise alarmingly on Thursday in State capital city Bhubaneswar with as many as 379 more positive cases being registered on Thursday, taking city's total tally to 34,579. This was highest single-day spike. Out of new cases, 270 were local contacts and 109 were quarantine cases.

Out of local contacts, 17 cases were reported from Gopabandhu Chhhack, 15 from Nayapalli, 13 from Patia, 11 from Khandagiri, 10 from Chandrasekharpur, 8 from Mancheswar, 7 each from Samantrapur, Tankapani Road, Unit-8 and Acharya Vihar and six each from Unit-3, Jagamara, Laxmisagar, Sundarpada, Kalpana Chhhack, Satya Nagar and Kalinga Nagar.

Matric, +2 exams this year in State postponed

Class IX, XI students to be promoted; Class X, XII suspended from April 19

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Keeping the safety of students in mind amid the Covid-19 situation, the State Government on Thursday postponed all the upcoming board examinations including Class-X and Plus Two. "Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has announced to postpone upcoming HSC (High School Certificate) (matriculation) and Plus II examinations in the State," said an official release.

The Class-X (HSC) examination which was earlier scheduled to start from May 3 was postponed. A final decision

to hold examination would be taken after a review of the pandemic situation. Besides, the Plus Two exam scheduled to be held on May 18 was also postponed.

"The State Government and Council of Higher Secondary Education will conduct a review of situation in first week of June and on conduct of examination. The students will get adequate time to appear in examinations," the release added. School and Mass Education Minister Samir Dash said decision to defer board exams has been taken in view of Covid-19 situation.

All students of Classes-IX and IX classes would be promoted to Classes-X and XII, respectively, without conduct of any examination, Dash added. The State Government on day also announced to suspend Classes-X and XII (2020-21

academic session) from April 19 in view of spike in Covid-19 cases. Clear instructions have been issued to ensure that no academic work is undertaken in educational institutions. The decision came after Government announced to postpone all board examinations.

As per an official release, the suspension of classes would be applicable for all schools under Board of Secondary Education (BSE), Adarsh Education (BSE), Adarsh Education Minister Samir Dash said decision to defer board exams has been taken in view of Covid-19 situation.

The circular issued by CBSE on April 14 would be applicable to all English medium schools affiliated to CBSE and Odisha Adarsh Vidyalayas. Schools and hostels of these institutions would also remain closed from April 19, notification added.

IAS officers as district Covid Observers

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Government on Thursday appointed senior IAS officers as Covid observers in the districts.

While Anu Garg and Dr N Thirumala Naik were assigned Bhubaneswar city, Madhusudan Padhi was given charge of Baleswar district. Satyabrata Sahu and Benudhar Behera Balangir, Bargarh and Nuapada districts.

Both Surendra Kumar and Srikanth Prusty were assigned Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar. Ganjam and Gajapati were assigned to G Mathivathanan while Hemanta Sharma and Suresh Chandra Dalai were given

Jajpur, Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapada. Bishnupada Sethi and Gopabandhu Satpathy were assigned Angul, Deogarh and Dhenkanal and Chitthra Arumugam Sambalpur and Subarnapur. Kalahandi, Kandhamal and Boudh were assigned to Saswata Mishra and Bishnu Prasad Mishra and VV Yadav and Rashid Khan were given charge of Koraput, Malkangiri, Rayagada and Nabarangpur.

Temjenapang A is in charge of Gajapati, Susanta Mohapatra assigned Cuttack city and Cuttack rural while Anil Saml also assigned Cuttack city, Cuttack rural, Nayagarh, Puri and Khordha rural.

College, varsity students protest offline exams

Students demand online tests as they fear Corona infection

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Fearing infection amidst the resurgence in Covid-19 cases, students of different educational institutions across the State, including a university, on Thursday took to streets protesting conduct of offline examinations. As a mark of

protest, a group of Plus-III students of the BJB Autonomous College here staged a demonstration on the main road in front of the campus. Holding placards and shouting slogans, the agitated students sat on a dharna disrupting vehicular movement on the road. They demanded

conduct of their third semester examination online or else ensure Covid-19 test of all the students before the offline examination, scheduled to be held on April 20.

Students of the Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) also staged a dharna demanding online examination after four from the university including two students tested positive on Wednesday. They demon-

strated in front of the office of the university's Vice-Chancellor. Tension erupted also at the Puri Government Women's College when students protested by burning tyres before the campus.

They also ransacked the main gate of the college while pressing for their demand of examination postponement. Later, police personnel were deployed at campus to avoid any untoward situation further.



Utkal mid-semester exams postponed

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The mid-semester examinations conducted by the Utkal University have been postponed as two students of the Biotechnology Department and an employee of the university have tested positive for Covid-19. Earlier, five students of university had contracted virus. The examinations have been deferred until further notice. A decision regarding

exams would be taken after improvement in the Covid-19 situation, university sources said. On the other hand, the university authorities have decided to sanitise various departments and hostels in view of detection of new Covid-19 cases in campus.

This apart, Covid-19 testing of students would be carried out with the help of Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC).

Odisha's last Gandhian's wait for the Mahatma is over

ANIL DHIR ■ BHUBANESWAR

One of Odisha's last freedom fighters who had worked with Gandhiji died at his residence at Khariar Road on Thursday. Raojibhai Rathore would have had his 100th birthday on September 11, 2021.

He was not exactly the typecast kind of a freedom fighter though like many of his ilk he remained virtually unsung. Very few of the locals were aware of the patriotic fervour that burnt in his heart till his last days.

Raojibhai had first met Mahatma Gandhi when he was only 13 years old. His childhood was spent in Khariar, where his father was employed by the Raja for building and civil works. Raojibhai recollected his childhood friend Anup Singh Deo, who later ascended the throne.

They used to play cricket and football in the palace grounds, but the young prince was sent away to the Rajkumar College at Raipur for proper grooming. Raoji too went to Raipur, but he studied in the High School there.

Raoji clearly remembered his first meeting with Gandhi when he had come to Raipur in 1933 and was staying in the house of Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla. Raoji went there and timidly made his way forward. There was a big crowd of people and many of them were giving money for the cause of the freedom struggle.

Raoji too held out his quarter anna, which he had saved from his meagre amount he got. Gandhi beckoned the young lad and took the coin from his outstretched hand. The smiling Mahatma then returned the coin to him, asking him to keep it.

Raoji kept the coin that he had got back from Gandhi. He got it out for me; it was his most-prized possession. Since then, he was drawn into the freedom struggle. He emerged as an active follower of Gandhi and a proponent of Gandhian thought and philosophy.

After five years, he convinced his parents that his future lay in the cause of the country and he went to Gandhiji's Ashram at Wardha. He spent a few days there, but conditions at home forced him



to return. From 1938-42, Raoji gave up the Gandhian principles and was active in underground freedom activities. "Though I vandalised government property and took part in violent political activities, I could always escape the prison walls," he had told me with a tinge of sadness and pang.

On December 22, 1942, Raojibhai, along with his friend Jadu Raut, climbed up the roof of the newly set up Civil Court at Nawapara and removed the Union Jack, replacing it with the Congress tricolour.

A big crowd gathered and they were asked to come down by the policemen. However, they remained atop the roof, shouting slogans of Vande Mataram, Bharat Mata Ki Jai, Inquilab Zindabad and Mahatma Gandhi Zindabad.

The British officer posted there was summoned from the nearby Coronation Hall. He arrived and asked the policemen to open fire. There were only three sepoy deployed at the court and they had no guns. They were ordered up the roof, but Raoji and Jadu managed to push them back after each attempt.

The crowds below cheered. The angry officer summoned more force and asked them to open fire, but the sympathetic policemen only fired in the air.

At the insistence of the crowd, both the young men jumped down from the rear of the building and ran towards the fields. They returned to Khariar

and remained in hiding for weeks.

I had met him in the twilight of his life, but Raojibhai had not lost his love for the country and continued as a social activist and lent unequivocal support for the rightful public cause.

After Independence, he was not granted the freedom fighter's pension as he was never jailed. "I never tried for it," he said. However, he helped many freedom fighters get their dues.

Reminiscing about those days of the freedom struggle, he had said, "In our time, we had the pictures of freedom fighters in our rooms, now you only find posters of film stars and cricketers." I had gone looking for the Court House where Raoji had raised the flag. I could locate the building.

The flagpole was still in place. The signage on the building had been painted over. But I could read the inscribed words "Court Building-Nawapara-1942" which had been whitewashed over and over again.

However, like Raojibhai's memories, the words had not been erased till date. I had written to the district Collector to ensure that the sign is restored and to put up a board which tells of the significance of the small building. I have intimidated the Collector and the MLA that a proper State funeral with full honours should be given to him.

Pradhan urges Naveen, Gadkari 'Include Chilika east coast into Bharatmala project'

Construct Satapada-Jahnikuda water link bridge

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has urged Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari to include the

east coast of Chilika lake via Krushnaprasad block as part of the Bharatmala project. He has also requested to construct a bridge from Satapada to Jahnikuda connecting waterways which would benefit 96 villages isolated from the mainstream, especially Puri district headquarters.

Pradhan has written letters to both leaders on April 13 appealing to them to consider the matters in the larger interest of people of the area.

Pradhan has enclosed a copy of a petition he got from a Class-V student, Rishap Pradhan, of that locality who has placed relevant logic in his memorandum.

Pradhan quoted Rishap saying due to non-availability of regular all-weather road people of 96 villages under Krushnaprasad block especially children, old and women and physically-disabled people are facing the real problem to go to the district headquarters town.

AAP for 2021-22

100% piped water connections target by 2024

State's 29,749 schools, 43,727 AWCs to be covered this FY

TATHYA ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government plans for 100 per cent saturation by 2024 of household tap water connection for providing safe drinking water to the people.

This was presented in the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) annual action plan (AAP) on Tuesday charting the State Government's plan of action for the financial year 2021-22 as well as the saturation plan for the State. Notably, more than 27 per cent of the rural households in the State are receiving drinking water through tap, which

was 3.63 per cent during 2019.

Odisha has 85.66 lakh rural households out of which tap connections have been provided to 23.25 lakh households.

When the JJM started on August 15, 2019, only 3.63 per cent of the people in State had access to tap water. In the past one and a half years, the Mission has ensured 20.15 lakh rural homes get safe drinking water through tap connections and every household in 2,996 villages are getting safe drinking water.

Notably, the State Government has declared 57 of its Panchayats as 'Har Ghar Jal' ones meaning that all the households in these Panchayats have been provided with piped water connection.

In 2021-22, the State plans to provide piped water supply in 29,749 schools and 43,727 Anganwadi Centre thereby

ensuring 100 per cent tap water connection in all the schools, ashram schools and Anganwadi centres for drinking, cooking mid-day meal, hand washing and use in toilets. The State has set 2023-24 target for providing 100 per cent functional household tap water connections in every rural households.

So far, the State has heavily invested in training. The Self Help Group (SHG) members were trained to conduct water quality surveillance- sanitary inspections of 4.64 lakh drinking water sources across the State.

It is an important surveillance mechanism to test the water source and end point. Field testing kits are being provided at Panchayat level and handed over to the sub-committee constituted for carrying out frequent tests especially during pre and post

monsoon for testing water quality for taking corrective measures. In summers, issue pertaining to water quality and scarcity comes to forefront in Odisha. The national committee suggested focussing on testing and treating contaminated water.

During the Covid-19 pandemic situation, efforts to provide household tap connections in rural areas will definitely improve the ease of living especially of women and girls by reducing their drudgery and making them safe and leading a dignified life.

The Annual Action Plan (AAP) of State review is taken up under Jal Jeevan Mission by a committee chaired by Secretary, DDWS and with members from different Central Ministries and NITI Aayog to do a rigorous scrutiny of the proposed AAP prepared by States/ UTs before

finalising the same.

The review committee advised the State to identify sources of convergence, invest in sensor-based IoT technology for real-time monitoring and measurement of water supply. Further, the committee emphasized on well-placed Information, Education and Communication (IEC) strategies to instil behavioral change amongst public.

In 2021-22, in addition to Rs 50,011 crore budgetary allocation for the JJM, there is also Rs 26,940 crore assured fund available under the 15th Finance Commission tie-grants to RLB/ PRIs for water and sanitation, matching State share and externally aided as well as State funded projects.

Thus, in 2021-22, more than Rs 1 lakh crore is planned to be invested in the country on ensuring tap water supply to rural homes.

Covid norm violation ₹26.16L more fine collected

PNS ■ CUTTACK

On the eighth day of the special Covid enforcement drive, police acted against 8,314 violators of mask usage and social distancing rules and collected fine of Rs 26.16 lakh across the State in last 24 hours. Cumulatively, in eight days, action has been taken

against 83,391 violators of Covid protocols in the State and penal fines amounting to Rs 2.44 crore have been collected.

Police urged people to behave responsibly and follow the Covid-19 guidelines. The enforcement measures would be further intensified in coming days.

INS Chilka holds passing out parade

PNS ■ CHILIKA

A batch of 419 Artificer Apprentices of the Indian Navy graduated from INS Chilka on Thursday. The INS Chilka has established itself as the premier sailors training centre of the Indian Navy. The passing-out parade was witnessed and reviewed by Commandant AD Centre, Gopalpur, Brigadier Sumeet Mathur. The parade

marked the culmination of nine weeks of ab-initio training commenced on February 19 amidst Covid-19 overhang.

The trainees were put through the various rigours of the training including parade training, swimming, sports and physically-enduring exercises. Among the Artificer Apprentices, Vikram, Vikash Kumar and Vikas of Indian Navy were adjudged the best



trainees in their batch. All successful trainees will now proceed to professional training schools for next phase of their training.

SOCIAL CANVAS

Implement Ambedkar's ideas on Odisha river water use



MANAS JENA

The nation paid homage to Bharat Ratna Dr BR Ambedkar on his 130th birth anniversary. Leaders cutting across party line referred to Dr Ambedkar's pioneering role in Constitution making process and his important contribution as Chairperson of the Drafting Committee and later as the first Law Minister of independent India. Ambedkar contributed in many ways through his struggles and thoughts to

expand democracy, not just in political sphere but also in social and economic spheres. His political, economic and social thoughts and struggles continue to inspire, guide and influence our nation.

Dr Ambedkar's economic thoughts are based on the principles of socialism, equality and State ownership over all means of production. He argued for nationalisation of land and other means of production.

He was suggesting for the fullest utilisation of natural resources and human capital to fulfil the material needs of the people where modern State has to play an active role in taking economic policy decisions.

Many of his economic ideas are reflected in our Constitution's preamble, fundamental rights and Directive Principles.

He as a trade unionist and Labour Minister, played a major role in bringing labour rights legislation to regulate eight working hour and ensuring benefits of minimum wage,

social security, insurance, equal wage and maternity benefit for women workers and banned child labour. He argued for one State, one language and said linguistic provinces would make democracy work better than a mixed language province. He was always in favor of federalism which gives legislative, executive and judicial power to States in managing the governance of the States.

In recent times while the States are demanding financial autonomy and power to manage natural and financial resources, the discourses developed by him have become more relevant for resource rich poor States such as Odisha.

His insightful proposals were based on information and scientific analysis while mostly targeted to public good with equity.

Dr Ambedkar visited Odisha as the Labour Member in Viceroy's Executive Council to the Government of India. In his presidential address at a conference of representatives of

Central Government and Government of Odisha, the central provinces and eastern States held at Cuttack on November 8, 1945, he explored the possibilities of developing Odisha's rivers to control flood while managing water for its best multipurpose use for the people.

He made valuable opinion relating to the development of Odisha based on available information in those days. He was worried after realizing the socio-economic suffering of the people in those days.

He identified flood, drought, famines, deterioration in health, malaria, malnutrition, vitamin deficiency and above all, low income and poverty as the major issues of Odisha and these issues remain as a challenge before the State.

He identified lack of internal communication links within the State either by railway or by canal to connect the vast hinterland with sea coast as one of the reasons of backwardness.

He said Odisha has natural resources, minerals, forest

products and precious possession of vast water wealth. The delta comprising three districts Cuttack, Puri and Baleswar can be traversed by a network of distributaries arising mainly from five rivers, Mahanadi, Brahmani, Baitarani, Budhabalanga and Subarnarekha for multipurpose use of water in all seasons.

The poverty and backwardness of Odisha can be changed by using best method of utilisation of water resources.

He was critical about the Odisha Flood Inquiry Committee report in 1928 and the subsequent reports in 1937 and Odisha Flood Advisory Committee report in 1939 with involvement of eminent engineers such as Adams William and M Visvesvaraya, on their approach to counter flood without a water management plan.

Because the plan of only building embankments is not helpful in conservation of water, there is a need of building small reserves to store the water flowing in the rivers, he

opined. Water being the wealth of people its distribution and conservation is highly essential from the point of view of public good. He suggested to construct dams in rivers at various points to conserve water permanently in reservoirs and these reservoirs can serve many purposes such as generating electric power.

The power can be helpful in running factories to make Odisha industrially developed. Another important area was navigation which was equally important and can supplement the railways.

He told in spite of railways, the importance should be given to canals by reviving old canals and make new one like Germany and Russia those which have used their water resources in best possible ways for multiples gains.

While supporting the scheme of canal, he said historically canal played an important role in British India and the East India Company invested public budget for development of canals. Odisha has one

such canal having its multipurpose use but after 1875 the focus was more on railway replacing canal navigation. It impacted agriculture and overall economy and changed the nature of public investment.

He proposed that it is possible to connect Chandabali to Sambalpur by a navigable inland waterway by construction of three dams at seven mile above Naraj, Tikarpada and Sambalpur.

It will be affordable, cheap and convenient artery for passengers and goods traffic from sea coast to Sambalpur. He was equally concerned about submergence of land and its impact.

Finally, the conference decided to undertake a survey of the Odisha's rivers to prepare projects for unified and multipurpose development like flood control, navigation, irrigation, drainage, soil conservation and power development.

Adviser to the then Governor of Odisha BK Gokhale also spoke on the

meeting in support of the proposal and said Odisha is the most backward part of India and this irrigation project will bring multipurpose development for the State.

Even today, the natural advantage of Odisha with river systems, as perennial source of water wealth, has not been fully tapped and managed for the development of irrigation which is a major reason of underdevelopment of agriculture sector of the State.

The development of agriculture will pave the way for industrialisation where the water management will play a key role in producing power for the industry.

The available hydro power will boost the small scale industries specially the agro based industries for a balanced sectorial growth in the State. The utilization of natural resources and manpower in a scientific way will increase production, employment and income in the State.

(manasbbsr15@gmail.com)

Interparty feud hits Sundargarh BJD position

PNS ■ ROURKELA

Despite all-out efforts by the Central leadership and ample of projects by the State Government in Sundargarh district, the ruling party BJD's position does not improve in the district, thanks to the feud among the local leaders.

Since the inception, the party has never bagged the Sundargarh Parliament seat. After detachment with the BJP in 2009 general election the party extended support to CPI(M) MP candidate in Sundargarh district who scored

only 70,000 odd votes and placed with fourth position. In 2014 the party put its direct candidate Dilip Turkey for Sundargarh MP seat who also lost though the party candidates in other 20 parliamentary constituencies of the State won.

In 2019 the party also put its direct candidate Sunita Biswal who also lost by a huge margin to her BJP rival.

Similarly, the party has not yet performed well in last five Assembly elections. The district has seven Assembly segments. But hardly the party has managed to win maximum 2 seats

in 2000, 2009, 2014 and 2019 elections and only one seat in 2004 election. Even in 2019 assembly election party sponsored two times MLAs (from Congress ticket) Jogesh Singh for Sundargarh seat but he lost.

The party has also been facing tough challenges in Zilla Parishad election since 1997. Though it only managed to capture the Zilla Parishad in 2012 for the first time but in 2017 it has to take the support of Congress. Similarly, the party has only managed to rule in prestigious Rourkela

Municipality once (2008-13). As the party has been performing poorly in Sundargarh district since its inception, the Chief Minister has been visiting the district frequently with a huge number of projects of big amount.

In his visit in March 2020, the CM had laid foundation for about 150 projects for more than Rs 1,200 crore.

Among them the important one is drinking water project for 63 GPs of Kuarmunda, Nuagaon, Gurundia, Koira and Lathikata blocks for more than Rs 660 crore to provide bene-

fit to 3.3 lakh people. Again, visiting on February 16, the CM laid foundation stone for more than 250 projects for Rs 4,915 crore including international hockey stadium at BPUT premises and 17 astro turf hockey stadiums in 17 blocks of the district.

During the visit more than 17 Ministers and 70 BJD MLAs were present across the district. Besides, the party has inducted four leaders of the district in its 80 members State executive.

Despite this, everything is not well in party in the district. Perhaps that is why in addition

to a district observer the party engaged a co-observer and later seven more observers for seven Assembly segments. The sour equation between veteran leader Mangala Kissan and Sundargarh district committee president Binay Toppo, may cost the party dear in Sundargarh, feel many.

Similarly, the odd equation between Rourkela MLA and president Rourkela Organisation District Sarada Nayak and Raghunathpali MLA Subrat Tarai may also affect the prospects of the party.

Firing on Umarkote bizman Month on, police yet to nab shooters

PNS ■ NABARANGPUR

Though it has been a month to a firing incident on local businessman Sanib Subudhi, the police are yet to identify the miscreants.

The businessman was on his way home after closing his shop on March 12 when all of sudden three bike-borne miscreants shot at him from close-range near the Punjab National Bank branch here and fled the spot.

After the attack, a critically wounded Subudhi was rushed to the Umarkote Community Health Centre by the neighbours. As his condition deteriorated, he was shift-

ed to the District Headquarters Hospital and later to a hospital at Visakhapatnam where he underwent a major surgery for the removal of the bullet. The attack on Subudhi has triggered shockwaves among the locals in the region.

His family members alleged that a mediaperson and a few persons with whom Subudhi had past enmity were involved in the incident. The investigation is on, said the SDPO, Umarkote. "As the police failed to nab the attackers of my son though several days have passed, we fear threat to life of my son and other family members," said Subudhi's mother Uma Devi.

Hinjili adjudged best block by district admin

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

Hinjilicut in Ganjam district was adjudged as the best block by the district administration in the Urja-3 ceremony held at Chhatrapur on April 11.

The block was chosen for its fresh new initiatives like cleanliness during the Covid-19 pandemic, providing mental health counselling for migrant workers, building model Adarsha schools, making new beautiful parks with aesthetic looks and providing excellent facilities and services to the people. The block was also credited to have implemented all Central and State Government schemes in effective

manner. Hinjili BDO

Prasanna Kumar Patra was also felicitated with a certificate and a memento in recognition of his contributions towards implementing the schemes by leading the team. The block has its significance because the area comes under the Assembly constituency represented by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

Among the guests present in the meeting were Collector Vijay Amruta Kulange, DRDA Project Director Sindhe Datatreya Bhau Saheb, SP Brijesh Kumar Ray, BeMC Commissioner Sidheswar Baliram Bandar and Brahmapur Deputy District Magistrate Kirti Basana.

Sand artist Maharana gets recognition

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

Ganjam sand artist Satya Narayan Moharana has been selected as one among the thirty artists from across the country for the 5th Mahanagar Global Achievers Awards 2021 in art and culture.

He is the only person selected from Odisha. He is going to receive the award on May 27 to be held at the India International Centre, New Delhi.

Maharana of recently has made a miniscule idol of the Maa Budhi Thakurani on the occasion of Brahmapur Thakurani Jatra. The stone miniature has a height of 9 mm and the five wood miniatures



have heights of 5 mm, 1 cm, 2.3 cm, 2.5 cm and 2 inches, respectively.

Two rapists on run held in Kendrapada

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

The Jamboo Marine police arrested two persons in connection with a gang rape case of a 29-year-old married woman. They were identified as Ranjit Mandal(38) and Umesh Mandal (37) of Ramnagar village, informed police.

The 29-year-old victim, who is a mother of two children, was raped by three fellow villagers on November 7, 2019 in broad daylight. While Jamboo marine police earlier had arrested Bankim Mandal

(60), one of the accused in the case, Ranjit and Umesh had managed to evade arrest.

On Tuesday the police came to know from reliable sources that the duo accused were returning from Paradip to Ramnagar in a boat and were at Bahakuda ferry ghat, they conducted a raid and nabbed the duo from there. The duo was later produced before the SDJM Court, Kendrapada, where they were remanded to jail custody after their bail pleas were rejected, informed Jamboo Marine police station IIC Maheswar Sethy.

VSSUT cancels offline semester exams

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

Finally, the VSSUT Burla authorities have decided to cancel all the examinations conducted offline mode keeping in view the rising Covid menace and also the demand of students who feel insecure in the situation.

"First, third and fifth semester examinations are cancelled," a senior VSSUT officer said, adding, "We are now preparing to conduct them in online mode that will take time.

Further, second, fourth and sixth semester examinations will be conducted in June/July depending on the situation that time." Notably, the exam-

inations for the odd number semesters were going on in the university smoothly. But looking at the growing number of corona patients all over the district and Burla and Sambalpur towns in particular, students demanded to cancel the exams immediately and go for online mode.

However, the authorities have decided not to vacate the hostels now and asked the students to stay safe obeying all Covid guidelines strictly.

"But this decision may change according to the situation. A meeting will be held on Friday to discuss all important aspects, including vacating hostels as there are no classes or no offline exams," sources said.

Baleswar always got raw deal from Govt: Congress

But party hails CM's ₹155-crore package

PNS ■ BALESWAR

The district unit of Congress while praised the CM for announcing a package of Rs 155 crore for different projects in Baleswar municipality, alleged that the major issues of district had been overlooked by the BJD Government for years.

Party's district president Sanjeev Giri besides alleging that the District Headquarters Hospital (DHH) was ailing due to paucity of adequate doctors and beds, said that most of the time, the patients

were referred to the SCB Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack and elsewhere for treatment. "The healthcare services are in a shambles. Inadequate number of beds has been a major concern while patients from neighbouring district avail healthcare facility. Although there is a cardiology department, yet it is defunct in the want of specialists.

Similarly, establishment of a trauma centre has become a distant dream,"alleged Giri during a media brief on Thursday alleging further, "Although it was announced for developing sports infrastruc-

ture, but the prominent sports ground ' Permit field' is wallowing in neglect . Similarly , there is no mention of renovation of Maha nalla in the town." He also alleged that law and order situation in the district had deteriorated and drug trading was rampant in district.

He also questioned the fate of new bus stand whose foundation stone was laid at Ganeswarpur under Remuna block 10 years ago when Rs 8 crore was announced for existing bus stand at Sahadevkhunta.Mamta Kundu, Archana Nandi and Gopinath Padhi among others were present.

Partially-burnt woman's body recovered in B'war, Hubby detained

PNS ■ BALESWAR

The Jaleswar police detained the husband of a deceased after a partially-charred body of the latter was found under mysterious circumstances in a jungle. Purna Chandra Das (48) of Chakahari village was being interrogated suspecting his involvement in the case, registered under Section 302 of IPC, said Jaleswar police station IIC Manas Deo.

The body of Kaberi Das (40) was spotted by the villagers on Monday. The body was identified by her parents who alleged that there had been marital disputes between the couple over extra marital relationship of Purna.

SAIL Super Specialty Hosp to be Covid care unit

PNS ■ ROURKELA

The Steel Authority of India Limited's Super Specialty Hospital at Rourkela has been approved to be used as Covid Care Hospital. Union Steel Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had instructed to use the SAIL Super Specialty Hospital at Rourkela as Covid Care Hospital in the wake of rising cases in the region.

The district authorities had also sent a request for utilising the ICU facilities of the Super Specialty Hospital for treatment of Covid-19 patients. The 60-bed ICU facility of SAIL-RSP will be used for COVID-19 care. This hospital will further augment the treatment facilities for Covid patients in the State.A Covid-19 testing facility was also set up at the SAIL-Rourkela Steel Plant's Ispat General Hospital.

Jan Shatabdi Exp catches fire

PNS ■ BALESWAR

The Bhubaneswar-Howrah Jan Shatabdi Express caught fire near the Markona railway station in Baleswar district on Thursday.

As per reports, the fire broke out in D-6 bogie of the train thereby leaving the passengers panic-stricken.

They informed the Government Railway Police (GRP) about smoke emanating from the coach, following which staffers of the station reached the spot and doused the flames.

The train was halted near the Soro railway station for around 30 minutes and later resumed its journey towards Howrah. Fortunately, no one was injured in fire mishap.

Ganjam set to fight 2nd Covid wave

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

In view of the fast spreading of corona cases in its second wave, the Ganjam district administration on Thursday urged people of to remain alert and follow Covid guidelines.

District Collector Vijay Amruta Kulange said that as the positive cases during the second wave are increasing, people need to be extra-cautious.

He informed that the distinct has now 245 active cases and 124 have recovered. He stated that now, the MKCG Medical College Hospital has 150 dedicated beds for Covid treatment; and in the coming days, Ashwini Covid Hospital



would have 150 beds and Tata Hi-tech Hospital 150 beds. Kulange further informed that Covid patients would also be treated in 100 beds at City Hospital in Brahmapur. Besides, 50 beds each in Hinjilikatu and Bhanjanagar hospitals have been arranged.

He said 6,064 people from other States have returned and registered with the district administration, which is keeping close eye on them.

INBRIEF

₹4-CR SPORTS INDOOR HALL TO COME UP IN JAIPUR

Jaipur: An indoor sports hall would be constructed at Jaipur at a cost of Rs 4 crore. The two-storied building would have three badminton courts and table tennis and billiards tables. Besides, it would have a yoga room and seating facilities for 100 people. The project would be completed in a year, said PWD Cuttack Circle Superintending Engineer Tara Prasad Mishra. The project is being supervised by PWD Executive Engineer Arun Patnaik. Sport lovers and students have thanked Jaipur MLA Pranab Prakash Das for the initiative.



EARTHQUAKE HITS RAYAGADA DISTRICT

Bhubaneswar: An earthquake of magnitude 3.2 in Richter Scale was felt in Rayagada district at 4 am on Thursday, the Regional Meteorological Centre here said. The epicentre of the earthquake was located at latitude 19.28°N and longitude 83.38°E with focal depth 10 km from earth surface. No loss of life or properties was reported.

SENIOR B'PUR ADVOCATE PATRA PASSES AWAY

Brahmapur: Senior advocate and an active member the Ganjam Bar Association, Somanath Patra passed away at his Jyotinarag residence on Monday due to cardiac arrest. He was 55. Ganjam Bar Association president Janardan Subudhi paid rich tribute to him and conveyed condolences to his family members. Bar members observed two minutes' silence and remained off in the courts for the rest of the day.

160 LAWYERS VACCINATED IN BRAHMAPUR

Brahmapur: As many as 160 members of the Ganjam Bar Association (GBA), who are above 45 years of age, were vaccinated in the bar premises on Monday amid the Covid second wave. Earlier, the GBA had written a letter the Chief District Medical Officer (CDMO) to conduct vaccination at the bar premises. The programme was coordinated by GBA president Janardan Subudhi and secretary Pradeep Behera. During the first wave last year, many senior advocates lost lives after testing positive for the killer virus.

KAMAPALI BJP WORKERS DISTRIBUTE MASKS

Brahmapur: BJP workers of Kamapali Mandal in Brahmapur on Monday distributed masks and sensitised people on fighting Covid. The team of leaders included Kanhu Charan Pati, Manoj Pattnaik, Sarat Sahu and Siba Adhikari.

POISONOUS SNAKES FOUND FROM B'PUR HOUSE



Brahmapur: Members of the Snake Helpline in Brahmapur rescued six poisonous snakes from a household at Nilkantha Nagar-V at Gosaniinagaon. The house owner's wife first spotted one such snake in the house and called the Snake Helpline, whose members reached the house and rescued more such snakes.

AMBEDKAR REMEMBERED IN ATHAGARH

Athagarh: On his 130th birthday, the father of Indian Constitution Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was remembered by the Anusuchita Jati



Janajati Unnayan Parishad here. A meeting was held at the Ambedkar Bhawan under the chairmanship of Parishad president Bichitrnanda Sethi. Guests Bibhu Prasad Sethi and Satya Prakash Rath lauded the contributions of Ambedkar and urged people to cherish and follow his noble instructions to build a perfect Indian society where welfarism would prevail.

J'SUGUDA BJD SC CELL OBSERVES AMBEDKAR JAYANTI

Jharsuguda: The 130th birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Dr BR Ambedkar was held here by BJD district SC Cell. Leaders recalled Baba Sahib's contributions to country and hailed him as one of tallest leaders and architect of Constitution. Earlier in day, led by BJD district



SC Cell president Jay Prakash Kuanar, members garlanded statue of Dr Ambedkar at Sunari Munda. State executive committee member Tapas Ray Chowdhury, town president Sandip Awasthy and BJD Legal Cell secretary Tulasi Prasad Dash were present.

Set zero forest fire goal in Odisha: Experts

SUDHIR MISHRA ■ BALANGIR

The forest department must set a goal of zero fires in forthcoming times. This was among the important views emerged in a webinar on forest fire held recently, organised by the RCDC and the Odisha Commons Exchange.

The motto was to understand the present situation of forest fire in Odisha, especially in the context of this having happened at greater frequency in the months of February. Forest fire in Odisha usually occurs from March to May.

And much to the surprise of many, this year the forest fire started from mid of February and the huge forest fire in the Simlipal Biosphere reserve captured the attention of the national and international media with Odisha topping the list of forest fire incidents in the country. According to the Forest Survey of India

(FSI), at least 5,291 forest fires were recorded in Odisha between February 22 and March 1, the highest in the country for the same period. Forest and Environment Minister Bikram Keshari Arukh informed the State Assembly recently that since January this year till date (March 24, 2021) 23,473 fire incidents have been reported in the State devouring about 159 square km of forest.

Joining the webinar, many experts on forest and environment kept their opinions as to how to effectively deal with the forest fires. Incidents of forest fire are increasing. Explaining the various causes, Prabhat Mishra told how community members have been traditionally proactive on reporting and putting out forest fires in association with workers of the Forest Department. Forest fires are more prominent in deciduous forests and maxi-

mum number of incidents occurred in south Odisha, opined RCCF BrahmspurManoj Mahapatra. He called upon all stakeholders to cooperate in preventing and mitigating forest fires. Mahapatra pointed out how the department was taking note of community efforts and providing incentives to encourage positive changes. He sought cooperation of all to fight forest fire effectively.

The process of approving individual and community forest rights should be stepped up to enthuse the community to do more and the process of CFR management should go a long way in protecting and conserving forests, pointed out Satya Pattnaik.

He was of the opinion that capacity of all stakeholders must be strengthened and coordination must improve to address the menace.As per the satellite data, forest fire clusters

are developing in certain pockets of Odisha and it is important to keep watch on them. He dwelt on the climatic factors that could be driving the fires, said Barna Baibhav Panda The Forest Department continues to look upon the forest as a production unit.

It should change its stance and concentrate on conservation of forests with an eye towards enriching the livelihoods of the forest dwellers, said Gitanjali Sahoo, adding that the State must strengthen the Forest Department and enhance coordinated efforts.Forests are vital and all the inhabitants of the Earth should think of themselves as one community and look after the welfare of forests, said Nibedita Dash.

While Odisha excelled in achieving zero casualty in the disaster management like of cyclone efforts of the State Forest Department should be

to achieve the goal of zero fires, opined Dr Ambika Nanda. The Forest Department should engage and involve youths in mitigating forest fires, besides sensitizing the women on forest fire and its prevention, opined Kailash Dash.

Community is moving away from viewing forests as an essential resource particularly as modern life is moving away from nature towards artificial goods like plastic and proper marketing of MFP could reverse the stance, said Kulamani Sahu. There is the need for a long term plan to mitigate forest fires keeping in view the impacts of climate change.

There is also a need to renew the interests of the community in forests and ensure their rights over resource. The community is best managers of forests and traditional ways of forest management must be renewed, said Pradeep Brahma.

Jharsuguda Vedanta's Safety Month ends

Host of events organized

PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA

The Vedanta Jharsuguda observed the 50th National Safety Month from March 4 to April 3 and wrapped up the event with a ceremony on virtual mode in the presence of Deputy Director of Factories and Boilers, Odisha Swaroop Jena, Assistant Director of Factories and Boilers, Odisha Manoj Mishra among others.

During the ceremony, the company also promoted behaviour-based safety at the workplace by felicitating its employees and business partners for

ensuring safety in its operations. As part of the observance, awareness campaigns, competitions, quizzes, interactive sessions and various activities like safety slogan writing, safety rallies, etc. were conducted for employees and business partners in line with this year's National Safety Day theme 'Learn from disaster and prepare for a safer future.'

Speaking about the company's safety-first culture, Vedanta Limited , Jharsuguda, CEO CN Singh said, "Vedanta's operations are governed by robust safety standards and rigorous processes. Our business imperatives are founded on the premise of 'Zero Harm, Zero Waste & Zero Discharge.'



India foiled Chinese bid to change status quo at LAC: CDS Rawat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Despite China adopting "shove and push" tactics, India foiled these bids and prevented a change in status quo at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat said here on Thursday.

Making this assertion in his lecture at the Raisina Dialogue, he also said the country proved it will not get pushed under any pressure in apparent reference to the nearly ten-month long stand-offs in Eastern Ladakh. He also said China is using its military might and conveying the message it is "my way or no way."

Rawat said China felt that it will be able to compel nations to give in to its demands by doing a little bit of "shove and push" as it has superior armed forces because of technological advantage.

"But, I think India stood firm on the northern borders and we have proven that we will not get pushed," he said at the virtual conference.

He said India was able to get support of the international community by standing firm in preventing the attempt of changing the status quo in the region.

"They tried to ensure that they can change the status quo by the use of disruptive technologies without using force... They thought that India, as a nation, will succumb to the pressures that they have been putting on us because of the technological advantage that they have," he said, adding

RAISINA DIALOGUE



that did not happen.

The CDS said the international community came to India's support to say that "yes there is an international base-line rule order which every nation must follow. That is what we have been able to achieve."

His remarks came in the backdrop of face-offs at several friction points in Eastern Ladakh since May last year. The tension mounted after a violent brawl in June in the Galwan valley between the troops of India and China leaving 20 Indian soldiers including the commanding officer dead. More than 40 Chinese soldiers were also killed but China is yet to officially make public the number of casualties.

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, India and China completed withdrawal of troops and weapons from the North and South banks of Pangong lake in February. The two sides are now engaged in talks to extend the disengagement process to the remaining friction points.

Rawat said "They feel that they have arrived and they have a superior armed force because of the technological advantage that they have," He also said "They have been able to create disruptive technologies which

can paralyse systems of the adversary, and therefore, they feel that just by doing a little bit of shove and push, they will be able to compel nations to give in to their demands."

Referring to modernisation of the armed forces, the CDS described the F-35 fighter jets of the US as a state of the art platform but added that he was not sure whether the US will share the technology with India.

"What they have offered us is a lower version in the F-series," he said.

At the conference, Chief of Staff, Joint Staff of Japan Self Defence Forces, General Koji Yamazaki said China is attempting to unilaterally change the international order, and that it is necessary for cooperation among like-minded countries in areas of disruptive technologies and counter the "grey zone tactics".

He said China does not recognise the legitimate interests of Japan and other countries in the region and such an approach will heighten tension, adding rules-based order is necessary for stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Yamazaki also noted that any probable contingency in Taiwan directly impacts the defence of Japan.

Chief of Defence Force of Australia General Angus Campbell said the "grey zone tactics" are a way to nibble away at territory. "We see this in the South China Sea. It is very challenging to respond without

Indo-Pacific epicentre of strategic contest: Oz PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



With China flexing its muscle in the Indo-Pacific region and objecting to the Quad nations presence there, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said here on Thursday the region has become the epicentre of strategic competition.

Making this observation in the ongoing Raisina Dialogue here, he said in this backdrop like-minded nations need to act more consistently and cohesively to protect their shared interests in the face of multiple challenges.

His remarks came as the Quad nations including India, US, Japan and Australia some months back conducted the Malabar series of naval exercises off the Indian coast. China has objected to it saying the Quad will lead to militarisation of the Indo-Pacific region.

Without mentioning any country, the Australian Prime Minister also referred to the growing tensions over territo-

rial claims and the unprecedented pace of military modernisation in the region.

"Democratic sovereign nations are being threatened and coerced by foreign interference. Cyber attacks are becoming more sophisticated, including from State-sponsored actors," he said at the virtual conference.

"Economic coercion is being employed as a tool of statecraft. Liberal rules and norms are under assault and there is a great polarisation that our world is at risk of moving towards," Morrison said.

He said a polarisation is taking place between authoritarian regimes and liberal democracies, adding that a liberal democracy and a liberal set of values underpin the global order that has delivered so much to the world.

He said like-minded nations need to act more consistently and cohesively in protecting their shared interests. "The Indo-Pacific is the region that will shape our prosperity, our security and our destiny, individually and collectively," Morrison said. "The Indo-Pacific is the epicentre of strategic competition," he added.

Morrison also said the corona pandemic has provided a fresh perspective in creating new opportunities to build a durable strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific region.

Incidentally, on Wednesday Indian Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh underlined the high level of synergy amongst the navies of the Quadilateral countries and said these forces can come together in a plug and play mechanism in case of a military need in the Indo-Pacific region.

Participating in the Dialogue inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday, Admiral Philip Scot Davidson, Commander of the

US Indo-Pacific Command, identified the Quad as a strategic opportunity diplomatically, military and economically, as he designated China as "the greatest strategic threat" to rules-based international order.

The two Navy top commanders during the conclave held virtually discussed the potential of the Quad and agreed that there are many new spheres of engagement where the grouping can come together and also include more like-minded countries.

Asked about the future of Quad military in terms of joint patrolling and others, the Indian Navy chief said the Quad started as a consultative grouping and has evolved and grown organically. "There is no dearth of issues that it can handle and we have a robust engagement with the navies of all Quad members," he said.

The Navy chief said the Quad navies already enjoy high degree of interoperability and highlighted that the Malabar exercise started with the US in 1992.

Similarly, he pointed out that India has been carrying bilateral naval exercises with Japan since 2012 and with the Australian Navy for the last six years. "So if an opportunity arises, we have the capability and capacity to come together in almost a plug and play mechanism," he said.

The US Navy commander said the Quad has tremendous potential for cooperation, going far beyond the security sphere. "The vaccine approach is a powerful signal to the region that the Quad is working for the common good outside these four countries," he said.

Noting that the Quad has gained momentum, Davidson said, "It's a diamond of democracies in region... We should think about it in broadest possible terms."

He also said China seeks to exploit the current global pandemic with increased military aggression throughout the Indo-Pacific. He added that China's intent is to undermine international law and norms.

Make plans to counter future challenges, IAF told

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



their task.

Referring to changing international geopolitics, he observed that the perceptible shift of focus from Trans-Atlantic to Trans-Pacific has become more obvious in the recent past.

Changing dimensions of war would now include advanced technologies, asymmetric capabilities and information dominance, and it was very important that the IAF's

preparations for the future must include these aspects, he said.

Reiterating Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Self Reliance', Rajnath stressed on the need to promote Atmanirbharta in defence infrastructure.

He added the IAF's order for Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) would result in a substantial boost to the domestic defence industry and



will be a game changer from the indigenisation perspective. The order for the LCA to be manufactured by the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) is more than Rs 50,000 crores for 100 jets.

He urged the Commanders to continue their efforts for achieving even greater results in the field of indigenous defence production and aircraft maintenance.

He added that national security and economic development are complementary aspects of national policy.

Rajnath stressed on the need to continue to work proactively towards the integration process currently underway, implementation of the joint logistics plan and to enhance synergy in areas of joint planning and operations.

He assured the Commanders of the wholehearted support from the Ministry of Defence in achieving the goal of being a potent Strategic Aerospace Force. The Commanders' Conference will conclude on April 16.

The status of strengthening current combat capabilities and the action plan for making IAF a future-ready combat force would be examined. Issues pertaining to systems, reforms and restructuring for ensuring more efficient processes across all domains and optimised operational training will also be discussed.

SC asks CBI to conduct further probe into role of erring cops in ISRO espionage case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Thursday ordered that the report of a high-level committee on the role of erring police officials in 1994 espionage case relating to ISRO scientist Nambi Narayanan be given to the CBI and directed the agency to conduct further investigation on the issue.

The apex court said the CBI may treat the panel's findings as part of preliminary investigation and asked the agency to submit its report to the court within three months.

A bench headed by Justice A M Khanwilkar said the report of the three-member panel, headed by former top court judge Justice (retired) D K Jain, be kept in a sealed cover and it should not be published.

The top court rejected the submission of former DGP Siby Mathews, who was then heading the SIT probe team, that he was not heard by the committee while Narayanan was heard.

The bench, also comprising Justices Dinesh Maheshwari and Krishna Murari, said the committee was not to adjudicate the matter but it had to go through circumstantial evidence and form a prima facie view on the acts of omission and commission of erring officials.

The apex court was hearing the Centre's plea seeking con-

sideration of the report filed by the committee regarding the role of erring police officials in espionage case relating to Narayanan, who had been acquitted and was eventually awarded Rs 50 lakh compensation by the top court.

On April 5, the Centre had moved the top court seeking urgent hearing and consideration of the panel's report terming it as a "national issue".

The apex court had appointed the panel on September 14, 2018 while directing the Kerala government to cough up Rs 50 lakh compensation for compelling Narayanan to undergo "immense humiliation".

It had ordered setting up of the committee to take appropriate steps against the erring officials for causing "tremendous harassment" and "immeasurable anguish" to Narayanan and had directed the Centre and state government to nominate one officer each in the panel.

Terming the police action against the ex-scientist of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) as a "psycho-pathological treatment", the apex court had in September 2018 said that his "liberty and dignity", basic to his human rights, were jeopardised as he was taken into custody and, eventually, despite all the glory of the past, was compelled to face "cynical abhorrence".

Govt relaxes rules for renewal of OCI cards

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday eased out many conditions related to the re-issue of OCI (Overseas Citizen of India) cards. Union Home Ministry relaxed the mandatory renewal of OCI card along with the issue of new passport renewal of other countries. The government also relaxed norms of renewal of OCI card to a person who attained the age of 20 years also.

Presently, the OCI card is required to be re-issued each time a new passport is issued up to 20 years of age and once after completing 50 years of age, in view of biological changes in the face of the applicant. With a view to facilitating the OCI cardholders, it has now been decided by the Government of India to dispense with this requirement.

A person who has got registration as an OCI cardholder prior to attaining the age of 20 years will have to get the OCI card re-issued only once when a new passport is issued after his/her completing 20 years of age, so as to capture his/ her facial features on attaining adulthood. If a person has obtained registration as an OCI cardholder after attaining the age of 20 years, there will be no requirement of re-issue of an OCI card.

Exposure to higher levels of air pollution likely to increase severity of Covid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Exposure to higher levels of air pollution is likely to increase the severity of Covid-19 among people suffering from respiratory conditions such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a study has warned.

Researchers from the University of Cincinnati in the US found that a one-unit increase in particulate matter 2.5 was associated with a 60 per cent higher chance of hospitalisation for Covid-19 patients with pre-existing respiratory disease.

Particulate matter less or equal to 2.5 micrometers refers to a mixture of tiny particles and droplets in the air that are two-and-one half microns or less in width.

For patients without respiratory disease, no association was observed, revealed the findings published online in the scholarly journal Respiratory Medicine.

"Particulate matter is very small, small enough to be inhaled deep into the lungs, they cross into the blood and also affect other organ systems. Air pollution as a result of emissions from automobiles, factories or other sources is a generator of particulate matter," Angelico Mendy, MD, Assistant Professor of environmental and public health sciences, at the varsity's College of Medicine.

Some allegations against judges are shockingly false, says SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



The Supreme Court on Thursday said some of the allegations made against judges are so "shockingly false" that if there had been no security of tenure, they could have been easily "knocked out".

The top court favoured fixed tenure of two or more years for ad-hoc judges if they are appointed in high courts to reduce the backlog of pending cases.

A special bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde said, "Position of judge has to be made secure. I tell you, we have seen allegations against judges which are shockingly false. Yes, some of them are shockingly false. You can easily knock out a judge if there is no security. There has to be security of tenure for ad-hoc judges".

A bench, also comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Surya Kant, which was hearing arguments on the modalities of appointments of ad-hoc judges, reserved verdict on a plea filed by NGO Lok Prahari seeking appointment of additional judges in the high courts under Article 224A of the Constitution in order to reduce the pendency of cases.

Article 224-A of Constitution says that "the Chief Justice of a High Court

for any State may at any time, with the previous consent of the President, request any person who has held the office of a Judge of that Court or of any other High Court to sit and act as a Judge of the High Court for that State".

Justice Kaul said he concurs with the views of the CJI as every time a judge is appointed, frivolous complaints are made and the court cannot put the entire system of appointment of ad-hoc judges in question. "Ad-hoc judges cannot be made vulnerable," the bench said, adding that too much fine-tuning may lead to losing the objective behind the appointment process.

The top court also rejected the submission of senior advocate Vikas Singh and some of other lawyers appearing in the matter that many of the former judges may not be interested in taking the job as they may be more interested in other lucrative fields like arbitration.

"We think this decision should be left to the former judges. We cannot decide for them. The chief justice will definitely discuss with the retired judge which is proposed to be appointed as ad-hoc judge. If the retired judge thinks that he has something better to do, then he can very well say no to the appointment," the bench said.

The CJI also brushed aside the argument that high court chief justices may not be able to hear important matters, if ad-hoc judges are appointed.

NGT prepones 2021 summer vacation due to exponential surge in Covid-19

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal on Thursday preponed its summer vacation for 2021 in the light of exponential surge in Covid-19 cases.

An office order issued by the NGT authorities said that the earlier notified summer vacation from June 1, 2021, to June 30, 2021 stands cancelled and shall be working for the tribunal.

In lieu of the same, the period from April 19, 2021, to May 18, 2021 (both days inclusive) shall be observed as summer vacation for all the benches, it said.

"In the light of the sudden and exponential surge in COVID-19 cases, the competent authority has pleased to modify the calendar with respect to summer vacations to be observed by all the benches of the National Green Tribunal.

India, France sign agreement for cooperation on Gaganyaan mission

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Space agencies of India and France on Thursday signed an agreement for cooperation for the former's first human space mission, Gaganyaan, a move that will enable Indian flight physicians to train at French facilities.

French space agency CNES said under the agreement, equipment developed by it, tested and still operating aboard the International Space Station (ISS) will be made available to Indian crews.

The CNES will also be supplying fireproof carry bags made in France to shield equipment from shocks and radiation, it said.

The agreement was announced during French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian's visit to the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) headquarters in Bengaluru.

Centre urged to restart distribution of free food grains

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Following the second wave of Covid-19, a few State Governments including Rajasthan, Kerala and Uttarakhand as well as MPs from NCP, TMC, CPI and CPI-M have urged the Centre to restart distribution of free food grains to 810 million poor people under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY), which was launched last year during the first wave of the pandemic. Under the scheme, the Centre distributed 5 kg rice or wheat per person and one kg of pulses per family covered under the National Food Security Act from April-November 2020.

With various States imposing partial lockdowns and curfews due to a sharp rise in cases in the second wave of the pandemic, the need for providing food security to the poor is being felt again by some State Governments.

Ample stock of oxygen available in country to tackle Covid: Centre

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid growing demands for medical oxygen in the country, the Centre on Thursday assured that sufficient stocks of oxygen are available in the country even as it has started the mapping of sources for supply of medical oxygen to the affected States to ensure its uninterrupted supply.

The States with greater needs of oxygen are Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and Chhattisgarh. Besides, there is more consumption of medical oxygen in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Rajasthan.

The Union Health Ministry said that the present oxygen stocks are more than 50 thousand metric tonnes in the country. In a statement here, it said that the country's daily

production capacity of oxygen is more than seven thousand metric tonnes and the production capacity has further scaled up.

The Central Government has asked the States to make rational use of medical oxygen and avoid wastage to fulfill the growing demands.

An Empowered Group in this regard has also initiated action to ensure the sufficient availability of medical oxygen. The Government assured that the surplus oxygen available with the steel plants is also being utilised as per the need. States have also been asked to set up Control Rooms to ensure a smooth supply of oxygen to the districts.

The Government has initiated several measures to ensure the supply of medical oxygen to various affected States.

TMC men urinate in BJP leader’s mouth: Sources

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With reports of electoral violence breaking records with each passing phase the latest one came from East Midnapore where alleged Trinamool Congress cadres urinated in the mouth of a block BJP leader Shyamsundar Das, BJP sources said adding the victim was beaten up too.

Das has been hospitalised at Mecheda town, sources in the saffron party said. The TMC however denied the involvement of its party men. Elsewhere at violence-torn Nanoor constituency in Birbhum district local Trinamool leader Nurman Sheikh on Wednesday evening openly threatened CPI(M) candidate Shyamali Pradhan with chopping of the hands of Left voters. Pradhan is a sitting MLA too.

Nurman accosted Pradhan at Agartar village in Agartar village in Nanoor constituency when she went their campaigning. “Why have come here... you cannot campaign here ... there is no CPI(M) here ... we will not allow them (Left voters) to go and vote ... and if they do their hands will be chopped off,” he was heard telling

the Left candidate.

Incidentally barely a day before a similar threat came from Birbhum TMC president Anubrata Mondal who referred to earlier incidents of violence and murder saying “you are trying to stop me but there is no point doing so ... murders had taken place in 2011, 2014, 2019 ... murders will take place this time also.”

He was referring to a showcase notice issued to him by the Election Commission to explain his conduct regarding an earlier threat issued to BJP saying “they will be beaten away from this area.”

Meanwhile, hours after coming out of a 48-hour ban from campaigning for using violent languages BJP candidate from Bongaon Rahul Sinha seemed to return to his elements on Thursday referring once again to the Cooch Behar police firing and threatening there will be more such firing to ensure peaceful voting.

Quoting Police Observer Vivek Dubey he said, “I will once again say that the central forces should resort to firing if there anyone tries to capture booths ... in the firing death is not a big question ... the point is you have to ensure free and fair election.

Political differences make friends foes in Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ BAGULA/NADIA

Jehanara Khatoon and Alpana Biswas are two great friends. Their husbands are not. While Jehenara’s husband Kamran is a committed Trinamool Congress worker, Biswas’ husband Aroop is a “comrade-turned-pracharak.”

Such is the intensity of their hatred that one suspects that Kamran had a hand in Biswas’ tank being poisoned last December killing fishes worth about a lakh of rupees. All for political rivalry.

Whereas till a few years ago the two families had great dealings. “Both belonged to the Left and both were happy... After Mamata Banerjee came to power her men bought over the minority people here with posts and other facilities ... Kamran joined the TMC.

As the rivalry began the organizational base of CPI(M) shrank “not because we were disliked by the people but because they would not allow us to work politically ... if you join a rally they will fine you often in lakhs ... insult your sis-

ter ... or even kill you ... gradually the Left workers were immobilized as the TMC had a field day ...”Still we gave a fight in 2013 panchayat elections and even 2016 Assembly polls ... but they would not let our men vote ... we would sit back home and they would cast our votes ... as the CPI(M) faded the vacuum that was filled by the BJP which came with leaders like Dilip Ghosh who prescribed eye-for-an-eye ... that the people lapped up and the whole village became BJP,” Biswas a member of the Matua community says, adding the TMC has filled the area with corruption, cut money and crime.

Curiously “both the TMC and the BJP are vying for Matua votes but when it comes to the ground level minorities are preferred to the Matuas because they vote in block,” says Swapan Bhowmick a social worker adding how “communalization of Bengal has taken place in the past 5-10 years.”

At Hatishala village Naresh Mandal a local says, “For my sister’s marriage I had to take loan of Rs 2 lakh from a bank at Bagula

(a nearby panchayat). The local TMC leader managed it for me and took a whopping Rs 75,000 out of that.”

Ipshta a school teacher from Mayurhat says how she had to shell out Rs 5 lakh for the job adding her sister a nurse had to give Rs 2 lakh for a temporary job at a hospital at Ranaghat.

Abdul Karim a local from Majdia says he has job card but is seldom given work in the 100-days work scheme. “If they get me to sign there for 50 days, they will give me payment for 10 days ... rest will be appropriated by their men,” he says. And what if he takes it up with the BDO. “Babu then you will not be there to be seen the next day... even the BDO Saheb does not have a say... they have the power to make him do sit-ups in public.”

Anima a 75-year-old widow from Shahpur says how she had to give Rs 10,000 for a room and a bathroom to be made under Indira Awas scheme. “When I refused to give that money they stopped my widow allowance ... on the one hand they had to show the list of constructed houses on

the other hand they needed cash and there they took that from helpless people like us ...” asked,” says she adding she has not voted since 2011. “My husband was a CPI(M) voter and so was I. But after 2011 we could not vote because they would not let us vote,” she says adding “who wants to get hurt ... if I die it is good but if I get a fractured leg then who will look after me ... I have nobody.” The helplessness is writ large on her face.

At Hatishala and Ghosh Para there are numerous such families that have shifted allegiance from the Red to BJP. “I am a born Leftist within, I joined the Brigade (Parade Ground) rally in Kolkata but I am working for the BJP locally because CPI(M) cannot handle the TMC’s money and muscle power ... the BJP matches them in every respect ... besides they are in power in the Centre and can put their big leaders in jail for numerous scams if they cross their limits which the CPI(M) cannot do,” says Tapash Ghosh from Ghosh Para in Ranaghat North-East constituency.

TN logs 7,987 fresh corona cases

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Covid-19 situation turned grave in Tamil Nadu on Thursday as the State diagnosed 7,987 new patients and registered 29 deaths, which experts like Dr C V Krishnaswamy describing as a ‘tidal wave of pandemic’.

Chennai topped the table of districts with the highest number of new cases on a single day. The Metropolis tested 2,558 new cases of Covid-19 till 6 pm on Thursday. Chengalpet, the neighbouring district that hosts institutions like SRM University and automobile giant Ford tested 685 new cases.

Though the Univesrity is silent about the number of cases in its campus as well as in residential areas, there is total panic in staff quarters as many faculty members were tested positive.

Kerala takes fresh measures to control Covid

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

With the Centre terming Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan as a COVIDIOT because of his alleged violation of pandemic protocols and the number of new persons tested positive for Covid-19 nearing 8,300 on Thursday, the State administration tightened the rules to prevent further spreading of the disease.

Earlier in the day the Union Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs and External Affairs said Vijayan should be addressed as COVID-IOT because of his reckless behaviour on the day of polling (April 6) and in the subsequent days when he threw to the winds all norms specified by medical experts.

Vijayan had been admitted to the Medical College Hospital from where he was discharged on Wednesday. He is back in his palatial residence at Pinarayi where he would be recuperating for the next ten days.

The Chief Minister reportedly held a virtual meeting with other ministers and bureaucrats on Thursday where it was decided to take drastic steps to prevent the spread of the pandemic but without causing any inconvenience to the general public.

A Government Order issued after the meeting said that crowding during public and private functions would be brought under strict control. Marriages, house warming func-

tions and other private ceremonies should be intimated to the local authorities well in advance, said the order.

Addressing the media later in the day, V P Joy, chief secretary, said all front line workers and people above the age of 45 would be checked on Friday and Saturday as part of the massive testing ordered for the next two days.

He said there was no shortage of vaccines in the State as alleged by certain people. “We have stock of more than 7 lakh doses of vaccines and the Centre has assured us that we will be given more than two lakh doses in the next two days,” said the Chief Secretary.

He ruled out the possibilities of total lock down and pointed out that malls and hotels have been instructed to down the shutters by 9 pm.

Joy also disclosed that there were 1.15 crore persons in the State who are of in the age group of 45 and above. “We will vaccinate this entire category of people and also vaccinate those below the age of 45. It has been found that persons below the age of 45 are the main carriers of the pandemic,” he said.

The chief secretary said that the top priority of the Government was to hold the public examinations for students and he requested the general public to postpone unimportant meetings and gatherings to later dates considering the gravity of the situation.

Govt only indulging in sham of Covid ‘vaccine festival’: RaGa

New Delhi: Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi on Thursday attacked the Government over the handling of the Covid-19 situation and alleged that it is only indulging in a “sham” of a ‘vaccine festival’. He also alleged that there is no testing, no beds in hospitals, neither ventilators nor oxygen and vaccine is also not available. His sister and party’s general secretary Priyanka Gandhi asked the Uttar Pradesh government to take concrete steps to prevent the spread of coronavirus and asserted that it is “futile” to invest time and resources in “hiding” this tragedy.

Rahul Gandhi also took a jibe asking what PM-CARES is doing, as huge donations were given to the fund for handling COVID-19 situation. “There are no tests or beds in hospitals. There are no ventilators or oxygen. The vaccine is also not there. But there is a sham of a

festival. PM-CARES?” he asked. His attack came after the government celebrated the ‘Tika Utsav’ (vaccine festival) from April 11 to 14.

Taking to Twitter, Priyanka tagged a video purportedly showing Baikunth Dham crematorium in Lucknow being covered by opaque screens. “There is a request to the government of Uttar Pradesh: It is futile to invest time, resources and energy into hiding, suppressing this tragedy,” Priyanka Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi.

“Take concrete steps to stop the pandemic, save lives, and prevent the spread of infection. This is the need of the hour,” she said. The Congress leader had on Wednesday accused the Uttar Pradesh government of hiding coronavirus numbers and said had they been cautious from day one, people would not have witnessed such times. **PNS**

Alarmed by Covid surge, J&K admin defers summer Darbar

Jammu: Taking note of the alarming surge in Covid-19 cases, the Union Territory Government on Thursday decided to defer the summer Darbar move 2021 and reinforce its resources towards the containment of the pandemic.

It was also decided that the civil secretariat will continue to function through its e-office in both the capital cities of Jammu and Srinagar so that the public at large is not inconvenienced at either capital.

As part of the biannual darbar move and the civil secretariat’s shift, other move offices and the Raj Bhavan were scheduled to close in Jammu on April 30 to May 1 and set to begin functioning in the summer capital from May 10.

Last year also the government had delayed the shifting of Darbar move offices to Srinagar till June 15 in the wake

of Covid-19 pandemic. The functioning of the dual-secretariat will ensure uninterrupted functioning of the UT administration while reducing the need for long-distance travel of the public.

During a high-level meeting chaired by LG Manoj Sinha it was observed that a complete shift of Darbar offices to Srinagar from 30th April can jeopardize COVID-control efforts in Jammu and Kashmir. As elsewhere in the country, the number of COVID cases in the Union territory is at an all-time high and requires uninterrupted attention for effective monitoring and control.

The Government also directed the Administrative Secretaries to put in place a robust mechanism for holding virtual offices through e-office and use online/electronic/video conferencing/other modes of communication at the two cap-

ital cities. J&K Secretariat has already switched over to a paperless office by rolling out the prestigious e-office project. As such, most of the official record is available on the web cloud which can be easily accessed and retrieved by the authenticated employees’ accounts anywhere, anytime.

It was also decided that GAD will issue orders regarding ‘move’ HoDs, all of whom will also need to shift to e-office. This will apply to all HoDs, barring a few.

Meanwhile, the UT government also decided to postpone the class XII J&K board exams till further orders and cancelled ongoing class X exams.

The Union Territory recorded 1141 fresh cases of coronavirus with Jammu division accounting for 434 and Kashmir 707 cases. **PNS**

Covid-19 surge: ASI monuments closed for visitors till May 15



New Delhi: All centrally protected monuments, museums and sites under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have been closed with immediate effect till May 15 due to the surge in coronavirus cases in the country, the Union culture ministry said on Thursday. An order to this effect was issued by the ASI and it was tweeted by Culture Minister Prahlad Patel this evening. “Due to the prevailing COVID situation, it has been decided to close all centrally protected monuments, sites and museums under the ASI with immediate effect and till May 15 or until further orders,” the ASI said. These include 3,693 monuments and 50 museums. In live monuments like Puri Jagannath Temple and

NIA organises BRICS seminar on ‘misuse of internet by terrorists’

New Delhi: The immense challenges posed by the misuse of the internet by terrorists can be effectively tackled by international cooperation and sharing of good practices, delegates underscored at a BRICS seminar hosted by India.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) organised the two-day online event here of the BRICS nations that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa on April 13-14.

The seminar on the theme ‘Misuse of Internet for Terrorist Purposes and Role of Digital Forensics in Terrorist Investigations’ was inaugurated by Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla on Tuesday. The NIA organised the seminar as India is holding the BRICS chair for the year 2021.

“The delegates at the seminar appreciated the fact that in the current milieu of breakneck technological innovations and ever-evolving digital landscape, the challenges pertaining to prevention, control and prosecution of the terrorist misuse of Internet are immense,” the NIA said in a statement.

“It was emphasised that it is only through expedient international cooperation and seamless sharing of good practices in tackling this menace that we can create a safer and secure environment for citizens of

BRICS member states as well as the whole world,” it said.

A number of technical sessions were held during the seminar like ‘exploitation of social media as an arsenal’, ‘dark web and anonymisers’, ‘emerging technologies and artificial intelligence’, ‘crypto currency and virtual assets: vulnerability of privacy and online stealth’, equipping law enforcement agencies: counter-terrorist investigations and digital forensics. In the seminar, as many as 40 experts from the five member countries deliberated upon these technical sessions.

Two panel discussions on engaging multiple stakeholders from both public and private sectors to tackle the misuse of the Internet and enhancing international cooperation to effectively tackle the exploitation of the Internet by terrorists for their nefarious activities were also held, the statement said.

BRICS member states in 3rd Counter Terrorism Working Group (CTWG) at White River, South Africa had agreed to establish five sub working groups dedicated to enhance debates over specific challenges on counter-terrorism front. Thereafter, at the 4th CTWG meeting at Brasilia, India was given the Presidency of the sub-working group on “Misuse of Internet for Terrorist Purposes” for one year, it added. **PNS**

BMC debunks perception that it purchased Remdesivir vials ‘at very high rates’

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid news reports that it purchased Remdesivir injections at rates 2.5 times more than their actual cost, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Thursday debunked the “perception” sought to be created by a section of the media that it had purchased Remdesivir vials “at very high rates”, by saying that it “is not correct at all”.

“There is a perception created by a section of the media that the BMC has purchased Injection Remdesivir at very high rates which is not correct at all. We reiterate that BMC shall always strive to give the best services to Mumbaiians. Team Media must support BMC in these extremely critical times to decisively and effectively defeat the Covid pandemic,” the BMC said in a statement issued here.

Explaining the circumstances leading to BMC purchasing 2,00,000 at Rs 1,568 per vial Remdesivir injections, the BMC said: There is an acute shortage of Remdesivir vaccine in the entire country. On 1st April 2021 Haffkine Bio-Pharmaceutical Corporation Ltd. paced orders for 57,100 vials of Remdesivir at the rate of Rs. 665/- per vial. However, it is a fact that till today the said order has not been entertained by the supplier.”

On April 5, the BMC floated a bid for purchase of 2,00,000 vials of

Remdesivir which was due on April 7. Only one bid was received from Mylan till April 7 at 4.00 pm. The BMC’s stock position on April 7 happened to be 10,471 vials which would have been sufficient for 3 to 4 days only.

“On April 7 morning BMC spoke to Cipla and explored the possibilities of getting supplies of around 10,000 vials. However, Cipla expressed its inability to supply any vial immediately. Due to supply constraints, no other company showed interest in this bid,” the statement said

“The only bidder, namely Mylan refused to reduce the bid price of Rs. 1,568/- inclusive of GST. The scarcity is not only in Maharashtra but all over the country. It was vital to make available Remdesivir to critical patients in MCGM without fail. As seen from different media reports on April 7 various States and cities were trying to procure Remdesivir to protect their citizens,” the statement said.

“It was imperative to act fast and decisively to procure Remdesivir on April 7 or BMC would have faced a huge crisis to treat patients. Any delay would have resulted in Remdesivir going out to other cities/States of India in this scarcity time bringing bad name to BMC specially when Mumbai is the financial capital of India. Between money and human lives, BMC opted to save all

possible human lives even if it meant spending an extra amount of money for securing 2,00,000 vials of Remdesivir,” the BMC said.

On April 7, more than 17,431 beds were occupied by covid patients under MCGM. Therefore, BMC had to bite the bullet and order was placed on April 7 2021 itself to procure 2,00,000 Remdesivir out of which 25,000 vials were received immediately,” the BMC said. “In sharp contrast to this prompt delivery of Remdesivir vaccine to BMC by the vendor, Haffkine Bio-Pharmaceutical Corporation Ltd’s order of 57,100 vials of Remdesivir at the rate of Rs.665/-, is still not entertained with no supplies made till date,” the BMC said.

The BMC also said that around the time it placed an order on Mylan for purchase of Remdesivir injections, organisations like the Surat Municipal Corporation, District Hospital, Satara, Commissioner of Medical Education, MP, Mission Director, NHM, Assam, Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMC) and Gujarat Medical Services Corporations Limited placed similar orders on Mylan.

“BMC has taken the lead in placing the order at the earliest keeping in view the interest of Mumbaiians and at prices comparable with various other cities of India,” the civic body said in its statement

BMC converts Mumbai’s Jaslok hospital into dedicated Covid-19 hospital

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a view of the alarming surge in the Covid-19 cases and high occupancy of patients in the Dedicated Covid Hospitals (DCHs), the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Thursday converted Mumbai’s famed Jaslok Hospital in south Mumbai into a dedicated Covid-19 hospital.

Announcing this here, Mumbai Municipal Commissioner I S Chahal said: “Additional 250 Covid beds in JASLOK Hospital will come on BMC’s online dashboard by Saturday morning to help needy patients. Of the 250 beds, 40 will be ICU beds.”

In two more major announcements aimed at increasing Covid-19 beds across the metropolis, the Mumbai civic chief said that

1500 additional beds (mostly oxygenated) will be added to NESCO Jumbo Covid-19 facility in seven days, while 30 more ICU beds were being added to Seven Hills Hospital At Andheri (East) in north Mumbai on Thursday.

“Given that the current surge in the pandemic cases and high occupancy of beds in DCHs – especially in private hospitals is very high, it is necessary to increase the number of beds with advance critical care in Mumbai,” Chahal said.

“Jaslok has served as a DCH hospital with advanced critical care since the beginning of the pandemic and has been treating the Covid19 excellently. In view of the current need, we have decided to convert the Jaslok Hospital into a dedicated Covid-19 hospital. It will no longer admit non-

Covid patients,” the Mumbai civic chief said.

Following its decision to convert Jaslok Hospital into a dedicated Covid hospital, the BMC has instructed the hospital management to discharge all the existing “stable” undergoing treatment in speciality wards, to shift all such patients requiring non-Covid tertiary care to nearby tertiary hospitals in 48 hours and to discharge all patients admitted for elective treatments by postponing their surgeries.

The BMC has also asked the Jaslok Hospital management to augment suspected/holding area for suspected Covid-19 cases, if required and follow all protocols and guidelines laid down for dedicated Covid hospitals as earlier.

Located on upmarket Peddar Road in south Mumbai, Jaslok Hospital and Research

Centre – better known as Joslok Hospital – is private hospital founded by founded by philanthropist Seth Lokoomal

Chanrai along with surgeon Shantilal Jamnadas Mehta.

Set up in 1973, Jaslok Hospital shot to fame in late

1970s when Jayaprakash Narayan was admitted for treatment of kidney failure by the nephrologist M. K. Mani

BMC TO SET UP ‘STEP-DOWN’ FACILITIES IN 4-5 STAR HOTELS TO ACCOMMODATE PATIENTS WHO NEED MINIMAL MEDICAL INTERVENTION

Mumbai: In its effort to make available Covid-19 beds to patients without much of a time lag, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and major hospitals in the metropolis have decided to jointly identify four-star and five-star hotels in their neighbourhood to set up step-down facilities to accommodate patients who need minimal medical intervention.

Announcing the setting up of stre-down facilities at four/five-star hotels located in the vicinity of major hospitals in the metropolis, Mumbai Municipal Commissioner I S Chahal said: “We have observed that many beds in private hospitals are occupied by patients who do not require emergency medical intervention and can be effectively managed at isolation facilities such as CCG-2 or step-down facilities.”

“If such patients are shifted to a step down

facility where minimum medical intervention is required, more number of oxygenated/ICU. Ventilator beds can be made available to patients in need of such beds. These beds will help treatment on time and reduce the fatality rate,” he said.

The Mumbai civic chief said that the BMC intended to set up step-down facilities with active participation of major private hospitals, as an “integral part of these hospitals.

Among the guidelines that the BMC has issued to facilitate linkages between the major hospitals and four star/five star hotels include identification of hotels, need for a proper understanding between private hospitals and hotels, hotels should be able spare at least 20 of its rooms and that the step-down facilities shall be an extension of private hospitals

Youth found hanging from tree, family cries murder

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH

The body of a youth from Suratgarh village was found hanging on a tree near the village. The relatives who reached the spot have accused for murder of the youth and hanging him on tree. The police, who reached the same spot, took the body hanging on the tree and called the forensic team to the spot and collected the evidence and sent the body to the district headquarters for post-mortem. There was chaos in the family with the death of the young man.

Gulab Singh (26) son of Pransukh, resident of village Suratgarh, was missing from home late Wednesday evening. Late in the night, when the young man did not reach home, the relatives searched the

young man a lot. But could not find him. Farmers going to the fields early in the morning on Thursday morning noticed that Gulab Singh’s body is hanging on a Babool tree near the village.

Whose information was given by the farmers to the police along with their relatives. After receiving the information, the family and police reached the spot.

The family created an uproar by accusing unknown people of killing the young man and hanging the body on the tree. On this, the police pacified explaining to the family and called the forensic team from the district headquarters on the spot. The team collected evidence related to the death of the young man from the spot.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Walk the talk

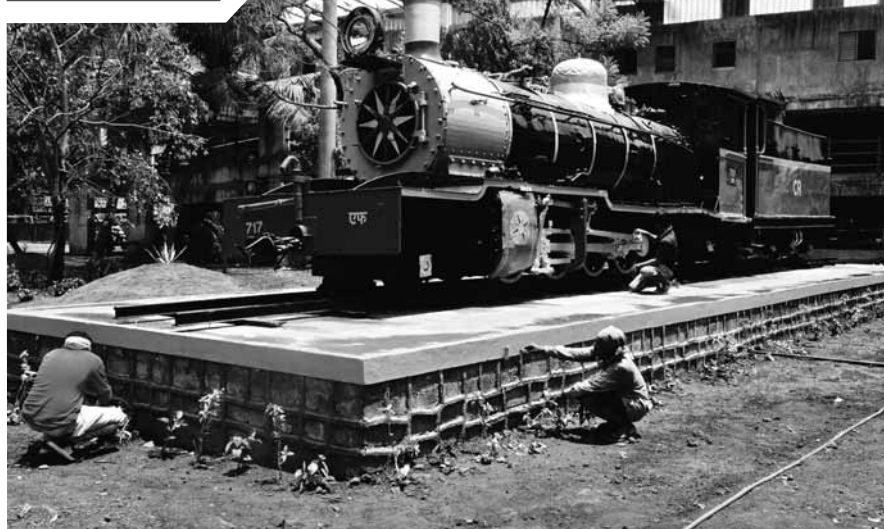
Only lip service won't do, the *netas* must follow COVID-appropriate behaviour at all times

The pandemic has upended all the notions of life, as we knew it, from personal hygiene to societal behaviour to health to economy, but the one bulwark it has failed to burst through is the way our politicians think and act. There should be no double standards in dealing with the raging contagion but unfortunately this duality is a trait quintessential to our politicians. Though the Government is fastidiously dealing with the rising COVID-19 cases, it has literally turned a blind eye to the situation in the States currently undergoing polls, where the COVID-appropriate behaviour is a disregarded casualty. During their public rallies, road shows and campaigns, almost all political leaders and their minions overlook measures like wearing masks, maintaining social distance and other protocols. For these power-hungry politicians, the vote of any individual is more important than his/her life — hence, they have scant concerns if the COVID protocols stand in the way of their votes. Despite repeated warnings by the Election Commission, the ground condition hasn't ameliorated. But there are good examples to be had from most of the politicians abroad who — discounting the likes of ousted US President Donald Trump and Brazil's strongman President Jair Bolsonaro — aren't dyed in the same wool. For instance, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson earlier this year

put off his India visit, where he was to be the chief guest at this year's Republic Day parade, because the number of COVID-19 infections in his home country shot up exponentially and he chose to stay with his constituents to alleviate their fears. Now, again, Johnson has decided to curtail his India trip later this month because of the virus situation in England.

Johnson said the rapid drop in the COVID-19 deaths in the UK was because of the three-month lockdown and not so much because of the vaccination. We don't know whether he has any empirical evidence to back his claim, but the fact remains that the condition in his country has steadily improved while India has consistently been climbing the chart of the worst-hit countries, lagging behind only the US at the number two position, for now. Our leaders, therefore, should be ashamed of facing the electorate, for whatever it is worth, rather than milling with them to garner votes. God forbid, but if they do contract the virus — as has become the lot of a host of them — they immediately quarantine themselves in the best of medical institutes and access the best of medical care, of course at the cost of the taxpayers' money. But what about the fate of the poor masses that they leave behind, afflicted? It is for several similar reasons that after almost winning the war against COVID, we are again pinned down on the mat; thanks partly to our insouciance and largely to our political leaders. All the festivals, including the celebration of democracy, can be cherished in the real sense only when the nation's people remain healthy and enjoy their basic right to life.

PICTALK



Preparations to showcase a heritage engine, on the eve of the 168th anniversary of the first train run in India, in Thane

PTI

Matters of faith

Can devotion alone, in the absence of precautions, protect one from deadly contagions like COVID-19?

Even as lakhs of devotees throng the Kumbh Mela venue every day in Haridwar, with practically non-existent observation of the COVID-appropriate behaviour including face masks and social distancing, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat kicked up another controversy by saying that the Coronavirus won't infect the pilgrims. The corollary to his logic: The devotees are "our own people" (read Indians) spread over a "vast open area" and "Ma Ganga's blessings will ensure the devotees' well-being". His reasoning flies in the face of all expert warnings and empirical evidence — the authorities detected 1,701 COVID-19 cases between April 10 and 14 at the congregation. Rawat's pearls of wisdom sprang forth when some sceptics dared to compare the largest human gathering in India to the Jamaat at the Nizamuddin Markaz, which was tainted in April last year as the "hotspot" and "epicentre" of the COVID-19 cases in Delhi and across India. He said the Kumbh was different because the Tablighi event was organised in a small enclosure, with several overseas attendees and when the Markaz was held, neither was there much awareness about Corona nor were any guidelines.

Coming from a Chief Minister who had tested positive for the viral infection on March 22 before winning the battle against it in early April, it seems that some people, and unsurprisingly the politicians, have so thick a skin that they don't learn any lessons from even personal experiences. India is currently being battered by a rapidly spreading second wave of the pernicious virus and here we are, throwing all sense and caution to the winds amid a sea of humans. One shudders to think of what may happen at the Kumbh if the virus spreads like wildfire and when these lakhs of asymptomatic devotees head back to their homes all across India and unknowingly become the delivery agents of the contagion. Experts have already warned that such a large gathering in the midst of a raging pandemic can prove to be catastrophic and severely impede India's fight against the deadly disease that has claimed millions of lives globally. Yes, Mr Chief Minister, the matters of faith can't and shouldn't be ignored but can these be subservient to the right to life and the joys of good health? That really is the question.

Socio-economic divides in 2021

As a nation, we must tear down all the obstacles that impede the participation of women in the economy, even those of the mind



BINDU DALMIA

Along expected lines, the post-COVID economic data point to a widening of three pre-existing divides: The gender divide, increasing asymmetries between the incomes of the rich and the poor, and an increasing rural-urban digital divide. As each of these inequalities are subjects that need targeted policy interventions, the focus in this post is on the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Report 2021*, wherein India has slipped to the 112th ranking among 153 countries.

India, home to 0.65 billion women, has widened its gender gap from 66.8 per cent a year ago to 62.5 per cent this year. The decline is seen on multiple sub-index parameters, like the labour force participation falling from 24.8 per cent to 22.3 per cent; the share of women in senior managerial positions being as low as 14.6 per cent; estimated earnings being one-fifth of men; the political empowerment index has regressed by 13 per cent where in ministerial berths for women have declined from 23.1 per cent in 2019 to 9.1 per cent.

Gender equality is a basic human right enshrined in our Constitution and its achievement has multiplier socio-economic benefits. India is committed to the timelines of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations which place gender parity at the heart of bringing a gender perspective to all development initiatives. However, the COVID-triggered economic stress will defer the timelines for achieving the SDGs by 2030.

The post-pandemic policy initiatives require increased gender-specific budgeting and recovery strategies: The Modi Government's flagship schemes that positively impacted women during the first term are an outcome of closely aligning with the Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) norms of the 'UN Women'. The GRB is a globally followed "best practice" among nations which allocates fiscal expenditure with specific gender perspectives. Though the *Magna*



Carta of Women (1999) required that the Governments allocate at least five per cent of the GDP to address gender issues, the amount allocated towards women's welfare has stagnated in recent years. The Union Government releases the 'Gender Budgeting Statement' consisting of two parts. The first part reflects women-specific schemes in which 100 per cent allocation is only for women. The second part reflects pro-women schemes in which 30 per cent of the allocation is for women.

In the recent years, while some schemes have achieved transversal benefits like the Jan Dhan Yojana, DBT and MNREGA, specific gender-targeted schemes have made significant improvements in the socio-economic living conditions of women. However, the funds allocated for the GRB are limited to less than five per cent of the public expenditure, and shrink to about one per cent of the GDP, making it necessary to significantly increase these budgetary outlays. The NITI Aayog estimates that India will have to increase its gender-specific spend by an additional 6.2 per cent to comply with the SDG targets.

Upskilling women to

adapt to the changing nature of jobs: The job market has undergone a tectonic shift since COVID, so the nine-to-five model is no longer the future. Deloitte's research shows that economic contraction is nudging companies towards hiring experienced freelancers.

Data point to the fact that this gig work model has found a growing traction, with 78 lakh women who had earlier dropped off from work have sought to revive their careers as the WFH concept has opened the floodgates for those who hold professional degrees combined with robust work experience. Therefore, while automation will displace many jobs, it will also create 90 million flexi-jobs in the next 10 years, according to the Boston Consulting Group.

Second, as self-employment and micro-entrepreneurship is expected to grow at an annual rate of 17 per cent and projected to reach \$455 billion by 2023, State and cooperative banks must readjust their models to disburse loans at lower rates for priority sector lending to women because the data show that women have stronger saving habits and lower non-performing loans than men. As most women lack collateral and

credit history to access formal lending, we need innovative ways to build credit history.

How much has gender inequality stunted India's economic progress? The lack of equal ownership of land, access to formal credit, the unfamiliarity of women with the latest technologies, high educational dropout rates as well as inequitable household and unpaid workload distribution have impeded Indian women's economic prosperity.

Gender inequality has, therefore, translated into enormous notional capital losses for India. The economic impact of achieving optimum levels of gender equality in India is estimated to be \$700 billion of the added GDP by 2025. The IMF estimates that equal participation of women in the workforce will increase India's GDP by 27 per cent.

There is clear evidence: "When women do better, economies do better. That means we must tear down all obstacles that impede the participation of women in the economy, even the subconscious obstacles of the mind."

(The writer is an author, columnist and Chairperson, NCFIL, at NITI Aayog. The views expressed are personal).

DATA POINT TO THE FACT THAT THE GIG WORK MODEL HAS FOUND A GROWING TRACTION. A WHOPPING 78 LAKH WOMEN WHO HAD EARLIER DROPPED OFF FROM WORK FOR REASONS LIKE CHILD CARE, HAVE SOUGHT TO REVIVE THEIR CAREERS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GOOD DECISION TO CANCEL BOARD EXAMS

Sir — It would ease the minds of students and their parents that the CBSE exams for Class 10 have been cancelled and those for Class 12 were postponed to minimise the risk of infection. It was a wise and welcome move needed at this point in time when we are fighting a second wave. It reflects the priority given to the health and safety of students and keeping them out of harm's way.

The exams by State or other boards, now in progress or scheduled to be held in the coming weeks and months, too should be either cancelled or put off for the simple reason that it will aid in mitigating the pandemic and minimising morbidity and mortality. A picture can be drawn only if there is a canvas or a wall. The preservation of life is of paramount importance. The considerations of safety override all other concerns. It is true that education is vital for students to be able to unlock their potential but treating examinations as the be-all-and-end-all of students' existence is not done.

The "real exam" the mankind is currently taking is the continuing pandemic. We cannot afford to do badly in this life-and-death exam. The sole question that bears on our existence and is far from academics is how best we can respond to the once-in-a-lifetime global public health crisis and get through it. Our handling of the COVID-19 pandemic must be based on strategies defining how best we can adapt by modifying our behaviour and way of life and availing the benefit of vaccination to achieve population immunity in order to survive.

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

SERVE THE GREATER GOOD

Sir — Do we need to be "Faster - Higher - Stronger", the Olympic motto, or should we just try to be okay and healthy? The Olympics may yet be cancelled completely after having been delayed a year, says Toshihiro Nikai, the secretary general of the Liberal Democratic Party.

The 2020 Olympics were postponed because of the COVID pandemic and the 2021 version will have few people in the stands as overseas spectators have been

Respect our jawans



The Cooch Behar violence may or may not have been fomented by the TMC but West Bengal Chief Minister and party chief Mamata Banerjee has created a flutter by accusing the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) of wrongdoing — that the security force intentionally shot down four people in her serious allegation. Over and above, she has put the blame at the doorstep of the BJP and Home Minister Amit Shah by charging him with "genocide".

The CISF personnel were apparently targeted by a rampaging mob of over 500 men,

banned and many of the local citizens aren't interested or actually want it cancelled. Any spectators who would attend will only be allowed to clap and not cheer which seems a rather sad, paler version of the event. The first priority for most countries is to get citizens vaccinated, stop the spread of the virus and then start on an economic recovery rather than watching two weeks of Olympians and para-Olympians doing the best they can. Considering how many have already died and will still die, it is probably best to commit all resources to the medical world and stay safe at home. I know a number of Olympics competitors will miss their one opportunity but that may be the cost they have to pay for the safety of the majority.

Dennis Fitzgerald | Australia

STICK TO COVID PROTOCOL

Sir — The second wave of COVID-19 is rav-

aged by a rumour that a boy of theirs was shot dead by the police, so goes the common version. It is said that when things went out of control, the CISF men fired at the mob. A very unfortunate incident that should not have taken place in the first instance if everybody had a good head on their shoulders. Here, neither the mob nor the police can be blamed.

On the other hand, Shah has accused Mamata of provoking the people. Caught between the two political bigwigs are the CISF and the Election Commission (EC). It is a mockery of democracy that the constitutional bodies and paramilitary forces are ridiculed and berated by politicians every now and then. Our paramilitary personnel are steadfast on their duties but our politicians have scant respect for them. Let us face the truth — these entities work against all odds. The security forces have a thankless job — no encomiums for doing a thing right. But one mistake, even if inadvertent, can turn things topsy-turvy. Ditto with the EC.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

aging India, making the lives of poor, daily-wagers and migrant labourers very difficult. One of the main reasons for the fast spread of the pandemic is the elections being held in five States where COVID protocols are not being adhered to by the public or leaders.

Adding to the woes are the large congregations of people at religious events and places. It is advisable that after the completion of elections there should be no more elections, to local bodies or other bodies as these will only aggravate the situation. We all must act responsibly at this stage; else we will lose our battle against Coronavirus. The cases are rising exorbitantly and taking precaution is the only thing that is in our hands.

CK Ramani | Mumbai

SOUNDBITE

The Governors can play an important role with the involvement of the Red Cross volunteers and others in creating awareness among the people on the COVID-appropriate behaviour.



Prime Minister
— Narendra Modi



Over the past two years, we've been reducing our military presence in Afghanistan from a high of

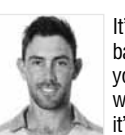
over 1,500 personnel to around 80 personnel currently.

Australian Prime Minister
— Scott Morrison

Every day you go through your own journey of asking questions to yourself. There are your own challenges and weaknesses. You have to overpower them.



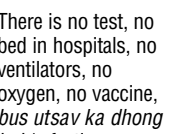
Actor
— Fatima Sana Shaikh



It's nice to have batters behind you, you have the freedom with AB to come and it's a very similar role I have in the Australian

cricket team.

Cricketer
— Glenn Maxwell



There is no test, no bed in hospitals, no ventilators, no oxygen, no vaccine, bus utsav ka dhong hai (a festive pretence)... PM cares?

Congress leader
— Rahul Gandhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

AN INVESTMENT FOR PEACE

It is exactly in a moment of crisis that art consoles us with hope and reminds us that we are not alone



SNEHA GAUTAM

Art can serve as an excellent means of self-expression. Curating an art collection that reflects one's personality and taste is indeed an extremely fulfilling experience. When one looks at an artwork from a vantage point, beyond its financial aspect, s/he tends to delve deeper and reflect upon its inherent attributes of mystery and philosophy. This, in turn, will help achieve further clarity and give one the confidence to keep adding art works to one's collection. The World Art Day is observed on April 15 to make people realise that one of the most important roles of art is its ability to trigger introspection and the mirror it holds up to society at any given point of time. Acquiring and being in the presence of art is also about breaking one's perception and engaging with the work of visionary artists. The art one chooses to display at home or the workplace will most likely be a topic of discussion, so it makes sense to carefully pick and select the work that resonates with one's mind and aligns with one's philosophical ethos. The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown also have a positive side when looked at from the aspect of being in the presence of art and the effectiveness of creative expression in our daily lives.



Before the pandemic brought most of the world to a standstill, the World Health Organisation had published a report enlisting the various beneficial effects of art on the health and well-being of individuals. This report encouraged many firms to use art as a medium to boost the morale of their employees during the pandemic. With movements and social interactions largely restricted, art gave countless people a way to look inwards and thus proved to be a means of cathartic relief and helped people in staying optimistic during these tumultuous times. It is exactly in a moment of crisis that art consoles us with hope and reminds us that we are not alone. It's a proven fact that looking at art triggers the human brain to release the feel-good hormone, Dopamine, and initiates a chemical reaction within that is similar to the feeling of euphoria. Hence, one can easily imagine the far-reaching and therapeutic effects of art. Carefully, surrounding oneself with hand-picked creations can play a deciding role in influencing our mood and have a calming effect. It is widely known that colours affect us and certain hues are largely associated with catalysing the onset of different moods. Thus, inevitably, the colour composition of an artwork a person selects will affect him/her. The advantages of being around art are so well-established that a complete art therapy field has been recognised. It helps individuals explore their creative side, arm their perceptions with the thought of the artists, process and present their ideas in a unique way. The fact that museums display artworks as a visual treat for visitors reflects the fact that Governments have recognised these benefits and thus they promote art. People invest good sums in masterpieces made by various renowned artists so as to broaden their horizons and increase their joy.

If these reasons are not convincing enough for someone to actively collect art work, then the originality factor would definitely inspire him/her to do so. This way, one can be assured that the artwork s/he has decided to collect or which is already in one's possession will be uniquely his or hers. Another important aspect while collecting art is the connections one can forge within the art world with like-minded people. Collecting artwork is a passion for many and certainly adds value to one's life. Currently, technology has definitely eased how enthusiasts can learn and explore the techniques of seminal artists from the past and contemporary ones, too. Virtual exhibitions and online auctions are also tools that can help one make decisions regarding acquiring artwork that will add a soothing presence to one's mental space.

(The writer is vice-president, AstaGuru. The views expressed are personal.)

Engineering a better future for humankind

In this age of unprecedented technological revolution, genetic engineering is fast occupying the centre stage



BKP SINHA

SOMNATH PAI

In this age of unprecedented technological revolution, genetic engineering is fast occupying the centre stage. Susan Hockfield, a Professor of Neuroscience at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), says that virus-powered batteries, protein-based water filters, cancer-detecting nanoparticles, mind-reading bionic limbs, computer-engineered crops, and so on, have the potential to overcome some of the greatest humanitarian, medical and environmental challenges of our time. These are going to be next generation products that have the potential to reshape our lives. For instance, the discovery of products like aquaporin to purify water for our use that functions like a parking lot that permits only cars identified with a specific transponder to enter, is nature's marvel. All these frontier technologies have inputs of genetic engineering.

Genetic engineering has come a long way since 1971, when two scientists, Berg and Jackson, created the first molecules of a recombinant DNA. Many milestones have been accomplished since then to make genetic engineering almost child's play in the hands of a molecular biologist. But gene therapy, which genetic engineering promised, has been fraught with pitfalls despite a multitude of methodologies. As a result, inherited disorders resulting from aberrations in one's genes could not be treated by replacing or correcting a faulty gene. Correcting the gene in its specific location was an issue and when this was overcome by employing viruses, our immune system would play the spoilsport apart from other issues that sprung up. Ever since the failure of the Jesse Gelsinger trial for the cure of a rare metabolic disorder called ornithine transcarbamylase deficiency syndrome, (OTCD) in 1998, gene therapy was left gasping for breath amid stringent regulations. This is where a serendipitous observation of bacteria having the ability to specifically target the DNA of viruses to inactivate the invader, provided the breakthrough to overcome many of the pitfalls of the earlier methodologies.

CRISPR and GENE editing: CRISPR technology is a simple yet powerful tool for editing genomes. It allows researchers to easily alter DNA sequences and modify gene function. Its many potential applications include correcting genetic defects, treating and preventing the spread of diseases and improving crops. The CRISPR-Cas9 can do the job easily and precisely as CRISPR is a part of the bacterial immune system and germs, too, can get sick from viruses. Bacteria fight them by chopping their DNA or RNA with CRISPR sequences and then remember them by pasting their DNA bits into their own genome, allowing to ward off any future infections. These genetic scissors, whose use for targeted modification of genomic DNA was perfected by Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier, have given a new life to genetic engineering and gene therapy. Both these scientists were the recipients of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2020.

The use of CRISPR-Cas9: Many diseases that were incurable through traditional means can now be treated easily, thanks to genetic engineering. There are ongoing clinical trials using



APART FROM MEDICAL APPLICATIONS, IT IS BEING USED TO GENETICALLY MODIFYING CROPS TO MAKE THEM RESISTANT TO VIRUSES, MAKE LEANER PIGS, HELP YEAST MAKE BETTER BEER, MAKE MOSQUITOES INFERTILE AND SO ON. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE TO RECREATE AN EXTINCT SPECIES, SO A 'JURASSIC PARK' COULD ACTUALLY BE A REALITY IN THE FUTURE

Sinha is a former IFS officer and Pai is Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Virology & Immunology. The views expressed are personal.



CRISPR-based approaches to treat monogenic inherited diseases such as sickle cell anemia, childhood blindness and so on. It holds the promise to treat many other diseases such as cancer, autoimmune disorders and polygenic genetic disorders in future.

Apart from medical applications, it is being used to genetically modifying crops to make them resistant to viruses, make leaner pigs, help yeast make better beer, make mosquitoes infertile and so on. It is also possible to recreate an extinct species, so a 'Jurassic Park' could actually be a reality in the future.

Research is also underway for the use of CRISPR gene editing that could make us less vulnerable to pandemics, cancer, Alzheimer's and other diseases. Mammals have a gene known as p53 that encodes the proteins that suppress the growth of cancerous tumours. Humans and most other mammals have only one copy of this gene, whereas elephants have 20 copies, and they almost never get cancer. Hence, research is ongoing to double this gene in human beings.

Up till 2020, over a dozen clinical trials were underway for a disease called acute myeloid leukemia, super-high cholesterol and baldness. The thrust of the ongoing research is to study how bacteria developed an immune response to ward off new viruses.

Coronavirus: COVID-19 jobs, like many modern vaccines, have

also gained from the advancements in genetic engineering.

Bits of the SARS-CoV2 genes have been pasted onto the adenoviral DNA backbone, some of whose own genes have been knocked off to accommodate the foreign gene. When this vaccine is delivered, the adenovirus carrying the SARS-CoV2 will enter the human cell, it will pretend that it produces the SARS-CoV2 protein but will itself be unable to replicate and make a person sick. This creates a temporary SARS-CoV2 protein factory in our bodies to prime our immune system and prepare it to tackle any infection with the real SARS-CoV2 virus.

Hopes and pitfalls: Ever since Herbert Boyer and Stanley Cohen patented the recombinant DNA technology that they developed in 1972, and Boyer co-founded Genentech, the world's first biotechnology company in 1976, genetic engineering has been the subject of intense debate beyond the scientific arena, involving lawyers, journalists, politicians and the public at large.

Since then, genetic engineering has come through the moral issue of man playing God, with a possibility to determine the fate of the evolution of all species on planet Earth. It is generally agreed that genetically engineered organisms will not be released into the environment. Many countries, including India, have put in place ethical committees at various levels

that oversee and approve research that involves the use of genetic engineering. Even routine laboratory experiments which only aim to demonstrate cloning experiments to students in biology laboratories also need mandatory approvals of the institutional ethical committees or relevant boards. Though there are already products of genetic engineering in the market like vaccines, pest-resistant crops and genetically-engineered mosquitoes, debate continues on the ethical and moral issues surrounding genetic engineering and gene therapy. Thankfully, its fruits are slowly blossoming for larger public good.

Fortunately for humankind, in 2015 at the NAPA international conference, a consensus quickly developed that it would be bad to completely ban germ line gene editing.

The CRISPR inventor, Jennifer Doudna, herself summed it up: "We wanted the scientific community to hit the pause button until the social, ethical, ecological and philosophical implications of germ line editing could be properly and thoroughly discussed ideally at the global level."

It was concluded at the conference that though it was too early to do germ line editing safely, but someday it would happen and the goal should be to provide prudent guidelines. This holds the key to the future of this marvelous invention.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THE POOR PEOPLE OF BANGLADESH COME TO INDIA AS EVEN NOW THEY DO NOT GET ENOUGH TO EAT IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY.

—UNION HOME MINISTER

AMIT SHAH



I WOULD SAY THAT HIS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT BANGLADESH IS LIMITED. NOBODY DIES OF HUNGER IN OUR COUNTRY.

—BANGLADESH FOREIGN MINISTER

AK ABDUL MOMEN

Arrest the COVID wave as lockdown is not an option

Any congregation, be it election rallies, religious or social gatherings, must be immediately banned if the pandemic is to be controlled

There is a familiar sense of dread in the air and a feeling of *déjà vu*. That is because, what we are witnessing right now is a rerun of last year and at vastly alarming proportions than before. The new strain of the Coronavirus is creating havoc across the country and straining the existing healthcare system once again.

Railway stations and bus depots are getting packed once again with migrant workers trying to catch a public transport back home. Once gain, we can see motley groups of migrant workers silently trudging back home with all their worldly belongings on their drooping shoulders. Thankfully, this time the exodus on foot does not seem to be as major as the last time because the trains and buses are still running.

Messages of total lock-



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

down are constantly being shared by State-level Ministers, even as the Centre is maintaining that localised containment is the best solution to effectively bring the pandemic under control.

The only fact emerging from this second wave sweeping the nation is that India has failed to take lessons from the total lockdown and the first COVID wave that hit it last year. As the experts rightly point out, somewhere towards the beginning of this year, when the active cases across the country started to come down drastically, the Government and citizens alike, threw caution to the winds. The best example of this was the number of weddings which took place in the last couple of months or the long queues outside restaurants for a seat at the table. People, tired of being stuck in the house for almost

a year, forgot that masks and social distancing are going to be a part of our everyday existence for a long time to come. From weekly bazaars to shopping malls or airports, not to forget the recent festival of Holi and the Maha Kumbh in Uttarakhand, everywhere there is a massive crowd to be seen.

It was only a matter of time before the contagion started spreading exponentially. This explosion of cases that we are witnessing now was imminent and new studies suggest that the virus strain is much more infectious, even though the mortality rate could be lower.

What, therefore, needs to be done before India shuts down again for business and a year of irreparable economic damage is registered? First, as the Prime Minister has been saying, "track, trace and isolate." India, in the last two



weeks, has again got back to ramping up its testing infrastructure to identify the patients. However, the strategy should not have been discarded or taken lightly in the first instance. It took a while to set up centres testing for COVID across the country and there were instances of mandatory negative reports before anyone was allowed free movement across borders. The creation of micro-containment zones to stop the spread of infections was also an

effective tool, thereby leaving the larger area open for economic activities. It is time to revisit these lessons learnt last year.

Any congregation, be it election rallies, religious or social gatherings, must be immediately banned if the pandemic is to be controlled in any manner. It is a mockery of the citizens' patience and persistence if local lockdowns are imposed in some cities or districts thereby curtailing free movement, while thousands congregate to celebrate the festival of democracy, or mammoth religious events like the Kumbh Mela. There has to be political will cutting across party lines to immediately priorities public health and prevent the spread of the contagion by voluntarily calling off any public rallies in the remaining phases of elections.

The migrants have already

started to trickle back into their towns and villages from the big cities, bringing with them unknown variants of the virus. Any mass spread of the pandemic in rural belts and smaller towns may cripple the backbone of India. Any amount of night curfew or complete lockdown may not be able to contain the spread of the disease if a sizeable chunk gets infected.

India has achieved a great feat by vaccinating over 10 crore people in 86 days since the exercise began. However, vaccine shortages are being reported from across the country. First the Central Government should ensure that all States, down to the last district, get the appropriate number of vaccines and are prepared to face any life-threatening conditions due to the jab.

It is an established fact now that the new variant of the

virus may make the vaccine less effective even though the mortality rates are still within control. India was one of the largest suppliers of vaccines to the world and it is time the focus shifts to domestic use. As we read this, there are five more vaccines awaiting the Government's nod in order to be introduced into the market. Speedy approval and speedier delivery of the Sputnik V vaccine in India could go a long way in saving lives. The Government needs to rethink its vaccine strategy and provide financial support to private players to ramp up production. Plus, based on vaccine availability they should allow every willing person to start taking the jab. All the facets of this deadly disease are still unknown, however, last year's knowledge and the preventive shield of the vaccine are always reliable options.

The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.

WPI inflation spikes to over 8-year high of 7.39% in Mar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The wholesale price-based inflation shot up to over 8-year high of 7.39 per cent in March on rising crude oil and metal prices.

Also, the low base of March last year, when the data was computed with a low response rate due to the nationwide lockdown, contributed to the spike in inflation in March 2021.

The WPI inflation was 4.17 per cent in February 2021 and 0.42 per cent in March 2020.

This is the third straight month of up-tick seen in the wholesale price index (WPI)

based inflation.

“The annual rate of inflation stood at 7.39 per cent (provisional) for the month of March 2021 over March 2020,” the Commerce and Industry Ministry said.

Such a high level of WPI was last recorded in October 2012, when inflation was 7.4 per cent.

Inflation in food articles in March was 3.24 per cent as prices of pulses, fruits and paddy hardened.

In pulses, it was 13.14 per cent in March, while in fruits and paddy, inflation was 16.33 per cent and 1.38 per cent, respectively.

In vegetables, the rate of

price rise softened to (-) 5.19 per cent, against (-) 2.90 per cent in the previous month. Inflation in the fuel and power basket was 10.25 per cent in March, against 0.58 per cent in February on higher fuel prices. In manufactured products, inflation was 7.34 per cent.

“The prices of crude oil, petroleum products and basic metal substantially increased in March 2021 as compared to the corresponding month of last year. Also, due to nationwide lockdown, the WPI index for the month of March 2020 was computed with a relatively low response rate,” the ministry said while releasing the WPI data.

Citi to exit consumer banking biz in India, to focus on institutional segment

PTI ■ MUMBAI

American banking major Citibank on Thursday announced exiting the high visibility consumer banking business in India as part of a global strategy.

The consumer banking business comprises credit cards, retail banking, home loans and wealth management. The bank will be exiting the segment in India after more than three decades.

The bank has 35 branches in the country and employs approximately 4,000 people in the consumer banking business.

On Thursday, the bank announced exiting from the consumer banking businesses in 13 countries, with its glob-

al CEO Jane Fraser attributing the decision to an absence of scale to compete in these geographies.

Contours of the exit were not immediately known and the proposed exit from the consumer banking business will also need regulatory approvals. “There is no immediate change to our operations and no immediate impact to our colleagues as a result of this announcement.

In the interim, we will continue to serve our clients with the same care, empathy and dedication that we do today,” Citi India’s Chief Executive Ashu Khullar said.

“... the sharpened strategy announced today will strengthen our ability to bring the full global power of Citi to

our institutional clients, reinforcing our leading positions across corporate, commercial and investment banking, treasury and trade solutions, as well as markets securities services,” he added.

Citi had entered India in 1902 and started the consumer banking business in 1985.

From a social perspective, the consumer bank had extended loans of Rs 27,911 crore to agriculture, affordable housing, renewable and MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) as of March 2020.

Of that amount, Rs 4,975 crore was extended to weaker sections as part of Citibank India’s priority sector lending obligations, as per a release issued by the bank last year.

Markets extend gains to 2nd day as banks, financial stocks rally

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Sensex and Nifty closed in the green after a volatile session on Thursday as investors accumulated banking, finance and select IT counters despite an unabated rise in COVID-19 cases.

A recovering rupee and positive global cues also propped up the bourses, traders said.

After gyrating 877 points during the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 259.62 points or 0.53 per cent higher at 48,803.68.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty advanced 76.65 points or 0.53 per cent to 14,581.45.

TCS topped the Sensex gainers’ chart, climbing 3.67 per cent, followed by ONGC, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Dr Reddy’s, HDFC, Axis Bank and HCL Tech.

On the other hand, Infosys was the biggest loser, dropping 2.65 per cent after its March 2021 quarter earnings missed market expectations.

The IT services major had on Wednesday posted a 17.5 per cent rise in net profit to Rs 5,076 crore for the March quarter, and announced up to Rs 9,200 crore buyback offer at a maximum price of Rs 1,750 per share.

RBI sets up RRA to streamline regulations and reduce compliance

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Thursday set up the second Regulatory Review Authority (RRA 2.0) with a view to streamlining regulations and reducing compliance burden of regulated entities.

Reserve Bank of India Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao has been appointed as the Regulations Review Authority, the central bank said in a statement.

The RBI had set up a

Regulations Review Authority (RRA) initially for a period of one year from April 1, 1999, for reviewing regulations, circulars, reporting systems, based on the feedback from public, banks and financial institutions. The recommendations of the RRA enabled streamlining and increasing the effectiveness of several procedures, simplifying regulatory prescriptions, paved the way for issuance of master circular and reduced reporting burden on regulated entities.

Amazon announces \$250 mln fund for small, medium businesses in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce giant Amazon on Thursday announced a USD 250 million (about Rs 1,873 crore) fund that will focus on digitising small and medium businesses, and driving innovation in the areas of agri-tech and health-tech in India.

“Small and medium sized businesses are often the engine and the lifeblood of economies and I think it’s true in India as well. And we are very passionate about trying to enable

acceleration of SMBs in fuelling innovation and the economy in India,” Amazon Web Services CEO Andrew Jassy said.

Building on last year’s announcement, Amazon is announcing a new USD 250 million Amazon Smbhav Venture Fund, Jassy, who will take over as the CEO of Amazon Inc later this year, said during the second Amazon Smbhav event.

He noted that Amazon intends to help inspire more SMBs to be able to build brand new businesses.

Private equity inflow in India realty up 19% in FY21

Mumbai: Bucking the pandemic private equity investments into the India real estate sector rose around 19 per cent in FY 2020-21 to over \$6.27 billion, according to an Anarock report. During the previous financial year, PE investments into the realty sector stood at \$5.8 billion. Indian real estate recorded its highest-ever private equity investments since in the last fiscal, since FY16, noted the Anarock Capital’s ‘Flux - FY20-21 Market Monitor for Capital Flows’.

India’s March merchandise exports rises by over 60% YoY

New Delhi: Base effect, along with healthy demand conditions abroad, pushed India’s merchandise exports higher by 60.29 per cent on a year on year basis in March 2021, official data showed on Thursday.

The country’s merchandise exports during the month under review increased to \$34.45 billion as compared to \$21.49 billion in March 2020.

PTI

FY22 prospects uncertain, insurers wish for an insurance cover

IANs ■ CHENNAI

Insurance is basically a business based on uncertainty of events. Curiously, the general insurance industry officials while hoping for a growth, are uncertain about the prospects for FY22, as they are faced with negative consumer sentiment; the reduction in cash flow due to withdrawal of long-term motor policy; lower investment yield and muted growth owing to economy affected by Covid-19 pandemic.

The 34-member Indian general insurance industry closed last fiscal with 5.2 per cent growth with a premium of Rs 198,734.68 crore up from Rs 188,916.61 crore logged in FY20.

“The uncertainty is high owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. The consumer sentiment is negative.

The health insurance portfolio will continue to do well. The motor insurance business should do well if the economy doesn’t deteriorate further. Some sport utility vehicles (SUV) have waiting periods,” Roopam Asthana, CEO and the Whole Time Director, Liberty General Insurance Ltd told IANs.



Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol bagh Delhi-110005

PUBLIC NOTICE - TENDER CUM AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET

[See proviso to rule 8(6)]**Notice for sale of immovable assets**

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of ICICI Bank Ltd. will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" as per the brief particulars given hereunder;

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price Earnest Money Deposit	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of Auction
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
1.	Ram Dass (Borrower), Indra (Co-Borrower), Kamal (Co-Borrower) LBDEL00002375637	No 25, 1st Floor Block- E-2, Pocket-3 Lig Sector 34 Rohini Delhi, 110085, Area: 335 Sq.ft.	Rs. 17,44,677/- (as on April 8, 2021)	Rs. 11,40,000/- To Rs.1,14,000/-	May 17, 2021 From 12 Noon To 1:00 PM	May 31, 2021 From 11:00 AM Onwards

The online auction will be conducted on website (**URL Link- <https://disposalhub.com>**) of our auction agency **M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited**. The Mortgagors/ noticee are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till **May 29, 2021** before **05:00 P.M** else these secured assets will be sold as per above schedule.
The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at **ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol bagh Delhi-110005** and thereafter they need to submit their offer through the above mentioned website only on or before **May 29, 2021** before **05:00 P.M** along with scan image of Bank acknowledged DD towards proof of payment of EMD. Kindly note, incase prospective bidder(s) are unable to submit their offer through the website then signed copy of tender documents may be submitted at **ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol bagh Delhi- 110005** on or before **May 29, 2021** before **05:00 PM**. Earnest Money Deposit DD/PO should be from a Nationalised/ Scheduled Bank in favour of "ICICI Bank Limited" payable at Delhi.
For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact **ICICI Bank Limited on 8657476284** or **M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited on 9710029933/ 9810022996/ 01244233933**
Please note that Marketing agencies 1. **M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited**. 2. **Augeo Asset Management Pvt Ltd**. 3. **Props AMC**, have also been engaged for facilitating the sale of this property.
The Authorised Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons.
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit **www.icicibank.com/n4p4s**
Date: April 16, 2021
Place: Delhi/NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

NITI Aayog to finalise names of 2 public sector banks for privatisation soon

New Delhi: Govt think-tank NITI Aayog, in consultation with the Finance Ministry, has started deliberations to finalise the names of two public sector banks that will be privatised in the current fiscal as part of the disinvestment process.
NITI Aayog has been entrusted with the task of selection of names of two public sector banks and one general insurance company for the privatisation as announced in the Budget 2021-22. The work in

this respect is going on, sources said, adding, a couple of meetings have been convened by the NITI Aayog on the subject.
There are various aspects that have to be looked into including regulatory issues, HR management, financial health etc before reaching a conclusion, sources added.
Once NITI Aayog makes its recommendations, it will be vetted by the Core Group of Secretaries on Disinvestment headed by Cabinet Secretary.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to notify the public at large that our client, Smt Kamla Kumari Yadav, W/o Late Sh. Ram Saran Yadav, R/o H.No-1004, Gali No-11/B, Faziil Colony, Part-02, Mukund Pur EXT., North West, Delhi-110042, through this public notice disown and renounce all her relations with her Son namely Rohit Kumar Yadav. It is further notified that she shall have no legal right, title, interest, right of inheritance etc on any of the movable and immovable properties of our client. Our client also serve all social ties with him. She shall not be responsible for any act and/or omission of any nature, whatsoever, committed by him and further she shall have no personal, social or moral relation with him in future. Any person dealing with him shall be doing so at his/her own risks, to which, our client shall not be responsible in any manner. Any other person related to him, also, shall stand to be disowned by our client from her all moveable and immovable assets.
ROHIT YADAV ADVOCATE
Chamber No. 728, Lawyer Chamber Block, Rohini District Courts, Delhi

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that my client, SH. SANDEEP CHAWLA, S/O LATE SH. NARINDER KUMAR CHAWLA, R/O FLAT NO. 86-A, IN BLOCK-A, POCCKET-D, SHALIMAR BAGH, DELHI-110088 has applied for conversion of the aforesaid flat from lease hold to free hold vide File No. F-58(08/1981)-H&M/UG in DDA. The original documents i.e. Demand / allotment Letter, Possession Letter, NOC to water and Electric and site Possession Slip of the above said flat has been lost. An NOC/RULE NO. 315(29/2021) dated 13/04/2021 to this effect has been lodged in P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi.
Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above Address/Phone No. 9810068120 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property can personally inform or write to Deputy Director (JAB) H or Director (H), D Block, 3rd Floor, Vikas Sadan, New Delhi.
Naveen Aggarwal (Advocate)
Ch.No. M-7, Near SBI, Western Wing, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi-11

DELHI JAL BOARD: GOVT. OF NCT OF DELHI
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (E&M)-HP-I
HAIDERPUR WATER WORKS, DELHI-110085

STOP CORONA: WEAR MASK, MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING AND MAINTAIN HAND HYGIENE
Short Press N.I.T. No.01 (2021-22)

S. No.	Name of Work	Approximate value based on Schedule of rates/Item rates/Lump sum (Rs in Lacs)	Earnest Money (Exempted) in Rs.	Tender Fee	Date of release of tender in e-procurement solution	Last date/time of receipt of tender through e-procurement solution
1.	Removal of floating material manually by labour at different bar screens installed at Twin Main Pond under HPWW-I.	Item rate	59000/-	500/-	15.04.2021	23.01.2021

Further details in this regard can be seen at <https://delhi.govtprocurement.com>
ISSUED BY P.R.O. (WATER)
Advt. No. J.S.V. 31 (2021-22)

Sd/-
(SUNIL KUMAR)
EE (E&M) HP-I

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is known to all that Allottee of residential flat/Kothi No. A-71, Sector-31, Noida, Sushil Kumar Kalra S/o Ram Kishore Kalra R/o DD-62, Amar Colony, Delhi, Present Add. 52/4/3, Kaila Bhatta, Ghaziabad (U.P.), has sold the above said flat/kothi on GPA basis.
1. A GPA was executed 31.12.2019 in favour of Mohd. Umair Ansari S/o Mohd. Salim Ansari R/o G-227, Sector-63, Noida Present Add. 129, Ansariyan Sikandrabad, Bulandshahr, U.P. which is registered in the office of Sub Registrar Office V. Ghaziabad the agreement to sell was not executed.
2. Because the Agreement to sell written in para 1 is not registered so with the help of this notice it is informed that the transfer of the above flat/kothi on the basis of GPA goes in favour of M/s Crossways Vertical Solutions Private Limited Regd. Office 405, Fie, First Floor, Patparganj Industrial Area, Delhi-110092 through its authorize Mr. Sunil Kumar Gupta (Director). If anyone has any objection, he/she can submit his/her objection in the residential department of NOIDA Authority within 30 days of publication of this notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is known to all that Allottee of Residential Guralp Kaur Bajwa, Miss Guralp kaur Bajwa D/o S. Sadhy Singh Bajwa R/o H.No. 27, Sant Nagar, Near East of Kailash, has sold the above said Plot on GPA basis.
1. G.P.A. was executed on 09.01.2001 in favour of Rajender Sharma S/o J.P. Sharma R/o L-73, Sector-11, Near Metro Hospital, Noida which is registered in the office of sub Registrar Office, Seelampur Delhi & the agreement to sell was not executed.
2. Because the Agreement to sell written in para 1 is not registered so with the help of this notice it is informed that the transfer of the above plot on the basis of GPA goes in favour of Mr. Avikalp Sharma S/o Jagdish Prasad Sharma R/o L-73, Sector-11, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.). If anyone has any objection, he/she can submit his/her objection in the residential department of NOIDA Authority within 30 days of publication of this notice.
Rajendra Sharma
S/o J.P. Sharma
Res.: L-73, Sector-11, Noida


SEARCH FOR MISSING



Sonam**Nasreen**

General public is hereby informed that these girls (depicted in the photo) namely: (1) Sonam D/o Late Sh. Ashok R/o Village Antola, PS Ayana, Distt. Oriaya, UP & (2) Nasreen D/o Md. Shamim R/o H.No. 4, Plot No. 15, Mata Chowki, Shivaji Nagar, Mumbai has been missing/ kidnapped from Katyani Balika Ashram, Mandir Marg, New Delhi since 20.07.2018. In this regard FIR No. 66/18 dated 20.07.2018 has been lodged at PS Mandir Marg, New Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the girls but no clue has come to light so far. Their physical description is as under:-
Name: Sonam, **Age:** 15 years, **Height:** 5'11" ft, **Complexion:** Fair, **Face:** Long, **Built:** Thin, **Wearing:** Pink Frock & Blue Payajami.
Name: Nasreen, **Age:** 13 years, **Height:** 5'2" ft, **Complexion:** Shallow, **Face:** Long, **Built:** Thin, **Wearing:** Red T-shirt and Black Jeans.
Any person is having information or clue about these missing/ kidnapped girls may kindly inform to the following:-
SHO
Website: <http://cbi.nic.in> **P.S. Mandir Marg, New Delhi**
E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in **Ph. No.: 011-23366730, 23364100**
Tel. No.: 011-24368638/24368641 **Mob. No.: 8750870522**
Fax No.: 011-24368639 **DP/253/ND/2021**

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION



General public is hereby informed that one male namely **Unknown S/o Unknown** R/o Unknown. Age about 55 years, Height about 5'7", Complexion wheatish, Built thin, Face long, Hair black & white wearing checkdar shirt was found dead on Patri under Janakpuri East Metro Station, Main Najafgarh Road, Tilak Nagar, Delhi on 12.04.2021 at about 11:05 hrs. The dead body has been preserved in mortuary DDU Hospital, Hari Nagar, Delhi. In this regard a DD No. 37-A dated 13.04.2021 has been lodged at PS Tilak Nagar, Delhi.
Any person having any information or clue about this deceased person may kindly inform to the undersigned at the address or telephone nos. given below.
SHO
PS Tilak Nagar, Delhi
Ph. 011-25407800, 25409290
DP/405/WD/2021

WANTED



General public is hereby informed that this person (Depicted in photo) **Name :** Unknown, is **Suspicious** against FIR No. **35/19 dated-12/03/2019 u/s 379 IPC P.S.-NDRS**. He is wanted in above case registered at PS New Delhi Railway Station, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about above person but no clue has come to light so far. Any person having any information or clue about above person may kindly inform New PS Delhi Railway Station (GRP) to the following. **SHO**
P.S. New Delhi Railway Station, New Delhi
Ph. No. 011-23744073
Mob. No- 8750871305
DP/114/RLY/2021

SEARCH FOR SUSPECTED PERSON



General public is hereby informed that one suspected person **Namely:** Unknown, **S/o Unknown, R/o Unknown, Age:** about 20-25 Years, **Height:** 5'6", **Complexion:** Wheatish, **Face:** Long, **Hair:** Black, **Built:** Thin, **Wearing:** Shirt & Pant, has been involved in case e-FIR No. 64/2020 dated 25.12.2020, U/s 379 IPC has been registered at P.S. North Avenue, New Delhi.
Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this suspected person but no clue has come to light so far.
Any person having any information or clue about this suspected person kindly inform to the following.
SHO
E-Mail: cic@cbi.gov.in **P.S. North Avenue, New Delhi**
Website: <http://cbi.nic.in> **Ph. 011-23093040, 23093294**
Fax: 011-24368639 **Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641**
DP/260/ND/2021

SEARCH FOR MISSING BOY



Prakash Ranaram Purohit

General Public is hereby informed that one boy (depicted in the photo) namely Prakash Ranaram Purohit S/o Rana Ram Purohit R/o H.No. B-1091, 4th Floor, Near Jain Mandir, Mor Wali Gali, Shastri Nagar, Delhi, **Permanent Address-** 107, Shyam Sunder Building, 1st Floor, KK Marg, Nav Jivan Society, Mumbai Maharashtra, **Aged-** 27 Years has been reported missing since 08.04.2021 at 1:00 PM from Shop No. 08, Ground Floor, World Mobile Plaza 13/22, WEA Karol Bagh, Delhi vide **DD No. 58-A Dated 12.04.2021** lodged at Police Station Karol Bagh, Delhi. His physical description is as under:-
Complexion: Fair, **Height:** 5'5", **Face:** Oval, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Maroon coloured t-shirt, brown coloured pant and blue coloured slipper in feet.
Any person having any information/Clue about this missing boy, may inform SHO, Karol Bagh, Delhi at E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in or website: <http://cbi.nic.in> Sd/-
Tele No. : 011-24368638 or 24368641 **SHO, Karol Bagh, Delhi**
FAX No. : 011-24368639 **Tel.: 011-25726870**
DP/760/CD/2021 **28721115**

WANTED
SEARCH FOR ACCUSED/SUSPECTED PERSON



General public is hereby informed that one boy namely Unknown S/o Unknown R/O Unknown, who was depicted in the photo is **WANTED** and suspected in the case of FIR No. **158/18 dated 26.12.2018 U/s -379 IPC at PS: New Delhi Railway Station**.
Full efforts have been made by the local police to trace out him but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone has any information about this suspected/accused boy then please inform P.S. New Delhi Railway Station (GRP), Delhi at following Tel No./e-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in and Website: <http://cbi.nic.in>
Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax No. 011-24368639
Sd/- S.H.O.
DP/115/RLY/2021 **P.S. New Delhi Railway Station, Delhi**
Phone: 23744073/2336363622/9212733576

CSB Bank
Formerly The Catholic Syrian Bank Ltd.
Palam Branch located at RZ 11-D, Yadav Towers, Infront of Palam Metro Station Gate No.3, Purnanagar, Palam Colony, South West Delhi, New Delhi-110045

GOLD AUCTION NOTICE
CSB Bank Limited, Palam branch had granted gold loan against pledge of gold ornaments to the below mentioned borrower/s. Notice has been issued to him/them demanding repayment of the amount with interest and charges thereon. Since they have failed to repay the balance outstanding in the respective account/s, we are constrained to recover the amount by sale of gold ornaments in public auction and if the auction does not fetch required amount, bank will proceed with the sale by private treaties/contract. Bank reserves its right to change/extend the date and venue of auction without assigning any reason.

Sl No	Name of borrower	Gross Weight of Pledge Items (in grams)	Overdue Gold Loan Account no.	Amount	Balance Outstanding (as on 14.04.2021)
1	Manju Rawat	19.64	0459-04185195-000001	67500	64971
2	Kabir Bagga	59.84	0459-04224772-000001	206000	217196
3	Deepika Arora	705.44	0459-03123514-000002	2500000	2478193
4	Deepika Arora	115.84	0459-03123514-000003	210000	217215
5	Vicky	195.7	0459-07292149-000001	710000	716287
6	Madhu	266.31	0459-07311891-000001	931000	933888
7	Neetu verma	306.13	0459-07315467-000002	11,50,000	1,101,255.50

The auction will be conducted at the premises of CSB Bank Limited, Palam branch premises situated at RZ 11-D, Yadav Towers, Infront of Palam Metro Station Gate No.3, Purnanagar, Palam Colony, South West Delhi, New Delhi-110045 on **23.04.2021**. Interested parties may contact the Branch Manager in the above address. Participants should attend the auction along with copy of Pan Card, passport size photo, valid identity proof and address proof on the date of auction.
Place: Palam
Date : 15-04-2021

Branch Manager



HAVE A SAFE JOURNEY

Urgent travel plans amid the pandemic? Here are a few things to keep in mind while booking your tickets

India is a land of varied culture and one of the best ways to explore its beauty is by experiencing a train ride. As soon as you enter a train station, you are greeted by the site of multiple vendors selling their products, different types of trains entering and leaving the platforms and people running back & forth to drop/receive their relatives. To match the needs of modern times, trains in India are equipped with CCTV cameras, bi-toilets and internet connectivity, ensuring the highest level of comfort to passengers. Though all this may excite you to hop on the train right away, much of the train travel experience has changed due to COVID-19.

With the pandemic not willing to take a beating, Indian Railways had to come up with a certain set of rules to promote social distancing and keep a check on the spread of infection. Because of this, the glam and charm of the train journeys are not what they used to be. That means a ban on entry of hawkers selling food, fewer pit-stops in between to take a joy ride, etc, are the new normal. Even after knowing all this, if you have urgent travel plans and have chosen 'train' as your medium for the ride, there are a few things you need to do or know while booking your ticket.

PLAN YOUR TRAVEL AHEAD OF TIME

COVID is not a hoax and shouldn't be considered otherwise. If you wish to stay at a hotel in your chosen destination, you should scan through the COVID protocols and go with the safest option. It's also recommended to go for off-season dates (weekdays) to avoid mixing with the heavy crowd. Further, you should map the places you wish to visit and be prepared to tackle the infection like a champ.

NO MORE 'UNRESERVED TRAVEL' FOR YOU

To avoid overcrowded trains and minimise the spread of infection, trains no longer allow unreserved

travel. Reserved bookings are the only way to board the trains without security saying 'no entry' to your face. So, make sure you have a confirmed train ticket to travel to your destination.

GO THROUGH THE COVID PROTOCOLS

To ensure the safety of its citizens and passengers, several state governments have updated their COVID protocols. For instance, the Tamil Nadu government has made it mandatory for train passengers from several Indian territories to register online a few days before coming to the state. You should check all the guidelines listed by your chosen destination to avoid breaking any rules and spoiling your journey.

SHARE YOUR COMPLETE ADDRESS

Earlier, there was no need to share your address details while booking train tickets. But now with COVID hovering over our heads, the risk of an outbreak/new red zone is quite imminent, even on trains. So, passengers have to provide their correct and complete address details to the Indian Railways so that they can trace them when needed.

GET YOUR RT-PCR TEST DONE

As more and more COVID+ cases surround our country, Indian Railways have requested passengers to get their RT-PCR tests done within 72-96 hours of boarding the train, which guarantees that a person is safe to travel (after getting a negative result), without posing a health risk to other passengers. The listed timeline varies from one Indian state to another. It's recommended that a passenger gets familiar with the rules laid by the chosen destination to avoid any trouble.

The COVID pandemic has indeed introduced a few roadblocks in the train travel industry. But as we try to overcome these and prepare for a post-COVID world, passengers have to



carefully follow the rules laid down by the government. So, whether you are travelling for work or pleasure, just

make sure to remember the above details while booking your train ticket to experience a safe journey ahead.

(The writer, Dinesh Kumar Kotha, is the co-founder and CEO of Confirmtkt.)



'Busy exploring shades of myself'

Actor KRITI SANON shares that no set or film is like the other

Kriti Sanon is the busiest bee of tinsel town currently with more than six films in her kitty. What makes these even more interesting is the range of her films in terms of their genres. From a horror comedy to an action film, the actor will be seen leading multiple genre films.

Talking about having so many different genres in her lineup Kriti says, "My work is so exciting because no set, no film is like the other. Doing such varied genres is helping me explore different shades of myself as an actor."

She adds, "From *Bhedhiya* being a horror comedy to action in *Ganpath*, mythology in *Adipurush* and an entertainer like *Bachchan Pandey*, I have many genres that I am working on right now which makes all the work even more exciting and interesting. It does also keep me on my toes."

Sanon has a bag of big budget films in her lineup for which she has been shooting non-stop for a while with all safety measures being taken as per government guidelines. She has been shooting in Arunachal Pradesh for *Bhedhiya* with Varun Dhawan, which is a horror comedy.

She will be seen playing Sita in Om Raut's mythological drama *Adipurush* with Prabhas. She has also signed an entertainer film *Bachchan Pandey* with Akshay Kumar and the drama - *Mimi*, which will star her as the solo lead. The actor also has a quirky comedy, *Hum Do Hamare Do* with Rajkummar Rao and her first action film, *Ganpath*.

Hollywood action superstar Vin Diesel has opened up about what makes his *Fast & Furious* franchise so popular globally. He also spoke of the biggest difference between the first film, which was released in 2001, and the ninth installment that is all set to release.

"I think the greatest difference is when the first film came out, you had no idea who these characters were. You had no idea what world you were entering when you came into the theatres to see this movie. Now, people feel that they have grown up with this saga. People feel like this is their franchise," said he.

Fast & Furious 9: The Fast Saga also stars John Cena, Michelle Rodriguez and Dwayne Johnson. The film is directed by Justin Lin. Diesel stressed that each time the makers embark on a new chapter they always thought of how to reach higher.

"How do we dazzle the audience or engage the audience even more? As John (Cena) articulated these are characters that are very familiar to the moviegoer, and the moviegoer has their own relationship with this family of characters that live in the saga. I will just say there is a familiarity," said Diesel.

He added: "I remember when the cast members used to say the release of *Fast And Furious* is like a holiday the world expects to see it every two years."

Fast & Furious 9 is the penultimate film in the franchise, and the next part will be done in two films. As of now, it has been decided the two-

'I am proud'

VIN DIESEL opens up about what makes his *Fast & Furious* franchise so popular globally. He says that people feel they've grown up with the saga



part tenth film would wrap up the series.

"When my daughter heard that ten would be the last, broken into two films, she started crying and I can't tell you how bad I felt. I tried to console her but she just didn't want to hear that this world saga could finally have a finale," Diesel, whose real name is Mark Sinclair, said.

He finds it incredible that the fans can finally have a look at the ninth installment.

He said: "It feels incredible to be a part of something that will bring the world together again. There is something I think we as society never antic-

ipated we'd be losing by not being able to be entertained together as a community."

"There is something special that happens when people see *Fast And Furious* in a packed audience with your family, friends and your loved ones, and you can feel the rumble of excitement and you can feel the emotions in the theatre building," he said.

"To be a part of the return to the theatrical experience is something so right, and I feel so proud of. To do it with my family that has been doing it for two decades is a dream come true," he concluded.

—IANS



KUSHAN MITRA



Recently, I got my hands on the Refreshed BMW 6-series, it takes this very nice sportback sedan to another level of refinement. Driving it in the 630i M Sport trim is extremely engaging. I have always liked BMW's two-litre turbocharged petrol engine with the 30i moniker and 250 horsepower. This particular one, running the longer-wheelbase variant of the 5-series platform, will go up against the recently refreshed E-Class sedan from Mercedes-Benz. Honestly, in this segment, the Mercedes wins out, not because it is the better vehicle but because of the badge value. The E-Class is the standard luxury sedan of choice for the companies and governments alike. It is the car, once you hit a certain age, that you want to be seen in.

But, as the title of this piece suggests, I have a preference for BMWs. While I am not alone among automotive writers here because other than a few dastardly misses with exterior design, they are all very engaging to drive, and we will not get into the mad-cap super-sedans that all the German companies put out. But sitting behind the wheel of the 6-series, I realised why I really enjoy driving a BMW even bumper-to-bumper traffic in the city. I love BMW's iDrive system, and one major reason is because it has been most consistent in terms of functionality among all the luxury car manufacturers. I experienced this system over a decade ago, there has been a consistency to the way it functions.

There has been no sudden dramatic change between generations of the iDrive system. Although it has come a long way from the very basic system that I first experienced on the E65 7-



Why I like BMWs

More than performance, BMW has always been on the ball when it comes to their infotainment system — the fabled iDrive

series years ago, the fact that the click-wheel, despite touchpads and touchscreens being added over the years, and the button layout on the centre console added in the third iteration of the system, remain the same. Of all the infotainment and car control systems of any manufacturer, I can find my way around the iDrive system just by feel. While it was called 'iDrive' because the 'i' was then in vogue, thanks to Apple. I must admit that the system, like iOS, has evolved without drama over the years.

On top of that, BMW's integration with iOS is among the most compre-

hensive of any carmaker and over the years, they have taken out the kinks. For example, BMW was the first carmaker to have wireless connectivity for Apple CarPlay. And initially working one's way through the menus to connect an iPhone through CarPlay could take a reasonable amount of time even if you knew your way around the system. On cars like the 6-series that run the eighth-generation iDrive system, it takes under 30 seconds. Honestly for the life of me I do not understand why other luxury carmakers haven't done wireless connectivity as yet, particularly since every new iPhone or even mid-

spec Chinese Android phone has wireless inductive charging and all cars come with a wireless charging bay.

There are many good reasons to choose a BMW, after all, they are great to drive like this 630i is. And while the large kidney grilles on some of the latest cars such as the X7 and the forthcoming 4-series may not be to your aesthetic choices (they do look better in real life than on the wide-angle handout photos), BMW's iDrive system is strangely enough, becoming a top reason to choose the car, because just like the driving, it really does bring a smile to your face.

TRENDBLAZER



DON'T BELIEVE IN A B&W WORLD: VIDYA

Actor **VIDYA BALAN** shared a monochrome picture on social media, saying she does not believe in a black and white world except for a picture.

Vidya posted the picture on Instagram, where she is seen sitting on a chair dressed in a black outfit. She completed her look by leaving her long hair open with a middle parting.

"I don't believe in a black and white world, except for a picture maybe," she wrote as the caption.

fairtalk

FATIMA SANA



'Every day you go through your own journey of asking questions to yourself. There are your own challenges and weaknesses. You have to overpower and overcome them. You'd cross those and then you have more challenges and insecurities. That is a constant journey. Everyday, there is a new mindset.'

dailytalk

URVASHI RAUTELA



'India is a diverse nation and lately many festivals of different cultures and religions happened to be on the same day. Some parts of the country celebrated Ugadi, while others had Navratri. But amid all the festivals, I request everyone to be safe and follow all the precautions to avoid COVID-19.'

JLO AND ALEX RODRIGUEZ BREAK UP

Singer **JENNIFER LOPEZ** and baseball star **ALEX RODRIGUEZ** have officially ended their relationship. The two called off their engagement.

"We have realised we are better as friends and look forward to remaining so. We will continue to work together and support each other on our shared businesses and projects," they jointly said in the statement.

They said they "wish the best for each other and one another's children."



TIME TO DETOX

Fasting is an effective way to get rid of accumulated toxins from the body. AISHWARYA DWIVEDI shares a few tried and tested weight loss techniques which you can try this Navratri

Be it any religion or any ritual, they always have a logic behind it. Navratri usually falls on the time of season change, when our immunity is low and we are most likely to fall sick. This time is best for detox and fasting is an effective way to get rid of accumulated toxins from the body and mind. So here are a few tried and tested weight loss and detox technique, which you can try this Navratri.

STAY HYDRATED

To achieve a healthy weight loss, keeping yourself hydrated is must. Also, water plays a key role in suppressing your appetite. One must drink at least three to four litres of water. This really works if you are trying to lose fat off your belly. Other ways to stay hydrated during Navratri is to have coconut water, more of water-based vegetables and fruits like muskmelon, watermelon, cucumber, etc.

One interesting recipe you can try is trying the latest trend: Nature's natural cereal. In a bowl, combine all your favourite fruits like watermelon, papaya,



pineapple, pomegranate, grapes and add coconut water into it. Top with ice and chia seeds (optional). Avoid including bananas and mangos.

Another drink which can be included is by taking one bowl of your favourite cut fruit like strawberry, watermelon, mango with one bowl of ice and half bowl of milk, water or yoghurt whichever is appropriate as per the fruit and making a slush or frappe. Sounds tempting, isn't it?

Tip: Avoid packaged fruit juice or coconut water as they contain sugar. Try opting for natural things.

DON'T STARVE OR SKIP MEALS

Most people tend to skip meals expecting a faster result. But this lowers metabolism and hampers your digestive system in the longer run. One must have three to four balanced meals even during Navratri. Fruits like apple, watermelons,

dry fruits like almonds and raisins, roasted foxnuts are excellent snacks. Eat them whenever you feel hungry. Cucumber and yoghurt, especially homemade, is a great snacking option as well.

EAT SAGO (SABUDANA) KHICHADI

Sago (*sabudana*) is a rich source of carbohydrates and calories, but if taken in right and small quantity, it is very wholesome, provides energy, prevents digestion issues and aids muscle growth. So here is one such delicious recipe of *sabudana khichadi*:

INGREDIENTS

- ▣ *Sabudana* (soaked overnight): 100 gm
- ▣ Peanuts: 20 gm
- ▣ Green chillies (chopped): 3-4
- ▣ Coriander (chopped): 20 gm
- ▣ Red chilli as per taste (optional)
- ▣ Rock salt as per taste
- ▣ *Desi* ghee: 1-2 tbsp

METHOD

- ▣ In a non-stick pan, heat *desi* ghee.
- ▣ Now shallow fry peanuts until crispy and keep them aside in a bowl.
- ▣ In the same ghee, now add chopped green chillies and saute for one to two minutes. Now add *sabudana* (washed three to four times after being soaked overnight or minimum for three hours.)
- ▣ Saute the *sadudana* for three to five minutes and keep stirring so that they don't turn sticky.
- ▣ Add rock salt as per taste. You can also add red chillies as per taste.
- ▣ Finally after cooking for five to seven minutes on low flame, garnish with chopped coriander and peanuts.
- ▣ Serve with cucumber salad and fresh yoghurt.

AVOID SUGAR

The most important thing while considering detox or weight loss is to complete-



ly skip sugar. Honey or jaggery can be used as a substitute when required. Try to avoid sweets as much as possible. So think twice before having lot of *prasad*.

TRY SAMAK RICE AND BOTTLE GOURD KHICHADI

Barnyard millet or *samak* grain is a good source of protein, carbohydrate, fiber and micronutrients (iron and zinc). It also has high content of fibre which helps to keep the body feeling full. This stops the urge to consume more food and avoiding high calorie intake. Bottle gourd aids weight loss, helps in digestion and reduces stress. So here is a delicious one pot recipe combining these powerful ingredients to make a scrumptious meal.

INGREDIENTS

- ▣ Bottle gourd (small): 1
- ▣ *Samak* rice: 1 cup
- ▣ *Desi* ghee: 1tbsp

- ▣ Water: 5-6 cups
- ▣ Green chilli: 4-5
- ▣ Rock salt and red chilli powder as per taste
- ▣ Coriander

METHOD

- ▣ In a pressure cooker, add *desi* ghee.
- ▣ After ghee heats up, add chopped bottle gourd, green chillies and cook on a medium flame until soft for five to seven minutes approximately.
- ▣ Now add salt and red chilli as per taste.
- ▣ After bottle gourd turns soft, wash *samak* rice and add. Saute for two to three minutes.
- ▣ Now add luke warm water and garnish with coriander.
- ▣ Pressure cook until one whistle.
- ▣ Serve with cucumber and *raita*.

Try these above tips and see some good results. (The writer is the food and lifestyle creator at Trell.)



Home-made pastries are becoming a new trend in India. It has become a form of expression, a stress relief exercise and most importantly a display of skills. As a beginner, whether you're trying to treat your loved ones after dinner or you want to impress your friends on social media, you can't afford to go wrong with a pretty cake.

Before you decide to go into a kitchen, start with the list of baking tools you must have. We'll help you set up a baking kit for beginners. For those who already own these tools, the list may provide motivation that you need to prepare the yummiest pastries or cakes. Building your essential baking toolbox starts here:

PASTRY BRUSH

This tool is one of the most important and has uses more than you can realise. It can be used to grease a pan before pouring cake in it, to coat dough with melted butter or egg wash or to paint milk on the top of pie crust. This is a must-have.

MEASURING CUPS

Baking is all about accuracy, so having a full set of measuring cups and spoons is a must. One

Bakers gonna bake

Whether you're trying to treat your loved ones after dinner or you want to impress your friends on social media, you can't afford to go wrong with a pretty cake. Here are top 10 pastry tools every home-baker should have

type of cup for measuring isn't enough for baking. You will need both dry and wet measuring cups to precisely measure all the ingredients you're putting in your recipe. Most measuring spoons sets have a tablespoon, ½ teaspoon, and ¼ teaspoon, while most measuring cups come in sets with ½ cup, ⅓ cup and ¼ cup.

WHISK

Whisk is used to beat together a few eggs, but it is used for other things too. In particular, it's one of the best to thoroughly mix various ingredients but it is also great for stirring together a home-made custard.

BAKING PAN

From flat baking trays for cookies and loaf tins for breads and

loaf cakes to square tins for brownies and round tins for classic sponge cake, the baking pans come in different sizes and shapes. Non-stick aluminum baking pan is better than a glass one. While glass one looks more stylish and presentable, aluminum has high heat conductivity so that you cook evenly.

STAND MIXER

An electric stand mixer is expensive, but once you use it, you'll wonder how did you ever manage without it, especially when you make things like marshmallows, they require beating for 10 or more minutes. It makes your cooking easier, takes off the physical load and saves a lot of time. Most importantly, it gives a better result in the final product.

ICING SPATULA

It is needed to evenly spread the cream all over the cake. It comes in different sizes and is needed as per the size/height of the cake. If you don't have an icing spatula, you can use the back, straight edge of a large knife to smooth your butter cream and then clean up the bottom of your cake plate with a paper towel. Next, take a freezer bag and fill it with your icing. Push the icing into one corner and twist the bag.

METAL BOWLS

Baking often necessitates frostings, caramels, and creams, which can be finicky if they're not kept at a steady temperature, are too warm. A frosting might not whip properly, for example, if ingredients are too warm. Metal bowls are really

helpful as they are a better conductor of heat than glass.

SERRATED KNIFE

This is the best knife for cutting a cake in half or thirds. It will help maintain a smooth, precise cut that's perfect for when you want to add a flavourful layer of fruit jam or fluffy buttercream to a pastry or a birthday cake.

PASTRY BAG DECORATING KIT

If you want to decorate your pastries with rose petals or a basetweave to the top, then you'll need some pastry decorating tools. This kit contains six different shaped tips and two reusable nylon bags, which are more eco-friendly than disposable plastic bags because they can be used over and over again.

GEL-BASED FOOD DYE

Gel-based food dye is used to create vibrant pastries and cakes. You should avoid water-based dyes found in little tubes at the supermarket as these dyes are so weak they'll produce pastels in place of bold, saturated ones. Natural dye is great too, but don't expect the same results.

(The list is shared by top chefs from the Academy of Pastry & Culinary Arts.)

RECIPES

BUCKWHEAT (KUTTU ATTA) KADHI

WHAT YOU NEED

- Sour yoghurt: 250 gm
- Buckwheat (*kuttu atta*): 1 tbsp
- Curry leaf: 5-6
- Black cardamom: 1-2
- Black mustard seeds: ½ tsp
- Green chillies (slit down the middle): 1-2,
- Ghee: 1 tbsp
- Himalayan pink salt (*sendha namak*) as per taste

METHOD

- Hand beat the sour yoghurt and buckwheat flour together ensuring there are no lumps.
- Heat ghee in a *kadhai*. Once hot, add curry leaves, black mustard seeds, black cardamom and green chillies till the ghee is fragrant.
- Turn off the flame.
- Slowly pour in the yoghurt and buckwheat while whisking continuously. This is done to avoid the yoghurt from splitting.
- Put it back on low heat while continuously whisking. Add salt. Keep whisking till



bubbles appear, that means the yoghurt has been cooked.

- Cook it till the desired consistency, some like their *kadhi* thin and runny, while some like it thick. Do keep

in mind that this will keep getting thicker as it cools down.

- Adjust seasoning and serve hot.

Courtesy: Chef Udit Maheshwari, co-founder of Pitaara Kitchen.

NAVRATRA SPECIAL ALOO TIKKI

WHAT YOU NEED

For tikki:

- Boiled mashed potato: 200 gm
- Chopped green chilli: 1/2 tsp
- Chopped ginger: ½ tsp
- *Kuttu ka atta* (for binding): 3 tbsp
- Chopped coriander: ½ tsp
- *Senda namak* to taste
- Oil

For saunth:

- *Amchoor* powder: 50 gm



- jaggery: 80 gm
- Fennel: ½ tsp
- Roasted cumin: 200 gm
- Black peppercorn

crushed: ½ tsp

- A pinch of *senda namak*

For mint chutney:

- Mint: 50 gm

PANEER MAKHANI

WHAT YOU NEED

- *Paneer*: 250 gm
- Tomatoes: 4-5
- Cashews: 3-4 tbsp
- Fresh cream: 4 tbsp
- Unsalted white butter: 2 tbsp
- Oil: 2 tsp
- Cumin seeds: 1 tsp
- Cinnamon: 1 stick
- Cloves: 4
- Green cardamoms: 2
- Black peppercorns: 5-6
- Turmeric powder: ½ tsp

- Kashmiri red chilli powder: 1 tsp
- Chopped green coriander and ginger: 2 tbsp
- Sugar: 2 tsp
- *Sendha namak* to taste

METHOD

- Boil water in a saucepan. Add cut tomatoes, ginger and cashew nuts for 10 minutes.
- Make paste of tomatoes using a blender.
- Heat oil, add the

cumin seeds, cinnamon, cloves, green cardamom and black peppercorns.

- Make paste of the above spices. Add turmeric powder, kashmiri red chilli powder, sugar, salt and cook the sauce on medium-high flame for 10 to 12 minutes.
- Cut the *paneer* into cubes and add into it.
- Garnish with fresh cream and chopped coriander leaves.

Courtesy: Executive chef Arvind Rai at The Ashok Hotel.



