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SOCIO-ECONOMIC
DIVIDES IN 2021

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APPEALS FOR UK GOVT HELP

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RODRIGUEZ
BREAK UP
10 VIVACITY

INDIA CROSSES 2-LAKH 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)



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

on Thursday converted famed Jaslok Hospital into a dedicated Covid-19 hospital.

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.

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
HARYANA: 3,35,800
PUNJAB: 2,86,816
CHANDIGARH: 32,397
DELHI: 7,84,137

Punjab to promote Class V, VIII, X students without exams

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The students of Class V, VIII, and X in Punjab will be promoted to the next class "without taking any examination".

The decision on Class XII Punjab School Education Board (PSEB) exams, which have already been postponed, would be taken later by the Government.

The decision, taken in the wake of massive surge in Covid-19 cases in the State, was announced by the Chief

The decision, taken in the wake of massive surge in Covid-19 cases in the State, was announced by the Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Thursday during a virtual Covid review meeting with top officials and medical experts

Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Thursday during a virtual Covid review meeting with top officials and medical experts.

The Chief Minister said that while the State had closed all educational institutions till April 30, bringing down the positivity in the 11-20 age group, relief was needed to be

provided to school children going for exams.

For the Class V students, since exams for four out of five subjects have already been conducted, results may be declared by the Punjab State Education Board (PSEB) on the basis of the marks obtained by the students in respect of four subjects, ignoring the

fifth subject.

Results for Classes VIII and X may be declared on the basis of Pre-Board examinations or the internal assessment of the respective schools, the Chief Minister directed the Education Department.

The Chief Minister, who had earlier this week written to the Union Education Minister in this regard, also expressed satisfaction at the Centre's decision to postpone Class XII CBSE exams and cancellation of Class X CBSE exams in view of the pandemic.

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Witnessing another day of a huge spike in the number of Covid-19 infections, Haryana on Thursday reported 5,858 fresh cases, the highest-single day record since the pandemic began.

18 more people died due to the virus in the State in the last 24 hours.

The active cases jumped to 29,236 while the total caseload reached 3,35,800. The death toll stood at 3,344 in the State.

According to the State's Health Department's bulletin, three people died in Faridabad,

two each in Hisar, Ambala, Karnal, Bhiwani, Fatehabad and one each in Gurugram, Sonapat, Kurukshetra, Yamunanagar, Kaithal.

A day before, the State had recorded 5,398 fresh cases and 18 deaths.

Gurugram district continued to be the worst affected in the State and recorded the highest number of fresh infections at 1,434 followed by 810 cases in Faridabad and 379 in Hisar.

There were 415 critical Covid-19 patients in the state out of which 342 were on oxygen support while 73 were on ventilators.

The active cases were recorded at 29,236 till the evening. The worst affected district — Gurugram reported the highest number of active cases at 7,740 followed by 3467 in Faridabad.

2,743 patients recovered from the virus in the last 24 hours taking the total recoveries to 3,01,948. Over 67.23 lakh samples have been tested till date in Haryana.

The fatality rate was recorded at 0.99 per cent in the State. The Covid positive rate was 5.01 per cent and recovery rate was recorded at 89.92 per cent.



Punjab registers highest ever 4,333 cases

80% cases of UK variant; Mohali records highest 860 cases; Active cases surpassed 30K

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The new infections in Punjab are growing by 1.2 per cent every day in the past one week, with the State health authorities blaming it on the UK variant that has been found in about 80 per cent of the State's Covid patients.

On Thursday, the State registered the steepest-ever single-day spike with 4,333 fresh cases in the past 24 hours, pushing the active cases in the state past the 30,000-mark. SAS Nagar (Mohali), with a

whopping 860 fresh cases, recorded the highest-ever figure by any district since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Against the total 34,409 tests conducted in a day, the State on Thursday registered the daily positivity rate of 12.59 per cent. The state's tally now stood at 2,86,816, of which 10.47 per cent (total 30,033) are active cases.

With Punjab's case fatality rate remaining highest in the country at 2.69 per cent, the state reported 51 fatalities in the past 24 hours. Amritsar, with ten deaths, reported the maximum casualties, followed by nine in Hoshiarpur; six each from Gurdaspur and Ludhiana; and five from Patiala.

Two deaths each were reported from Bathinda, Fatehgarh Sahib, Ferozepur, and Jalandhar; while one each were reported from Fazilka, Faridkot, SAS Nagar (Mohali), Muktsar, Pathankot, Sangrur, and Tarn Taran.

Reporting the highest ever fresh cases in a single day by any district, Mohali currently has the maximum number of active cases, 5,226 — which accounts for 17.40 per cent of the total active cases in the State, and 15.44 per cent of the total positive cases in the district.



People, not adhering to Covid-19 norms, walk at the Heritage Street near Golden Temple, in Amritsar, on Thursday PTI

State Health Secretary Hussan Lal on Thursday apprised during the Covid review meeting that against the 8.1 per cent overall positivity in Punjab, the Mohali district was reporting the highest 18 per cent. Along with Jalandhar, Ludhiana, and Patiala, the Mohali district is reporting high transmission.

Besides Mohali, other districts that reported fresh infections in three-digit figure include Ludhiana (482), Jalandhar (399), Amritsar (365), Patiala (353), Bathinda (301), Gurdaspur (194), Tarn Taran (186), Hoshiarpur (153), Kapurthala and Ferozepur (127 each), Faridkot (110), and Ropar (104).

70% of PGIMER samples sent to NCDC confirm UK variant: Director

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

PGIMER director Dr Jagat Ram on Thursday said that 70 per cent of the total samples sent to National Centre for Diseases Control (NCDC), New Delhi in March, 2021 had UK Variant of Covid-19 while 20 per cent of the samples had 681 H mutant of Covid-19.

The Director said, "The Department of Virology, PGIMER, Chandigarh, had sent 60 positive samples of Covid-19 to NCDC, New Delhi in the month of March 2021. It was found that 70 per cent of the samples had UK variants of Covid-19, one sample was found to have double mutation. 681H mutant of Covid-19 was observed in 20 per cent of the samples". Majority of the samples were from Chandigarh.

Dr Jagat Ram added with the Covid-19 cases surging at a rate much faster in the second wave than the first wave, it was being assumed that the UK variant could be responsible for this faster rate. The same was amply proved by the latest findings of the PGIMER samples sent to NCDC.

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 5,000 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.

"We will also monitor crowds at weekly markets and release guidelines pertaining to this as well. Dining at restaurants will no longer be allowed, one can avail of the home delivery and takeaway

method for now. Markets, public places etc. will see a stricter implementation of Covid norms," he added.

Kejriwal said, "We have been noticing a callous attitude in terms of wearing masks, observing social distancing, this is not good for safety and security."

Delhi reported 17,282 Covid-19 cases on Wednesday while 104 more people succumbed to the disease. The active cases reached to 50,736 in Delhi and containment zones rose to 7,598 on Wednesday.

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.

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 decid-

ed 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.

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 the disease among the children and safeguard them from the second wave of coronavirus infection, the CM said schools



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

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.

Yogi also asked the Team-11 members to keep a check on the availability of Remdesivir and oxygen for the treatment of Covid patients. The review should be done daily from the office of the Chief Secretary and the CM. It should be ensured that there is no paucity of these medicines in any hospital of the state, he said.

AMID SURGE IN COVID CASES

Haryana CM appeals to farmers to withdraw their agitation

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Thursday appealed to the farmers to withdraw their ongoing agitation on humanitarian grounds.

The appeal was made as the State Government on Thursday tightened restrictions on gathering at indoor and outdoor public functions to 50 and 200, respectively in view of a huge jump in daily infections across Haryana.

Earlier, 500 people at outdoor events and 200 at indoor programmes were permitted by the State Government.

Khattar said that it is the constitutional right of every person to protest and we have no problem with those who protest. However, at this time, due to Covid-19, life may be put in danger, so this is not the right time to protest.

"If they (farmers) have to hold or protest for any of their demands, they can do it when the situation improves," the Chief Minister said while presiding over a meeting called to review COVID-19 cases and vaccinations in Haryana.

Hundreds of farmers from northern states of Punjab and Haryana have been camping at Delhi border points for over four months now, demanding a repeal of the three agriculture reform laws enacted by the Centre in September last year.

The Chief Minister also directed the Deputy Commissioners to contact the agitating farmers and try to persuade them to end the protest.

He said that due to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in the country and the state, we have to take strict precautions. It has been decided that from now on, not more than 200 people can gather in open spaces during public functions and not more than 50 in indoor functions. Similarly, no more than 20 people will be able to attend funerals, he added.

He directed all the Deputy Commissioners to issue advisory in their respective districts

to ensure that night-time ceremonies should be shifted to the day time and the Navratri programmes should also be held during the day.

The state has already imposed night curfew from 10 pm to 5 am to break the chain of infection. The Chief Minister said that this time the spread of COVID-19 has started from educational institutions, so there is a need to be more vigilant, especially there. We also need to reduce crowding in public gatherings etc, he said.

Similarly, we should also include volunteers, ex-servicemen and Saksham Yuva in the task of dealing with COVID-19, he said.

There is proper arrangement of oxygen, ventilators and beds in the state. So people need not panic, he added.

He further directed that the district administration should plan at its level to deal with the situation. All the meetings should be held online or through webinars so that the movement of people can be reduced, he said.

Last year, economic activity had stalled due to the lockdown, which took about six months to get back on track. Therefore, we have to keep in mind that the economic cycle should continue in the state and that no one is adversely affected as well, he added.

DEPLOY TEAMS TO CHECK BLACK MARKETING OF REMDESIVIR, SAYS VIJ

During the meeting, Home-cum- Health Minister, Anil Vij expressed concern over the black marketing of Remdesivir and said that checking should be done by deploying teams to catch the culprits.

He directed that people living in home isolation must be checked at least once in two days at home. For this, an app has been created, he said.

Vij said that we want the situation to be dealt with strictly instead of imposing lockdown in the state. We can withstand resentment of people by acting strictly but cannot

CLASS X EXAMS CANCELLED, CLASS XII POSTPONED BY BSEH

Chandigarh: After the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) announced on Wednesday that the Board exams for class X stand cancelled and the exams for class XII will be conducted after assessing the situation on June 1, the Board of School Education Haryana (BSEH) on Thursday decided to follow the suit.

"The Haryana board class X exams have been cancelled and class XII exams have been deferred. The results of class X students will be

announced based on internal assessments.

If any student is not satisfied with the marks, he or she will be allowed to sit in formal exams after the situation improves," stated an order issued by Directorate School Education, Haryana. The exams of class XII scheduled for April 22 have been postponed and a decision will be taken after assessing the situation on June 1. At least a 15-day notice will be given to the students before the conduct of examination, the order stated.

not see people dying. This time, COVID-19 is more aggressive, he added.

Last year, the number of cases increased gradually, but this time it is a matter of serious concern that about five and a half thousand cases are reported in a single day. So we

Khattar directs to chalk out a policy for regularisation of industries in unauthorised areas

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar has directed the officers concerned to formulate a policy for regularization of industries running in unauthorised areas in the state and implement it as soon as possible.

The Chief Minister was presiding over the meeting of officers of Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC), Industries, Local Bodies Department, and Haryana Shehri Vikas Pradhikaran in this regard here.

He directed the officers to take forward the work by drafting rules and regulations to avoid any problem at any level.

It was informed in the meeting that so far, industries in Yamunanagar, Faridabad, Panipat and Rohtak have been surveyed.

According to the survey report, there are a total of 4742 industries in

Yamunanagar. Of these, 1413 are in the conforming zone while 3329 are in the non-conforming zone. Of the total 21460 units in Faridabad, 6048 are in the confirming and 15412 in the non-conforming zone. Of the total 10805 units in Panipat, 3318 are located in the confirming and 7487 non-conforming zones, and in Rohtak, 793 out of a total of 4176 units are located in the conforming and 3383 non-conforming zones.

Following the survey report, a five percent random sampling of these industries was directed to the Municipal Commissioner for disposal in the next week.

The industries in the non-conforming zone are classified into green, orange, red, and white according to the terms and conditions of the State Pollution Control Board.

It was further informed that after the physical verification of these industries, regular work will be done on a cluster basis.

Those eligible but not taking Covid-19 vaccine should be named and shamed: UT adviser

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Amid surge in covid-19 cases in Chandigarh, the UT Adviser Manoj Parida on Thursday said that those eligible for coronavirus vaccine but not taking it should be named and shamed. Chandigarh has been witnessing about 400 Covid-19 cases over the last many days. The positivity rate has been about 12 per cent in the city.

Parida further said, "In other States people are waiting in long queues to get it, while our facilities are underutilised in Chandigarh." "Those who are not taking vaccine will be termed defaulters in Chandigarh. They will be named and shamed," he said in a statement.

Parida said, "Resident Welfare Associations should help the UT administration by persuading eligible residents to take coronavirus vaccine in the city. Defaulters should be named and shamed."

UT Adviser further said, "Any group, association, soci-

ety can approach the administration with a list of 100 eligible persons to take vaccines. We will arrange a special camp near their place. Also, for old disabled eligible persons, our ambulance will pick up for vaccination, if they register with us."

CHANDIGARH REPORTS 412 CASES, 3 DEATHS

Chandigarh on Thursday reported 412 new cases, taking the infection count to 32,397. The death toll reached 407 in the Union Territory with three more fatalities. The number of active cases stood at 3371, according to a bulletin. A total of 409 patients were discharged after they recovered from the infection, taking the number of cured persons to 28,619 in the city. As many as 352,815 samples have been tested for Covid-19 so far. As per the medical bulletin, 4083 beneficiaries were given the Covid-19 vaccine at 55 sites in the city on Thursday. A total of 133,132 beneficiaries have been vaccinated in the city so far.

Not even single grain of wheat from outside to be allowed, Says Punjab CS

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To ensure smooth, seamless and hassle-free procurement of wheat, Punjab Chief Secretary, Vini Mahajan, on Thursday instructed the police and other departments concerned to make foolproof arrangements of not allowing even a single grain of wheat from outside the State and deployment of enforcement teams on inter-state borders to check the illegal trade.

She also directed to ensure the lifting of the crop within 72 hours after the procurement from the mandis and timely payment to the farmers.

Chairing a virtual meeting to review the ongoing wheat procurement operations in the state, the Chief Secretary said the Punjab Government has made elaborate arrangements with the ample availability of sanitisers.

Soaps, foot-operator wash-basins and face masks besides

holding vaccination camps while strictly following the Covid protocols in the mandis to accomplish the challenging task of grain purchase amid the virus surge.

The ACS Development Anirudh Tewari apprised the Chief Secretary that the state government has designated 4,000 purchase centres across the state for procurement of wheat at minimum support price from the farmers and Punjab Mandi Board has issued over 4.48 lakh passes to the farmers through arthiyas (commission agents) to ensure the staggered arrival of crop in the mandis in view of the Covid crisis.

Allaying the fears of shortage of bardana (gunny bags), the Principal Secretary Food and Civil Supplies KAP Sinha informed the meeting that sufficient bardana was available in the state and there was no need to panic.

Presently, as many as 2.6 lakh bales were available.

Reforms for MSME sector initiated in Punjab

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Government on Thursday said it has initiated a set of reforms to further reduce regulatory burden on MSMEs through rationalisation and digitalisation, aiming to enable entrepreneurs to focus on expanding their operations amid Covid-19 pandemic.

The reforms on building flexibility and reducing oversight in the labour rules, and pursuing a data driven assessment of service delivery delays are all centered around making entrepreneurship easier in Punjab, said Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh.

He underlined his government's commitment to reduce time, risk, and cost associated with compliance significantly, freeing up entrepreneurs to focus on growth.

The chief minister said with these reforms, commitments had been set for future changes, including rationalising trade license with Shops and Establishments Act and removing imprisonment terms from 100 low risk provisions in non-labour related rules.

Besides, he announced that the number of labour registers will be reduced, requiring an entrepreneur to maintain from 60 to less than 14, and flexibility enhanced in hiring women employees. Discretionary powers of inspectors are being removed with regard to deductions related to absence or leave.

To ensure timely delivery of key licenses and permits, the government has begun a monthly data driven assessment mechanism under the Chief Secretary to make sure not a single license or permit is delayed beyond the stipulated period.

Haryana's Nuh district lags in Covid vaccination drive

STATE ROPES IN RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO BOOST THE DRIVE

COVID VACCINATION REPORT AS ON APRIL 14 IN HARYANA					
District	Total doses given to HCWs	Total doses given to FLWs	Total doses given to persons aged 45-60 years	Total doses given to persons aged 60 years and above	Cumulative coverage of doses
WORST PERFORMING DISTRICTS					
Nuh	6613	1632	21587	4047	33879
Charkhi Dadri	4540	2573	15897	41623	64633
Kaithal	9658	3617	21880	39646	74801
BEST PERFORMING DISTRICTS					
Gurugram	52744	38176	147555	144032	382507
Faridabad	42939	10015	141464	125894	320312
Ambala	21714	25488	103451	88250	238903

NISHU MAHAJAN ■ CHANDIGARH

As the race to vaccinate Haryana's population against Covid-19 shifts into high gear amid the record spike in fresh infections, Nuh - which has the dubious distinction of country's most backward district, continues to lag behind its inoculation goals.

While the State Government administered over 6.37 lakh Covid-19 vaccine doses across Haryana during the much-hyped 'Tikka Utsav' from April 11 to 14, Nuh district continues with its poor performance in the vaccination drive.

Nuh is the only district in the state where not even a single citizen aged 60 years and above has received the second dose of vaccine.

Only 4047 persons aged 60 years and above, lowest among all districts, have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine since March 1 in the district. Not only this, just 57 frontline workers of government departments, again lowest in the state, have so far received the second dose of vaccine in

Nuh, according to the data of the state's Health Department till April 14.

Apart from Nuh, other districts where the vaccination pace has been sluggish are Charkhi Dadri, Kaithal and Fatehabad. However, Gurugram, which is the most affected district due to the COVID-19, tops the list in vaccination drive.

Haryana Additional Chief Secretary, Health, Rajiv Arora, while talking to The Pioneer said the Department is facing problems in Nuh due to some doubts in the minds of people against COVID vaccination hence religious leaders have been roped in the district to improve the vaccination rate.

We are hopeful that with the help of religious leaders, the Department will be able to motivate people to come forward for vaccination in Nuh, he said.

About the ongoing vaccination drive, Arora said that our target is to cover all people aged above 45 years in the state. We are expecting to receive another stock of vaccine doses between April 15-19 after which another four-day mega

vaccination drive will be conducted in the state, he added.

As per the data of Health Department, a total of 33879 vaccine jabs have been administered to the people of Nuh district out of total over 29.91 lakh jabs administered till April 14 in the state. The total 26381 jabs administered till April 11 increased to 33879 till April 14 after 'Tikka Utsav' in Nuh yet the district remains at the bottom in the state in terms of success rate in vaccine drive.

Nuh, Haryana's only Muslim dominated district is included in 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme aimed at effectively transforming the backward districts of the country.

Among other poor performing districts in vaccine drive include Charkhi Dadri, where 64644 doses of vaccine is administered, Kaithal with 74801 number of cumulative doses administered and Fatehabad with 76364 doses.

4540 doses of vaccine, the lowest in the state, have been administered to healthcare workers in Charkhi Dadri while it is in Nuh.



Sh. Manohar Lal
Chief Minister, Haryana

Keep following the Instructions after Corona Vaccination



Wear Mask Properly



Wash hands regularly with soap and water or use sanitizer



Maintain 2 Gaj Social Distance



In case of any symptoms get Tested for Covid-19 and Immediately isolate yourself



Be aware and make others aware



Information, Public Relations & Languages Department, Haryana

www.prharyana.gov.in @Cmohry @DiprHaryana

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

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday urged the IAF to draw long-term plans to counter any threat and appreciated the role of the Service in prompt, timely and befitting response during the stand-off at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh.

Making this observation while inaugurating the first bi-annual IAF Commanders' Conference of the year here, Rajnath asked the IAF brass to fashion strategies for capability enhancement to counter future threats. He appreciated the critical focus of IAF towards reorienting for the future.

Speaking about the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Minister appreciated the role played by the IAF in assisting other Government agencies in



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 (ret'd) 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 card-holders, 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 Bhowmik 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.”

Ipschita 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 match- es 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 Cgrave 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

Somnath Temple, daily ‘puja’ will be conducted but no public gathering will be allowed, said Nitin Tripathi, the ministry’s media advisor. Last year, too, all monuments and sites maintained by the ASI were closed due to the coronavirus pandemic on March 17. They reopened in July with strict restrictions like mandatory wearing of masks, cap on the number of visitors and social distancing. The curbs were relaxed later in the year. India’s daily COVID-19 cases surged to a record high of 2,00,739 on Thursday, taking the country’s cumulative tally to 1,40,74,564, according to Union health ministry data. The death toll climbed to 1,73,123 with 1,038 new fatalities, the highest since October 3, the data stated. **PTI**

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 Mumbaiers. 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 Mumbaiers 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 CCC-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

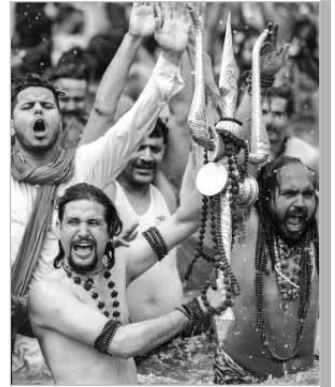
PTI

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.

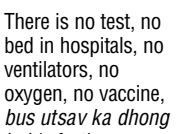


Actor
— Fatima Sana Shaikh



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



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



BKP SINHA SOMNATH PAI

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

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 sprang 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

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

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.

‘US troops pulling out of Af worrying for India’

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

After the withdrawal of the US and NATO troops from Afghanistan by September 11, India will have tremendous concern on the resurgence of the Taliban and the war-torn country being used as a safe haven for terrorists, according to experts here.

US President Joe Biden on Wednesday announced that all American troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by September 11 this year to end the country's longest war. Following suit, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) said it will also pull out its troops from Afghanistan.

Biden said his administration will ask other countries in the region to do more to support Afghanistan, especially Pakistan, as well as Russia, China, India, and Turkey. "They all have a significant stake in the stable future for Afghanistan," Biden said.

"We will not conduct a hasty rush to the exit. We'll do it responsibly, deliberately, and safely. And we will do it in full coordination with our allies and partners, who now have more forces in Afghanistan than we do," he said.



But, US experts said regional countries, especially India will view the complete withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan with tremendous concern and the role of the Taliban militants after the pull out of the Western forces from the war-torn country.

"Regional countries, especially India, will have tremendous concerns about the US pullout from Afghanistan and the likelihood of a Taliban resurgence in the country," Lisa Curtis, who was Deputy Assistant to the President and NSC Senior Director for South and Central Asia from 2017-2021 under the previous Donald Trump administration, told PTI.

Oz to withdraw last 80 troops from Afghanistan

Canberra: Australia would complete its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in September in line with the United States and other allies, the prime minister said Thursday. Australia's contribution to the NATO-led mission had once exceeded 15,000 personnel, but only 80 remain.

"In line with the United States and other allies and partners, the last remaining Australian troops will depart Afghanistan in September," Prime Minister Scott Morrison said, without nominating a day.

Blinken in Afghanistan to sell Biden troop withdrawal

AP ■ KABUL

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on Thursday to sell Afghan leaders and a wary public on President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all American troops from the country and end America's longest war.

Blinken sought to assure senior Afghan politicians that the United States remains committed to the country despite Biden's announcement a day earlier that the 2,500 US soldiers remaining in the country would be coming home by the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that led to the US invasion in 2001.

"I wanted to demonstrate with my visit the ongoing to commitment of the United States to the Islamic Republic and the people of Afghanistan," Blinken told Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as they met at the presidential palace in Kabul.



Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, right, meets with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, centre, and their delegations, at the Sapidar Palace in Kabul, Afghanistan on Thursday

"The partnership is changing, but the partnership itself is enduring." "We respect the decision and are adjusting our priorities," Ghani told Blinken, expressing gratitude for the sacrifices of US troops.

Later, in a meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, who heads

the National Reconciliation Council, Blinken repeated his message, saying that "we have a new chapter, but it is a new chapter that we're writing together."

"We are grateful to your people, your country, your administration," Abdullah said.

‘Terrorist forces’ may take advantage: China

Beijing: China on Thursday voiced concern over America's decision to withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan by September, saying the US should accommodate the legitimate security concerns of the regional countries to prevent "terrorist forces" from taking advantage of the chaos in the war-torn country.

Beijing also slammed Washington for linking the

withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan to focus more on the threats posed by China, saying the fight against terrorism is in the common interest of all parties, including the two countries.

"The current security situation in Afghanistan is still complex and grim and the problem of terrorism is far from being solved. Foreign troops stationed in Afghanistan

should withdraw in a responsible and orderly manner to ensure a smooth transition in Afghanistan and to avoid terrorist forces from taking advantage of chaos," Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a media briefing here while responding to questions on US troops pullout plan.

"The US is the biggest external factor affecting the issue of Afghanistan... It must

take full responsibility for preserving the outcomes of Afghanistan's peaceful construction and reconstruction and accommodate legitimate security concerns of the countries in the region," he said.

To a question that the US is linking its troops withdrawal to focus on China, Zhao said, "the US side links its withdrawal from Afghanistan to China's challenge. PTI

Top associate of Navalny convicted of trespassing in Russia

Moscow: A top associate of Russia's imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny was convicted of trespassing Thursday and handed a suspended sentence of one year community service after she tried to doorstep an alleged security operative believed to be involved in Navalny's poisoning with a Soviet-era nerve agent.

A court in Moscow found Lyubov Sobol, a politician and a key figure in Navalny's Anti-

Corruption Foundation, guilty of forcing her way into the apartment of a relative of the alleged operative whom Navalny had previously duped into revealing details of his supposed poisoning.

Sobol condemned the verdict as "shame and disgrace" and vowed to appeal.

"In the meantime, a (criminal) case into the attempt upon Navalny's life hasn't been even opened," she said in a

tweet.

Navalny, Russian President Vladimir Putin's fiercest critic, fell sick during an August 20 flight in Russia and was flown to Berlin while still in a coma for treatment two days later.

Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that he was exposed to a Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.

The 44-year-old politician has blamed the poisoning on the Kremlin, accusations Russian officials have rejected.

In December, while still convalescing in Germany, Navalny released a recording of a phone call he said he made to a man he identified as Konstantin Kudryavtsev and described as an alleged member of a group of officers of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, who purportedly poi-

US expels Russian diplomats, imposes new round of sanctions

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration on Thursday announced the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats and sanctions against nearly three dozen people and companies as it moved to hold the Kremlin accountable for interference in last year's presidential election and the hacking of federal agencies.

The actions, foreshadowed for weeks by the administration, represent the first retaliatory measures announced against the Kremlin for the hack, familiarly known as the SolarWinds breach.

In that intrusion, Russian hackers are believed to have infected widely used software with malicious code, enabling them to access the networks of at least nine agencies in what US officials believe was an intelligence-gathering operation aimed at mining government secrets.

Besides that hack, US officials last month alleged that Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized influence operations to help Donald Trump in his unsuccessful bid for reelection as president, though there's no evidence

Russia or anyone else changed votes or manipulated the outcome.

The measures announced Thursday include sanctions on six Russian companies that support the country's cyber activities, in addition to sanctions on 32 individuals and entities accused of attempting to interfere in last year's presidential election, including by spreading disinformation.

The 10 diplomats being expelled include representatives of Russian intelligence services, the White House said.

The White House also said Biden was using diplomatic, military and intelligence channels to respond to reports that Russia encouraged the Taliban to attack US and allied troops in Afghanistan based on the "best assessments" of the intelligence community.

Reports of alleged "bounties" surfaced last year, with the Trump administration coming under fire for not raising the issue directly with Russia. The White House did not publicly confirm the reports. "The safety and well-being of U.S. Military personnel, and that of our allies and partners, is an absolute priority of the United

States," the White House said Thursday.

It was not immediately clear what, if any, other actions might be planned against Russia. Officials had previously said they expected to take actions both seen and unseen.

The sanctions, presumably intended to send a clear retaliatory message to Russia and to deter similar acts in the future, are certain to exacerbate an already tense relationship between the U.S. and Russia.

President Joe Biden told Putin this week in their second call to "de-escalate tensions" following a Russian military buildup on Ukraine's border, and said the U.S. Would "act firmly in defense of its national interests" regarding Russian intrusions and election interference. In a television interview last month, Biden replied "I do" when asked if he thought Putin was a "killer." He said the days of the

U.S. "rolling over" to Putin were done. Putin later recalled his ambassador to the US and pointed at the US history of slavery and slaughtering Native Americans and the atomic bombing of Japan in World War II.

France urges its nationals in Pak to leave country after violent protests

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The French embassy here on Thursday advised all French nationals in Pakistan to temporarily leave the country after violent protests by a radical religious group that has now been banned by the government.

The Tehreek-i-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) took to streets on Monday to launch violent protests to force the government to expel the French ambassador over blasphemous caricatures published last year.

Though no French citizen was reportedly targeted so far but the embassy has urged all the French citizens to leave Pakistan, apparently as a precautionary measure.

"Due to the serious threats to French interests in Pakistan, French nationals and French companies are advised to temporarily leave the country," the embassy said in an email message to its citizens in Pakistan.

It said that the departures will be carried out by existing commercial airlines.

Interior minister Sheikh

Rashid announced on Wednesday to ban the TLP and officials said that Prime Minister Imran Khan and his cabinet endorsed the summary by the interior ministry to outlaw the group.

The trouble began after police arrested the TLP chief Saad Rizvi on Monday ahead of the April 20 deadline by the group to expel the French ambassador.

The issue of expulsion of the ambassador was linked to an agreement between the TLP and the government when the former in November last year postponed its protest against publication of blasphemous cartoons.

Initially the government had agreed that it would take action to fulfill the demand of expulsion of the French ambassador by February but later on the two sides agreed to set April 20 as the new deadline.

However, when Rizvi was arrested the TLP in coordinated protests blocked main roads in all major cities and the protests turned violent when police tried to remove them.

SALE NOTICE

The under mentioned Assets will be sold through auction on “AS IS WHERE IS BASIS” and “AS IS WHAT IS BASIS” for recovery of dues as per court orders, in the following cases:-

Case Details	Asset Details	Reserve Price	EMD
ICICI Bank Limited vs Neha, Case No-OA/1603/2018	Vehicle No-CH01BK7426, Make and Model-HYUNDAI CRETA 1.6 VTVT SX PLUS, Manu Yr-2016	780000	78000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Rajdeep Singh, Case No-RC NO. 1125/2017	Vehicle No-PB65X0313, Make and Model-MITSUBISHI PAJERO, Manu Yr-2014	850000	85000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Hygiene Feeds & Farms Private Limited, Case No-OA/1525/2019	Vehicle No-HR67B4552, Make and Model-EICHER 20.16, Manu Yr-2016	520000	52000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Vijay Singh, Case No-OA/1563/2019	Vehicle No-HR66B9521, Make and Model-BHART BENZ 3128C, Manu Yr-2017	1000000	100000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Vijay Singh, Case No-OA/1563/2019	Vehicle No-HR66B7217, Make and Model-TATA LPO 1618, Manu Yr-2017	1000000	100000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Hygiene Feeds & Farms Private Limited, Case No-OA/1525/2019	Vehicle No-HR67B2864, Make and Model-EICHER 10.59, Manu Yr-2014	110000	11000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Hygiene Feeds & Farms Private Limited, Case No-OA/1525/2019	Vehicle No-HR67B3014, Make and Model-EICHER 10.59, Manu Yr-2014	120000	12000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Hygiene Feeds & Farms Private Limited, Case No-OA/1525/2019	Vehicle No-HR67B5755, Make and Model-EICHER 10.59, Manu Yr-2014	100000	10000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Niroz Insulations Private Limited, Case No-O.A. NO. 902 OF 2018	Vehicle No-100149357, Make and Model-JCB JS 205 LC, Manu Yr-2017	2450000	245000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Munna Lal Kumawat, Case No-OA 656 OF 2018	Vehicle No-RJ32PA0653, Make and Model-TATA LPO 1618, Manu Yr-2017	1195000	119500
ICICI Bank Limited vs Niroz Insulations Private Limited, Case No-O.A. NO. 902 OF 2018	Vehicle No-RJ20GB5360, Make and Model-AL 2518, Manu Yr-2018	1225000	122500

Auction Date : 01.05.2021 from 11 am to 2 pm

Place of auction : <https://auctions.cardekho.com/>

EMD: DD/PO of EMD amount to be made in favour of ICICI Bank Limited payable at Delhi.

Manager: Mr. Rajeev Ranjan (8584874809)/ Mr. Jitendra. Kumar (7304914763)

Terms of Sale

The particulars of the said asset specified herein above have been stated to the best of the information and knowledge of the undersigned, who shall however not be responsible for any error, misstatement or omission in the said particulars. The interested participant/s are therefore requested, in their own interest, to satisfy himself / themselves/ itself with regard to the said asset and other relevant details pertaining to it before submitting the bids. All bidders are required to submit original DD/PO of EMD amount along with self-attested KYC proofs to participate in the online auction on or before April 30, 2021.

The intending bidders may call us for details and inspection of the said hypothecated vehicles.

सार्वजनिक सूचना

एतद्वारा सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है, कि कम्पनी मैसर्स हरे कृष्ण ट्रेडिज डेवलपमेंट प्रा० लि० द्वारा श्री मुनिन्द्र खण्डूरी पुत्र श्री रमेश० खण्डूरी से कय की गई भूमि खसरा सं-166केए, क्षेत्रफल 298.90 वर्गमीटर स्थित मौजा मालसी परगना सेक्टरल दून जिला देहरादून का मूल पंजीकृत विक्रय विलेख जो एक काले बेग में है, (उक्त विलेख बही नं-1 जिल्ड नं-1547 पृष्ठ 202 ए.डी.फा. बुक 1 जिल्ड 1586 पृष्ठ 179 से 192 में नं. 2569 दिनांकित 20.04.2006 उप निबन्धक सदर 2 देहरादून में पंजीकृत है) दिनांक 03.04.2021 को अक्षराम मन्दिर नई दिल्ली के आस पास बैग के साथ कही गुम हो गया है, जिसकी ऑनलाईन गुमशुदा रिपोर्ट एलआर नं-296846/2021 दिनांक 05.04.2021 को करा दी गई है, जिस भी व्यक्ति को उक्त बैग व मूल पंजीकृत विक्रय विलेख प्राप्त होता है, तो वह हमारे कम्पनी के कार्यालय गौड बिज पार्क प्लॉट नं-1, अमय खण्ड-2 इन्दिरापुरम गाजियाबाद ३0१0 201014 पर प्रेषित करें एवं मो सं-8376909430 पर सम्पर्क करने की कृपा करें। आपकी अति कृपा होगी।

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to all concerned that MR. VIJAY TALWAR Son of Sh. K.B. Talwar R/o 67/5344, Regaraura, Karol Bagh, New Delhi had sold residential LG Flat No. 89, Block-G, Sector-56, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, UP on General Power of Attorney basis to the following person(s):- General Power of Attorney was executed on 14-09-1994 in favour of TAHSEEN AHMED Son of Mehboob Ullah Resident of C-6/140, SETOR-31, NODIA duly registered in Sub Registrar Delhi on dated 14-09-1994 and Agreement to Sell was not registered, so it is informed to all concerned that the said residential LG Flat No. 89, Block-G, Sector-56, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, UP is going to be transferred in favour of TAHSEEN AHMED Son of Mehboob Ullah R/o Flat No. 89, Block-G, Sector-56, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, UP. If anyone has/have any objection he/she may file his/her objection along with the sufficient proof in the Housing Department (H) of the Noida Authority within 15 days from the date of publication of this Notice.

Sd/-
TAHSEEN AHMED
Updesh Kumar (Advocate)

UJVNL LIMITED

(An Uttarakhand Govt. Enterprise)

H. O. "UJJWAL" MAHARANI BAGH, GMS ROAD, DEHRADUN - 248006, CIN No. U40101UR2017SC025866
Toll Free : 0135-2763508, 2763808, Fax: 0135-2763507, website: www.ujvnl.com

Tender No.286

Tender Notice

Date : 15.04.2021

Office of the Executive Engineer (E&M-II, LWR), Vyasi Project, Dakpathar, UJVNL Ltd. invites sealed tenders from interested party's Brief summary of tender is given below

Tender No: 01/EE(E&M-II, LWR)/VP/2021-22

Name of the work :Work related to Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Sirens at Vyasi Project

Estimated Cost: Rs. 23,23,450/- (Plus GST extra)

Date of availability of bid document :16 -04- 2021 15:30 Hrs on website

Last date for submission of tender : 08 -05- 2021 up to 15:30 Hrs

For fuller & further details kindly visit our website. The tender documents can be downloaded from the Nigam's web site "www.ujvnl.com"

Executive Engineer (E&M-II, LWR)

"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to all concerned that my mother SMT. PREM SETHI Wife of Late Shri Janak Raj Sethi R/o D-83, Sector-30, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, UP had executed a will deed on dated 23.01.2021 in respect of Plot No. D-83, Sector-30, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, UP passed away on 08th March 2019. Late SMT. PREM SETHI had executed at registered WILL in favour of her son DEEPU SETHI S/o Late Shri Janak Raj Sethi R/o D-83, Sector-30, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, UP. The WILL is duly registered in the office of Sub-Registrar, Delhi, vide Book No. 3, Volume No. 1259 on pages 193 to 195 as Document No. 71, on 23-01-2021. So it is informed to all concerned that said property Plot No. D-83, Sector-30, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, UP is going to be transferred in favour of DEEPU SETHI S/o Late Shri Janak Raj Sethi R/o D-83, Sector-30, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, UP. If anyone has/have any concern/objection he/she may file his/her written objection along with the sufficient proof in the RESIDENTIAL PLOT DEPARTMENT of NODIA AUTHORITY within 30 days from the date of publication of this notice.

DEEPU SETHI S/o Late Shri Janak Raj Sethi R/o D-83, Sector-30, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar UPDESH KUMAR (Advocate)

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA

TENDER NOTICE

SR. NO	NAME OF DEPARTMENT	NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER	OPENING DATE CLOSING DATE	AMOUNT / EMD (APPROX.) IN RUPEES	WEBSITE OF THE DEPARTMENT	NODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL
1	PWD B&R, KATHIAL	CONSTRUCTION OF 4 NOS ROOMS NEW CAR & BIKE SHED IN HARYANA ROADWAYS BUS STAND AT KATHIAL IN KATHIAL DISTT. + 1 OTHER WORK	CLOSING DATE 29.04.2021	51.61 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	01746-222282 pwd-eeepd-kathial@hry.nic.in
2	PWD B&R, KATHIAL	TP-23 KATHIAL KHANOURI ROAD NEAR PUNJAB BORDER IN KATHIAL DISTT.FOR MONTHS EIGHTEEN MONTHS	CLOSING DATE 05.05.2021	7 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	01746-222282 pwd-eeepd-kathial@hry.nic.in
3	PWD B&R, HISAR	CONSTRUCTION OF LANDSCAPING GROUND, UNDERGROUND WATER TANK AND PREMIX CARPET ON ROAD IN GOVT WOMEN COLLEGE AT HISAR	15.04.2021 28.04.2021	24.71 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	pwd-eeepd3-hissar@hry.nic.in
4	PWD B&R, HISAR	SPECIAL REPAIR OF JAKHOD KHERA TO MIGNI KHERA ROAD RD 0.00 TO 0.600 IN HISAR DISTT (ROAD ID 4899)	20.04.2021 03.05.2021	89.70 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9812306111 pwd-eeepd1-hissar@hry.nic.in
5	PWD B&R, CHANDIGARH	IMPROVEMENT BY WIDENING AND STRENGTHENING OF LINK ROAD MAJRI JATTAN IN PANCHKULA DISTT. +1 OTHER WORK	15.04.2021 04.05.2021	43.83 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	0172-2618279 pwd-eeedc-chandigarh@hry.nic.in
6	PWD B&R, HISAR	SPECIAL REPAIR OF MEDIA CENTER AT SIRSA (PDG. E.I INTERNAL ONLY).	13.04.2021 20.04.2021	1.95 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9896697784 pwd-eeed-hissar@hry.nic.in
7	PANCHAYATI RAJ, KATHIAL	CONST. OF BIO GAS PROJECT AT VILLAGE BHAINI MAJRA	15.04.2021 23.04.2021	73.75 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	07146234748 prexeeng.kt@hry.nic.in
8	PANCHAYATI RAJ, KATHIAL	CONST. OF COMMUNITY CENTER WITH E.I AND P.H WORK AT VILLAGE LADANA CHAKKU , BLOCK SIWAN + 2 OTHER WORKS	15.04.2021 29.04.2021	342.45 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	07146234748 prexeeng.kt@hry.nic.in
9	IRRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, NUH	(1) MAKING LEFT SIDE SERVICE ROAD JEEPALE FROM KM 18.935 TO KM 32.20 UJINA DIVERSION DRAIN (2) RENOVATION/REPAIRING OF OFFICE BUILDING OF PUNHANA SUB DIVISION.	CLOSING DATE 19.04.2021	5.99 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	01267-271271 xen-wsnuh.irr@gov.in
10	IRRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, NARWANA	REPAIRING OF BRIDGES AT RD 7000 & 21063 OF BADSIKRI MINOR, RD 3000 KHERI SHERKHA MINOR AND RD 8000 OF MATOUR MINOR + 4 OTHER WORKS	CLOSING DATE 21.04.2021	5.57 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	xen-wsnuh.irr@gov.in
11	SHKM GOVT MEDICAL COLLEGE NALHAR NUH HARYANA	OUTSOURCING OF KITCHEN AND DIETARY SERVICES FOR PATIENT AT SHKM GOVT MEDICAL COLLEGE NAIHAR AS DESCRIBED IN SCOPE OF WORK	CLOSING DATE 10.05.2021	2 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	8818042997 tendergmcnewat@gmail.com
12	SHKM GOVT MEDICAL COLLEGE NALHAR NUH HARYANA	TENDER FOR PURCHASE OF MEDICAL BOOKS FOR CENTRAL LIBRARY AT SHKM GOVT MEDICAL COLLEGE NALHAR NUH	CLOSING DATE 03.05.2021	1 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	8818042997 tendergmcnewat@gmail.com

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT : www.haryanaeprocurement.gov.in or www.etenders.hry.nic.in

RO NO. 2599

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 reaty 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.

BRIEFS

Jayanta Das, SGM, ITPO pays floral tribute to Bharat Ratna Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar on his birth Anniversary (14th April 1891 - 6th December 1956) on 15th April, 2021, at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi



VIT-AP & AKS IAS ACADEMY SIGN MOU

The signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between VIT-AP University and AKS IAS Academy was held at VIT-AP University’s Admin Office at Hyderabad on Thursday, 15th April, 2021. Dr. S V Kota Reddy, Vice-Chancellor, VIT-AP University after signing the MoU with AKS IAS Academy said that “this collaboration of VIT-AP and AKS IAS Academy will be beneficial to students who are looking for a career based graduation programme from us. Along with the Dual Degree of BA & MA in Public Services students will be trained for IAS preparation, so that they are ready for the civil services and allied positions by the time they graduate from VIT-AP.”



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 onlonly 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 9710029933/9810029926/01244233933**

Please note that Marketing agencies 1. **M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited. 2. Augoe 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

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, Pali 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, PCKET-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)/9811-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 NOCLIR NO. 315029/2021 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-55

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 materia manually by labour at different bar screens installed at Twin Main Point under HPWW-I.	Item rate	59000/-	500/-	15.04.2021	23.01.2021	
Tender ID: 2021_DJB_202941_1							
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 favor 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 favor 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




General public is here by 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/NDD/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.-MDRS**. 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
DP/114/RLY/2021 **Mob. No- 8750871305**

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/NDD/2021

SEARCH FOR MISSING BOY



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 Jiwan 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, Purn Nagar, 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	58.84	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	0459-07282149-000001	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, Purn Nagar, 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, bio-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 *Bhediya* 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 *Bhediya* 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*.

'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



"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-

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 antici-

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.



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."





