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RNI No. 53466/91, REGD. No. DL (C)-05/1219/2021-23 Posted at DRMS Delhi 6

Established 1864

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

*Late City Vol. 31 Issue 103
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

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ELECTIONS IN THE TIME OF COVID

WORLD 8
IRAN PREZ CALLS 60% ENRICHMENT AN ANSWER TO 'EVILNESS'

SPORT 12
PSG, CHELSEA IN CL SEMIS

NEW DELHI, THURSDAY APRIL 15, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3

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I TIE UP WITH CAUSES: SONAKSHI
10 VIVACITY

CBSE Class X board exams cancelled

Govt defers Class XII examinations amid rising Covid concerns

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday announced the cancellation of CBSE Board examinations for Class 10 and postponed Class 12 exams in the wake of the coronavirus crisis. Both board examinations were scheduled for May-June.

The revised dates will be announced after June 1. The decision was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the wake of rising cases of Covid-19 cases and concerns raised from various quarters, including a few Opposition parties.

The meeting was attended by Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank', education secretary and other officials. The meeting also discussed a uniform policy or guidelines on board exams across States as was being demanded by several State Ministers.

The CICSE, which is the other prominent national board for school examinations, said it is reviewing the situation and will come up with a decision soon in this regard.

According to the official sources, Modi said the Government would keep in mind the best interests of the students and ensure that their health is taken care of at the same time their academic interests are not harmed.

After the announcement, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi tweeted that a decision must be taken for Class 12 too. "Glad the Government has finally cancelled the 10th standard exams, however a final decision MUST be taken for the 12th grade also. Keeping students under undue pressure until June makes no sense. It's unfair. I urge the Government to decide now," she tweeted.

The decision by Centre on CBSE will affect over 21 lakh students across the country. This is the first time that the Central Board of Secondary Education has altogether cancelled the board examinations conducted by it. Last year, the exams were partially cancelled in Delhi in the wake of riots in northeast Delhi and Covid-19 cases.

The CBSE will review the situation on June 1 to decide on the Class 12 exam schedule while objective criteria will be decided for Class 10 results.

In a statement issued after the meeting, the Union Education Ministry said, "Looking to the present situation of the pandemic and school closures, and also taking in account the safety and well-being of the students, it is decided as follows."

Continued on Page 2

India's daily Covid count nears 2L

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's daily Covid-19 count neared the 2-lakh mark on Wednesday as the situation turned alarming in several States and reports of unavailability of hospital beds, ventilators, and oxygen cylinders poured in from all over the country.

India recorded 1,99,338 cases and 1,036 deaths in 24 hours till post midnight on Thursday. The country caseload spiked despite a certain degree of containment achieved in Maharashtra where the daily surge has remained confined in the range of 55,000 to 60,000. During the last 24 hours, Maharashtra recorded 58,952 fresh cases and 278 new deaths.

On a day when the Maharashtra Government began to enforce stringent restrictions, including a ban on the movement of people in public places without a valid reason, prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPC and night curfew for 15 days, the number of infections dropped from Tuesday's tally of 60,212 to 58,952, while deaths came down from 281 to 278 in various parts of the State.

With 58,952 fresh cases, the total infections climbed from 35,19,208 to 35,78,160. Similarly, with 258 new deaths, the total Covid-19 toll rose from 58,526 to 58,804.

However, Covid-19 cases continued to hit new peaks on daily basis in States such as Uttar Pradesh (20, 510 new cases), Delhi (17,282), Karnataka (11,265), Chhattisgarh (12,603) and Madhya Pradesh (9,720), Gujarat (7,410) among others. In terms of death, Maharashtra accounted for 278, Delhi 104, Chhattisgarh (90), UP 67, Karnataka 38, and Gujarat 73.

Uttar Pradesh recorded 20,510 cases in the last 24 hours. Officials claim that 68 people died of Covid-19 during this period.

Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad said 20,510 new cases of Covid were reported in the State during the past 24 hours.

Continued on Page 2

Health workers conducts Covid-19 testing of passengers at Anand Vihar Bus Terminal in New Delhi on Wednesday Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

21 at women's national boxing camp Covid +ve

New Delhi: Indian women's boxing's High Performance Director Raffaele Bergamasco and head coach Mohammed Ali Qamar are among 21 campers who have tested positive for Covid-19 at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium here but none of the infected pugilists are bound for Olympics.

6 pm to 6 am night curfew in all cities in Rajasthan

Jaipur: Rajasthan on Wednesday night announced a 12-hour daily curfew — from 6 pm to 6 am — starting Friday, across all cities, as part of a series of measures to combat a worrying spike in Covid cases.The curfew will be in effect till the end of the month.

Covid-19 IN INDIA

TOTAL CASES: 1,40,70,852 (+1,99,338)
DEATHS: 1,73,151(+1,036)
RECOVERED: 1,24,26,122
ACTIVE: 14,65,864
MAHARASHTRA: 35,78,160
KERALA: 11,89,176
KARNATAKA: 10,94,912
ANDHRA PRADESH: 9,37,049
DELHI: 7,67,438 (+17,282)

Yogi, Akhilesh, test corona +ve

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Panic has set in after Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Samajwadi Party president and former Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav and a couple of Ministers and top bureaucrats tested positive for coronavirus.

Yogi had isolated himself on Tuesday after some officials in his contact tested positive for the infection. "After initial symptoms, I got myself tested. My report is positive. I am in self-isolation and following doctors' advice. I am doing all works virtually," he tweeted, advising those who came in his contact to get themselves tested and take precautions.

There was a panic in the air after the CM tested positive. "When will the Government announce a lockdown? Is it waiting for Lucknow to perish before it goes for strict measures," a section officer in the Labour Department told this reporter on Wednesday.

Meanwhile a team of Health Department officials air-dashed to Ahmedabad and returned with 25,000 shots of Remdesivir injection, considered a key antiviral drug in the fight against Covid-19.

UK strain, double mutant cases found in J'khand

SAURAV ROY ■ RANCHI

The UK mutant strain and double mutant strain of coronavirus have been found among Covid patients in Ranchi and East Singhbhum districts, the Regional Genome Sequencing Laboratory (RGSL) at Bhubaneshwar-based Institute of Life Sciences (ILS) confirmed on Wednesday.

The Health Department had sent as many as 52 Covid positive samples to Bhubaneshwar last week for genome sequencing, and the test reports confirmed that at least nine of these samples were of UK mutant strain while four were double mutant, a press communique from the Government stated, asking residents to be cautious.

Govt fast-tracks nod for 7 firms to make Remdesivir

Approval to double capacity to 78 lakh vials per month

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the demand for Remdesivir surges in view of increasing Covid-19 cases from across the country, the Modi Government has fast-tracked seven companies' applications to manufacture the critical anti-viral drug, allowing them to more than double their combined capacity to around 78 lakh vials per month.

The move aims to ensure smooth availability of the drug which is being sold in black markets in some States.

Union Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers Mansukh Mandaviya on Tuesday gave fast-track approval to six manufacturers to set up seven additional sites that could scale up the production capacity of Remdesivir by 1 million vials per month.

Another 30 lakh vials/month production is lined up. This would ramp up the production capacity for manufacturing to around 78 lakh vials/month from the current 38.80 lakh vials per month.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

HIRING TO GROW BY 7% IF NO MORE LOCKDOWNS

Mumbai: The intent to hire in the current quarter is likely to rise by 7 per cent over the previous three months if further lockdowns and workplace operating rules are not enforced, mainly driven by demand in healthcare, pharmaceuticals, educational services, ecommerce and technology start-ups and IT, according to a report. P9

NOW, CHECK FLIGHT DETAILS USING APP

New Delhi: Delhi air travellers can track their upcoming flight details and get real-time alerts about gate changes, weather forecast using HOI passenger engagement app developed to promote contactless and digital services at Delhi Indira Gandhi International Airport.

BORIS REDUCES INDIA VISIT TIME OVER COVID

London: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has reduced the length of his visit to New Delhi at the end of this month due to the Covid-19 situation in India, Downing Street said on Wednesday.

50 SHANTIES GUTTED IN FIRE IN JAMIA NAGAR

New Delhi: Around 50 shanties were gutted after a massive fire broke out at Noor Nagar in Southeast Delhi's Jamia Nagar area on Wednesday afternoon, Delhi Fire Services officials said.

CBI grills Maha ex-HM for 8 hrs on Param Bir's extortion charge

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The CBI grilled Maharashtra's former Home Minister Anil Deshmukh for eight-long hours on Wednesday in connection with the Preliminary Enquiry (PE) into the allegations of corruption made against him by Mumbai's former Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh.

Three days after it questioned his personal assistants Sanjeev Palande and Kundan Shinde, the CBI subjected the former Home Minister to intense grilling on various issues relating to the former police commissioner's allegation that he had asked now suspended and incarcerated police officer Sachin Vaze last month to "collect" a staggering ₹100 crore per month from bars, restaurants and other sources.

Deshmukh reached the DRDO Guest House at Kalina in north Mumbai around 10 am. He was questioned by two Superintendent of Police ranked CBI officers.

Deshmukh was quizzed by the CBI on various issues relating to the letter written by the former police commissioner to the Chief Minister.

Continued on Page 2

Over 13.51 lakh take holy dip in third Shahi Snan

Covid norms flouted despite Govt efforts; Random tests indicate 4% positivity

PNS ■ HARIDWAR

The third Shahi Snan of the Kumbh Mela held on the occasion of Mesh Sankranti here on Wednesday saw more than 13.51 lakh people taking the holy dip in the Ganga till late evening. However, despite efforts by the authorities, it was difficult to ensure social distancing and wearing of masks by all the devotees throughout the occasion.

Random tests among the sadhus at the akhadas indicate a coronavirus positivity rate of nearly 4 per cent. So far, 19 of the 500 samples from the mela site have come back positive.

The Shahi Snan began early in the morning with the Sadhus of the Panchayati Akhada Sri Niranjani, Niranjani Akhada and Anand Akhada reaching Har Ki Pauri. The Sadhus first worshipped their tutelary deities and then took the holy dip in the Ganga. These Akhadas were followed by Sadhus of the Sri Panchdashnam Juna Bhairav Akhada, Sri Agni Akhada and the Ahwahan Akhada.

Members of the Kinnar Akhada accompanied the Sadhus of these Akhadas. Third in the sequence were Sadhus of the Sri Panchayat Akhada Mahanirvan Kankhal and Sri Shambhu Panchayati Atal Akhada who chanted 'Har Har Mahadev'.

Continued on Page 2

A devotee unfurls the national flag as others gather to offer prayers during the third 'Shahi Snan' of the Kumbh at Har Ki Pauri Ghat in Haridwar on Wednesday PTI

Russia swears by India friendship to allay Pak-ties fear

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Days after promising military equipment to Pakistan, Russia on Wednesday tried to pacify India by assuring that Moscow's ties with New Delhi and Islamabad are independent. Moreover, India is a "trusted partner" of Russia, its envoy said here.

His statement came after Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's recent visit to New Delhi and then to Islamabad. In Pakistan, Lavrov said Russia was ready to supply special military equipment to Pakistan to boost its counter-terror capabilities.

Allaying apprehension, Deputy Chief of Russian Embassy Roman Babushkin said India is a "trusted partner", and there were no divergences or misunderstandings between the two countries and that it has "limited cooperation" with Pakistan based on "independent" relations.

He also welcomed the recent commitment by India and Pakistan to follow the 2003 ceasefire on the Line of Control (LoC) and said these are "very important steps" for regional stability.

However, at a joint media briefing with Babushkin, Russian Ambassador Nikolay Kudashev criticised the Indo-Pacific strategy by western countries describing it as "dangerous" and an effort to revive the cold war mentality.

Babushkin said India must be part of the process of shaping regional consensus on Afghanistan and that New Delhi and Moscow have similar approaches for the Afghan peace process.

Asked about reports of bad optics during Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's recent visit to India, as he travelled to Islamabad from Delhi, Babushkin said, "Russia has independent ties with Pakistan and that it does not target any relations against anyone."

"We believe that there is absolutely no reason to see that there are divergences or any misunderstandings between us. It is not the case in Russia-India ties," he said.

Nikolay Kudashev said India is a trusted partner of Russia and ties between the two countries were "equal, solid, comprehensive, coherent and forward-looking."

He also mentioned that the visit by Lavrov to India on April 6 contributed a lot to the ties. "It was a very important and remarkable event, which contributed a lot to the special and privileged strategic partnership between our two friendly nations. Our ties remain equal, solid, comprehensive, coherent and forward-looking despite any global turbulence," he added.

The Ambassador said the visit was aimed at preparations for the India-Russia summit which is expected to take place in the second half of the year.

Babushkin said Russia has independent relations with India, Pakistan and other countries and the relations are based on their own merits.

Continued on Page 2

Beat corona with 30-minute brisk walk daily!

Physical inactivity may land you in ICU or also prove fatal for you in case the virus clings to you, claims study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Regular exercise or a 30-minute brisk walk in your neighbourhood park five days a week while following the social distancing norms can go a long way in beating Covid-19. Physical inactivity may land you in ICU or also prove fatal for you in case the pathogen catches you, according to a study that analysed nearly 50,000 Covid positive adults.

Even patients who were inconsistently active had lower chances for a severe Covid-19 infection, suggesting any amount of physical activity has benefit, said the findings published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine.

"This is a wake-up call for the importance of healthy lifestyles and especially physical activity" said Robert E Sallis, a physician at the Kaiser Permanente Fontana Medical Centre in the US.

Researchers said the potential for regular physical activity to lower the severity of Covid-19 illness should be promoted by public health agencies and that pandemic control recommendations should include regular physical activity across all population groups.

"People who regularly exercise had the best chance of beating Covid-19, while people who were inactive did much worse," Sallis added.

For the study, the team identified 48,440 adults with a Covid-19 diagnosis from January 1, 2020, to October 21, 2020.

They found 6.4 per cent were consistently active and 14.4 per cent were consistently inactive, with the remainder falling in the inconsistently active category. Among all Covid-19 patients, 8.6 per cent were hospitalised, 2.4 per cent were admitted to the ICU, and 1.6 per cent died.

"What surprised me the most from this study was the strength of the association between inactivity and poor outcomes from Covid-19," said Deborah Rohm Young from the Kaiser Permanente Southern California.

"Even after we included variables such as obesity and smoking in the analysis, we still saw inactivity was strongly associated with much higher odds of hospitalisation, ICU admission, and death compared with moderate physical activity or any activity at all," Young added.

The results showed that inactivity is strongly associated with poor Covid-19 outcomes, Sallis said, while suggesting walking 30 minutes a day, five days a week at a moderate pace can prevent Covid-19 affliction.

Continued on Page 2

Congress' INC TV on YouTube to start on April 24

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday launched its own digital media platform, INC TV, on YouTube on the birth anniversary of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar.

The party has, over the years, alleged that the mainstream media is biased against the Opposition, and the YouTube channel will allow it to convey its message directly to the public. The ruling BJP already has a YouTube channel with 3.67 million followers.

Party chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said INC TV will start airing shows from April 24, National Panchayati Raj Day, and would be live for at least eight hours every day.

Continued on Page 2

COVID-19

PM: Govt committed to ensure adequate availability of jabs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that the Government is committed to ensuring adequate availability of Covid-19 vaccines, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, on Wednesday called for harnessing the combined power of community groups, political parties and NGOs in the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Interacting with Governors and Lieutenant-Governors of all States and Union Territories through video conference, Modi urged them to actively engage in ensuring that social institutions collaborate seamlessly with state governments. Modi said the feeling of "Janbhagidari" (people's participation) that was seen in curbing the virus last year needed to encouraged now as well and added the role of governors becomes all the more critical to achieving this.

Vice President Venkaiah Naidu, Home Minister Amit Shah and Health Minister Harsh Vardhan also participated in the virtual interaction on the issue of the COVID-19 situation and ongoing vaccination drive in the country and it took place amid an astronomical rise in the COVID infections across the country in the last few weeks that has seen India gallop past its last year peak with a number of states reporting new highs daily.

In his comments, Modi asserted that the government is committed to ensuring adequate availability of vaccines and highlighted that India has become the fastest nation to reach the landmark of 10 crore vaccinations.

Noting the positive impact of "tika utsav" (vaccination festival) in the last four days, he said that in this period, the vaccination drive was expanded and new vaccination centres also came up.

"Modi suggested that governors can actively engage to ensure that social institutions collaborate seamlessly with the state governments towards micro containment. He said their social network can help ensure an increase in the capacity of ambulances, ventilators and oxygen in hospitals. Along with spreading the message about vaccination and treatment, governors can also spread awareness about AYUSH-related remedies," an official statement said.

The prime minister noted that youths being our workforce are an important part of the economy, and said it is important to ensure that they follow all protocols and precautions. Governors' role is also critical in ensuring the greater engagement of our students in university campuses towards this "Janbhagidari".

Fate of 56 lakh UP board examinees uncertain as Covid afflicts 17 officials

Lucknow: The fate of over 56 lakh UP students, slated to undertake the State education board examinations for classes 10 and 12 from May 8, hangs in balance as 17 out of 19 officials entitled to take a call on holding examinations have tested positive for Covid-19.

The Uttar Pradesh Education Board examinations are scheduled to start from May 8.

"Every year about 56 to 57 lakh students appear in UP Board examinations for classes 10 and 12. The board exams were to be held initially from April 24. But they were postponed to May 8 following the steep rise in the Covid infection," UP Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma, who also holds the portfolio of secondary education, told PTI.

On the possibility of holding the UP board examinations for the two classes as scheduled, the minister added, "For taking a decision on holding board examinations, there are a total of 19 officials of which 17 have tested positive for Covid-19. They are undergoing treatment in hospitals," the minister said.

The situation is being monitored every day and as soon as they recover from the illness, we will hold consultations and also speak to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, said the minister.

"Only then we will be able to say anything in the context of exams beginning on May 8," Sharma said.Sharma's statement came hours after the Centre on Wednesday cancelled the CBSE's class 10 board exams and postponed its class 12 exams following an exponential surge in COVID-19 cases, a decision that will affect over 21 lakh students across the country. *PTI*

Haryana records biggest single-day jump of fresh 5,398 cases, 18 deaths

Chandigarh: Haryana reported its highest single-day spike of 5,398 new Covid-19 cases on Wednesday, taking the State's infection tally to 3,29,942, while 18 more fatalities pushed the death toll to 3,316.

Among the districts that reported a big spike in new cases are Gurgaon (1,151), Faridabad (838), Karnal (359), Panipat (227), Sonipat (387), Jind (378) and Panchkula (276), a health department bulletin said.

The state had recorded 3,845 coronavirus cases on Tuesday.

Among the latest fatalities, three were reported from Karnal and two each from Ambala, Yamunanagar, Fatehabad and Kaithal districts.

number of active COVID-19 cases in Haryana stands at 27,421, the bulletin said, adding that 2,99,205 patients have recovered so far, and the recovery rate stands at 90.68 per cent.

Meanwhile, in the last four days, the state has administered 6,37,327 vaccine doses as part of the "vaccine festival", the bulletin said.

Speaking on the initiative, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar credited the efforts of healthcare workers for the feat. State Health Minister Anil Vij congratulated the Health Department for comprehensive planning and successful implementation of the mega vaccine drive.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had last Thursday said that states should observe a "vaccine festival" from April 11-14 to inoculate the maximum number of eligible beneficiaries against COVID-19. *PTI*

India in touch with Pakistan: EAM on safety of Indian Sikh pilgrims

PTI ■ NEW DELHI/LAHORE

India is in touch with authorities in Pakistan regarding safety of over 800 Indian pilgrims whose visit to the neighbouring country has been affected by violent protests in several cities, including Lahore.

"Closely tracking developments. In touch with Pakistani authorities and Sikh Jatha. Will do utmost to ensure security and safe return of pilgrims," External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar tweeted.

The Minister's response came after President of Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management committee Manjinder Singh Sirsa, in a tweet, requested Jaishankar to look into the matter of stranded Sikh pilgrims in Pakistan. Over 800 Indian Sikhs travelled to Pakistan to attend the Baisakhi festival. The Indian pilgrims had reached Lahore via Wagah border on Monday to attend the festival.

On Tuesday afternoon, the visiting Indian Sikhs left for Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hassanabdal in 25 buses which were escorted by the police and the Pakistani Rangers.

"Owing to the TLP protest that blocked roads, the Sikh yatrees reached Hassanabdal at 4 am on Wednesday after over 14 hours of journey which otherwise is covered in three hours," an official of the Punjab government told PTI in Lahore.

Protests are taking place in several part of Pakistan by supporters of Tehreek-i-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) demanding the expulsion of the French envoy over the publication of blasphemous caricatures in France.

The Indian pilgrims attended the main event on Wednesday in which several local Sikhs also participated.

Over 500 people fall ill after consuming buckwheat flour in East, South Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Over 500 people who had eaten food prepared with buckwheat (kuttu) flour had fallen ill in Delhi's East and South districts. Police said that prima facie, it appears to be a case of food adulteration or sale of spoiled flour.

"Around 526 people were reportedly admitted to hospitals in East district. They complained of uneasiness, stomach ache and vomiting after they ate food prepared using 'kuttu' flour to break their 'Navratri' fast on Tuesday, a senior East Delhi district official said.

"We visited the area and Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital, where many such people were admitted. All of them except four-five people have been discharged," he said.

Reports of people falling ill were received from Kalyanpuri, Trilokpuri and other areas. Prima facie, it appears to be a case of food adulteration or sale of spoiled 'kuttu' flour during 'Navratri', another official said.

"A case under sections 273 (sale of noxious food or drink), 284 (negligent conduct with respect to poisonous substance) and 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others) of the Indian Penal Code has been registered at Kalyanpuri police station against the proprietor of Bunty General Store," said Deepak Yadav, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), East district.

In a similar incident, on Wednesday morning, police received information of food poisoning from ward number 2, Mehrauli where six members of a family got admitted in Fortis hospital after eating 'Kuttu ka Aata' during fast, police said.

Noida sees record single-day spike of 483 new cases

PTI ■ NOIDA (UP)

Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddh Nagar on Wednesday recorded its highest single-day spike of 483 new Covid-19 cases, pushing the district's overall infection tally to 28,439, official data showed.

The active caseload also crossed the 2,000-mark to reach 2,027, according to the figures released by the UP Health Department for a 24-hour period. Fifty-seven more patients were discharged from hospitals during this period, taking the number of overall recoveries to 26,315 in the district, the fifth-highest in the state, it showed. Gautam Buddh Nagar has recorded a death toll of 97, with a mortality rate of 0.34 per cent. The recovery rate of patients reached 92.53 per cent on Tuesday, the statistics showed.

Meanwhile, the number of active COVID-19 cases in Uttar Pradesh reached 1,11,835 from 95,980 on Tuesday, while the overall recoveries climbed to 6,22,810 and the death toll to 9,376 on Wednesday, the data showed.

Kejriwal to discuss Delhi situation with L-G today as Covid cases surge

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will discuss the coronavirus situation in the city with Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal during a meeting Thursday, the CM's office said.

The city recorded 17,282 fresh cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday, the highest single-day surge here till date, and over 100 fatalities, according to data shared by the health department.

"In view of the spread of Covid-19 infection, Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal will discuss the situation with Lieutenant Governor at 11 am on Wednesday," the Chief Minister's Office tweeted.

It said that Kejriwal will also hold a meeting with Health Minister Satyendar Jain, Chief Secretary and other senior officials on the coronavirus situation in Delhi at 12 noon.

As per the latest bulletin, 104 new fatalities were recorded, pushing the death toll to 11,540. These new positive cases came out of record 1.08 akh tests conducted the previous day, the bulletin said, adding, the positivity rate mounted to 15.92 per cent.

The highest single-day spike in Delhi till the third wave of the pandemic -- 8,593 cases -- was reported on November 11 in 2020, while on November 18, the city had recorded 131 COVID-19 deaths, the highest single-day fatality count till date. The positivity rate mid-November last year had stood above 15 per cent.

Reeling under the fourth wave of COVID-19, the national capital on Tuesday had recorded 13,468 cases and 81 deaths due to the infection, giving it the dubious distinction of being the worst-affected city in the county.

Delhi Cong VP pays tribute to Ambedkar on his birth anniversary

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Congress vice president and senior dalit leader Jai Kishan on Wednesday paid tribute to Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar on his 130th Birth anniversary in his constituency in Sultanpuri Majra. Remembering Baba Saheb Ambedkar's contribution in nation building, Congress leader Jai Kishan said that Baba Saheb Ambedkar gave a strong foundation to independent India so the nation could move forward while strengthening its democratic heritage.

He said the Congress has always emphasised on the establishment of an egalitarian society. "Working to make India free from all forms of discrimination is the only truthful way to pay homage to him," he added.

"Often hailed as The Father of the Indian Constitution, for being instrumental in drafting it, he was born in 1891. His life was spent fighting against inequalities, bringing social reforms and propagating progressive ideologies," Jai Kishan said..

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that **Smt. Rama Devi** W/o Sh. Atish Chand Gupta is intending to sell Residential Plot No. 38B, area measuring 20 Sq. Yds., Khasra No. 1014/1, Situated at Shri Ram Park Makanpur, Colony Khora, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & Dist. Ghaziabad U.P., to **Smt. Ranjana Devi** W/o Sh. Dharam Deo Tripathi, to be financed by M/s. DMI Housing Finance Pvt. Ltd.

If any person(s) have any objection(s) or claim in this property, then contact the undersigned within 14 days from date of this notice on below address, failing which, it will be assumed that there are no claims or issues in respect of the aforesaid property.

Raghav Tiwari (Advocate)
Ch. 830, Patiala House Courts, New Delhi – 110001
Mob.:+91-8076188328

PUBLIC NOTICE

General Public is hereby informed that I have sworn an affidavit declaring that I am known and recognized, both as Satish Kumar Sharma and S.K.Sharma S/o Late Mohan Lal Sharma **(Aadhar No.979901075604)**

As such it is for information of all that Satish Kumar Sharma and S.K.Sharma is one and the same person.

Congress' INC...

From page 1

Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha and Congress general secretary Mallikarjun Kharge, NSUI president Neeraj Kundan and Mahila Congress president Sushmita Dev were also present at the launch.

Speaking at the Press conference of the launch announcements, Kharge said even Ambedkar believed that journalism had become a trade in India and it was the BJP that was proving him right today.

He added the Dalits were suffering under the BJP and every 11 minutes, there was an attack on a Dalit in India. "This truth of our country has been long concealed. Our nation has the right to hear the truth. Through INC TV, we aim to bring it out" Kharge added.

The Congress has, over the years, been severely criticised for not upping its social media engagement with the young. In February, the party launched its "Join Congress Social media" campaign.

Beat...

From page 1

"Exercise is medicine that everyone should take — especially in this era of Covid-19," Sallis said.

The study said it is "reasonable to expect" that regular physical activity may mitigate poor Covid-19 outcomes, citing improved immune function, reduction of systemic inflammation, benefits to cardiovascular health and mental health - but that lockdowns and stay-at-home orders have restricted access to venues where people can be active.

Among all of the Covid-19 patients studied, researchers recorded that 8.6 per cent of them were hospitalised, with 2.4 per cent of those admitted to the ICU and 1.6 per cent died.

Those who were consistently meeting physical activity guidelines were less likely to be hospitalised, admitted to the ICU, or die in relation to Covid-19 compared to those who were consistently inactive or only doing some activity.

Researchers say this is the first study that demonstrates that physical activity is an important and modifiable risk factor for severe Covid-19 outcomes.

Govt fast...

From page 1

The issue of availability of Remdesivir was reviewed by Mansukh Mandaviya, Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilizers in meetings with the all-existing manufacturers of the Remdesivir drug and other stakeholders on April 12 and April 13, where decisions were taken to increase production/supply and reduce prices of Remdesivir.

Currently, Hetero Drugs, Zydus Cadila, Cipla, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Viatris, Biocon subsidiary Syngene International and Jubilant Pharmova manufacture Remdesivir in India. The prices of their product vary from Rs899 per vial for Zydus' Remdac to Rs 5,400 for Hetero Drugs' Covifor.

As an additional measure, Remdesivir, API and formulation were placed under export ban recently to enhance the supply in the domestic market.

On Government intervention, Remdesivir supplies of approximately 4 lakh vials meant for export is being diverted by manufacturers to fulfil domestic requirement. EOU/SEZ units are also being enabled to supply to the domestic market.Manufacturers of Remdesivir have volunteered to reduce the price to less than Rs 3,500 by the end of this week after they were directed to give priority to fulfil hospital/institutional level supplies.

The DCGI has also instructed enforcement authorities in the State and Centre to take immediate action on the incidence of black-marketing, hoarding and overcharging of Remdesivir.The Union Health Ministry has asked the hospitals to use the drug judiciously and rationally. The Ministry in a statement recently said that Remdesivir should be supplied only to hospitals and not to chemists or patients. It said the drug must be given only to hospitalised patients who are low on oxygen.

Russia...

From page 1

"We are all members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and develop cooperation in various fields including regional security, fight against terrorism and to deal with other threats," he said.

"Russia has limited cooperation with Pakistan as compared to India. However, the fight against terrorism is our common agenda. So, we also help Pakistan in providing anti-terrorism equipment and holding dedicated exercise," he added.Babushkin said Russia respects the Simla agreement of 1972 and Lahore declaration of 1999 and that it has no intention to interfere in issues between the two sides.The Russian ambassador also reiterated that Moscow will honour all the arms deals with India, including the contract for S-400 air defence systems, despite the threat of US sanctions.The diplomats, however, underlined Russia's concerns about the Indo-Pacific concept and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad, with Kudashev saying the West's Indo-Pacific strategy is aimed at reviving Cold War-era structures.

Kudashev described military cooperation as one of the most important tracks of the India-Russia relationship and said all arms deals were on track despite the threat of US sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

"Together with India, we don't recognise bilateral sanctions as they are illegal tools of unlawful and unfair competition, pressure and even blackmail. It was clearly stated by the two foreign ministers in the course of their exchange," Kudashev said.

"With regard to the S-400 and other agreements, both sides are committed to the agreed timelines and other obligations. This contract is being successfully fulfilled," he said, referring to the $5.4-billion deal for five S-400 systems.

In response to a question on India-China tensions linked to the standoff on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), Babushkin said, "We are following the developments at the LAC and we would encourage India and China to continue disengagement efforts in order to promote constructive and forward-looking dialogue."

India's...

From page 1

However, he said, 4,517 Covid-19 patients had recovered and at present 1,11,835 active cases were undergoing treatment. So far 9,376 people had died of Covid-19 in the State, including 68 who succumbed to the deadly virus in the last 24 hours, he said.

The pace of infection in the State is increasing at an exponential rate. There were only 1,700 active cases in the first week of March. But after the surge, which began from the second week of March, in one month the number of active cases reached 95,980 on April 14.About 68,000 new positive cases have been confirmed in just one week.

UP is just behind Maharashtra in number of Covid-19 patients. While Maharashtra has the maximum number 5.64 lakh active cases, UP now has 1,11,835 active cases. Karnataka is at number three and Kerala at number four. Earlier, Maharashtra was followed by Kerala, Punjab, Delhi and Rajasthan.The surge in Covid-19 infection has made people jittery and the paucity of medicines has made them nervous. The government probably realised this, therefore a consignment of 25,000 doses of Remdesivir injection arrived in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday.

A Government spokesman said Yogi had sent a Government aircraft to Ahmedabad to bring the life-saving injection. Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh recorded 9,720 fresh cases on Wednesday, the biggest single-day spike so far, pushing the infection count to 3,63,352, said health department officials.The death count rose to 4,312 with 51 more deaths, also the highest one-day count so far, reported during the past 24 hours, they said.

In this month so far, the State has recorded 67,841 new cases and 326 fatalities. Karnataka reported over 11,000 new Covid-19 cases, once again the highest single-day tally yet. With 11,265 Covid-19 cases, Karnataka's overall virus tally has reached 10,94,912, according to the daily health bulletin. Of these, Bengaluru reported 8,155 new cases.

Over 13.51...

From page 1

The three Bairagi Akhadas — Akhil Bharatiya Sri Panch Nirvani Ani Akhada, Akhil Bharatiya Sri Panch Digamber Ani Akhada and Akhil Bharatiya Sri Panch Nirmohi Akhada then partook of the Shahi Snan and were followed by the Sri Panchayati Bada Akhada Udaseen Nirvan Akhada and Sri Panchayati Naya Udaseen Akhada Nirvan. Sadhus of the Sri Panchayati Nirmal Akhada were the last to participate in the Shahi Snan.

The State Ggovernment showered flower petals from a helicopter on the Akhada members as they walked towards Har Ki Paidi for the Shahi Snan. After the Shahi Snan of the Akhadas got over early in the evening, the top officials of the Kumbh Mela and police along with other staff members also took holy dips in the Ganga.

According to information provided by the police, till 6 PM, a total of 13,51,631 people had attended the Shahi Snan on Wednesday at Ghats from Muni Ki Reti, Rishikesh to Har Ki Paidi in Haridwar. Till 2 PM, 8,540 Covid tests had been conducted on people entering Haridwar and of these 39 test results came out positive. Similarly, 1,750 people and 1,111 vehicles were turned back till 2 PM in absence of Covid test reports.

The Kumbh Mela officer Deepak Rawat informed that about 50,000 Covid tests were being conducted daily during the Kumbh Mela. The inspector general of police (Kumbh) Sanjay Gunjyal informed that Covid test certificates were checked properly at the borders of the Kumbh Mela area. A total of 56,000 devotees were sent back from the border due to absence of Covid negative certificate.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat expressed gratitude at the successful conclusion of the third Shahi Snan. He said that the Government had facilitated all the three Shahi Snans in the Kumbh Mela properly while also focusing on observance of the Central government's Covid guidelines. He further said that all necessary arrangements had been made to prevent any inconvenience to the Sadhus and general devotees with focus also being laid on ensuring protection from Covid. All the devotees who had attended the Kumbh Mela were appreciative of the Government's arrangements, he added.

CBI grills Maha...

From page 1

Param Bir's letter to the CM on March 20 mentioned allegations of extortion against the former Home Minister, and also on the responses they elicited from his assistants during its questioning on Sunday.

The CBI officials also questioned Deshmukh on a four-page letter that Vaze had written to the Special NIA court on April 3, accusing him (Deshmukh) and another Maharashtra Minister Anil Parab of asking him to Indulge in extortion for them.

The CBI questioned Deshmukh as part of the Preliminary Enquiry (PE) ordered against him by the Bombay High Court on April 5. The high court has asked the CBI to complete the PE within 15 days of the agency receiving a copy of its order.

It may be recalled that three days after he was shunted and posted in a relatively insignificant post as the Commandant General of Home Guards, Singh had in an eight-page sensational letter written to the Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on March 20 alleged that State Home Minister Deshmukh had asked now arrested and suspended police officer Sachin Vaze last month to "collect" a staggering Rs 100 crore per month from bars, restaurants and other sources.

In the operative part of his much-discussed explosive letter, Singh wrote: "…. Sachin Vaze who was heading the Crime Intelligence Unit of the Crime Branch of the Mumbai Police was called by Shri Anil Deshmukh, Hon'ble Home Minister, Maharashtra to his official residence Dyaneshwar several times in last few months and repeatedly instructed to assist in collection of funds for the Hon'ble Home Minister," Singh wrote in his letter.

"In and around mid-February and thereafter, the Hon'ble Home Minister had called Shri Vaze to his official residence. At that time, one or two staff members of the Hon'ble Home Minister including his Personal Secretary, Mr. Palande, were also present," Singh stated.

"The Hon'ble Home Minister expressed to Vaze that he had a target to accumulate Rs. 100 crore a month. For achieving the aforesaid target, the Hon'ble Home Minister told Shri Vaze that there are about 1,750 bars, restaurants and other establishments in Mumbai and if a sum of Rs. 2-3 lakh each was collected from each of them, a monthly collection of Rs. 40-50 crore was achievable. The Hon'ble Home Minister added that the rest of the collection could be made from other sources," the former CP wrote.

CBSE Class...

From page 1

"The Board Exams for Class 12 to be held from May 4 to June, 14, 2021 are hereby postponed. These exams will be held hereafter," the Minister added. The situation will be reviewed on June 1, 2021 by the Board, and details will be shared subsequently, the official statement read.

A notice of at least 15 days will be given before the start of the examinations

"The board exams for Class 10 are hereby cancelled. The results of the Class 10 board will be prepared on the basis of an objective criterion to be developed by the board," the official said.

Any candidate who is not satisfied with the marks allocated to him or her on this basis will be given an opportunity to sit in an exam as and when the conditions are conducive to hold the exams, the official added.

Besides Nishank, the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Cabinet Secretary, School and Higher Education Secretaries and other top officials from Home and Health department attended the meeting.

"Unlike State boards, the CBSE has an all-India character, and therefore, it is essential to hold exams simultaneously throughout the country," the MoE official said.

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Printed and published by Chandan Mitra for and on behalf of CMYK Printech Ltd., No. 6, Behind Gulab Bhawan, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110 002, and printed at Jagran Prakashan Ltd, D 210,211 Sector-63, Noida (U.P.). Editor: Chandan Mitra. AIR SURCHARGE of ₹ 2.00 East: Calcutta, North: Leh West: Mumbai & Ahmedabad South: Bangalore & Chennai. Central : Khajuraho, Delhi Telephones: EPABX-40754100, 23755271-74, 9871234271. Lucknow Office: 4th Floor, Sahara Shopping Centre, Faizabad Road, Lucknow-226 016. Telephones: 0522-2346443, 2346444, 2346445.

COVID-19

Enough beds for corona patients in hospitals: Jain

Out of 5,525 only 286 occupied

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid reports regarding shortage of Covid-19 beds in hospitals in the national Capital, Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Wednesday said that there are enough hospital beds available for coronavirus patients.

"The Covid care centres of the Delhi Government have 5,525 beds out of which only 286 are occupied as of yet, directly implying that less than five per cent are occupied and 95 per cent are vacant. No city has done tests as much as the Kejriwal-led Government has conducted," he said.

Jain mentioned that there has not been any shortage of ventilators in hospitals. "Delhi Government has consistently been conducting more than 1 lakh tests and its testing capacity is more than twice the number of tests being conducted in any city. More than one lakh tests are being carried out from which 70 per cent is RT-PCR," he said.

The Government is continuously increasing the designated beds. It has increased from six thousand to 13 thousand and more beds are being consistently increased.

The health minister also advised people not to rush towards getting hospitalised after testing positive as fever or any other mild symptom can be treated through home isolation.

"Until the time one is not advised by the doctor for hospitalisation, they must refrain from going to the hospitals. In case mildly symptomatic or asymptomatic patients rush to the hospitals, the ones who have been advised and are facing severe symptoms might face some problems in accessing the beds," he added.

He stressed that there was a need to avoid unnecessary movements for some time and follow COVID-19 appropriate behavior to fight this virus collectively.

"The easiest way to stop the virus is to wear a mask as it will help in containing the outbreak extensively. The COVID-19 appropriate behaviour is indispensable to our fight against covid-19. This includes wearing masks, maintaining proper hygiene, and being socially distanced. Any complacency in this regard can prove to be detrimental," he added.

Responding to questions surrounding the doubling rate of cases, the Minister said, "Since the past few weeks, cases are doubling in Delhi as well as the country. The cases are 13,468. Last year, the fatality rate was somewhere between 2-3 per cent in November. It is saddening because there should not be a single fatality. However, currently, the rate is less than 0.5 per cent."

Speed up admissions for infection, LNJP directed

NEW DELHI: With the cases of Covid-19 increasing at an alarming rate in the national Capital, Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain paid a surprise visit to LNJP Hospital to review the facilities available and encourage the staff and doctors.

The Health Minister directed the hospital management to speed up the admission process for people infected with Covid-19. "The hospital authorities must ensure that sufficient ICU beds are available to treat the patients," he said. He also talked to the patients, their family members and took feedback,

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is directly monitoring the situation of beds and facilities available for patients in all government hospitals, he said, adding that the government has ramped up the infrastructure available and is fully equipped to combat the virus.

A medic administers Covid-19 vaccine to a beneficiary during Tika Utsav in New Delhi
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

The minister also met with the family members of the patients admitted and buoyed up their spirits. He said that the LNJP Hospital has treated the maximum number of patients in India and was confident that they will continue to contribute.

Jain also reassured that the government has ramped up the infrastructure to combat the surge. "Delhi is seeing an unprecedented surge. In view of the same, I visited the patients at LNJP Hospital. LNJP has treated the maximum number of patients in India. The doctors and staff have been working really hard and I am very grateful for their dedication," he added.

"The management has been directed to ensure a quick admission process for severely sick patients. The hospital must make sure that there is zero rejection of patients. It must be watched over that sufficient ICU beds should be available for covid patients," he said. *SR*

Delhi reports 17,282 cases on Wednesday, 104 deaths

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi reported 17,282 Covid-19 cases on Wednesday while 104 more people succumbed to the disease.

With this, the active cases reached to 50,736 in Delhi and containment zones rose to 7,598, the Health Department of the Delhi Government said on Wednesday.

The positivity rate increased to 15.92 per cent. The 17,282 new infections pushed the tally to 7,67,438, while 7,05,162 patients have recovered from the virus, according to the health department.

As per the bulletin, the number of people under home isolation rose to 24155. A total of 108534 tests, including 73915 RT-PCR tests and 34619 Rapid Antigen Test conducted a day ago, the bulletin said.

CM welcomes cancellation of CBSE exams

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal welcomed the Central Government's decision of cancelling Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) board exams for class 10 and postponing Class 12 examination, which were scheduled for May-June, in a view of rising cases of Covid-19 cases in India. He termed the decision a 'great relief' for lakhs of students and their parents. Kejriwal tweeted: - I am glad that the exams have been cancelled/postponed. This is a great relief for lakhs of students and their parents.

Deputy Chief Minister and Education Minister (Delhi), Manish Sisodia also welcomed the Union Government's decision and said, "I am happy that Class 10 exams are being cancelled and dates are being rescheduled for class 12 exams. I know that Class 12 students will be anxious over the rescheduling," said Sisodia.

"Similar to what was done for Class 10 students, I appeal to the Government to promote Class 12 students on the basis of internal assessment and pre-board exams. It is very important to stay at homes during these troubled times," he added.

The Central Government on Wednesday announced the cancellation of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) board exams for class 10 and postponed for Class 12 which were scheduled for May-June in a view of rising cases of Covid-19 cases in India. The revised dates will be announced after June 1.

The decision was taken in a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in which Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal and Principal Secretary to Prime Minister, Cabinet Secretary, School and Higher Education Secretaries and other senior officials were present.

In a statement issued after the meeting, the Union education ministry said, "Looking to the present situation of the pandemic and school closures, and also taking in account the safety and well-being of the students, it is decided as follows. The Board Exams for Class 12 to be held from May 4th to June, 14th, 2021 are hereby postponed. These exams will be held hereafter." The situation will be reviewed on 1st June 2021 by the Board, and details will be shared subsequently, the official statement read.

State not moving towards lockdown, says Haryana Deputy CM

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Two days after a night curfew was imposed in Haryana, Deputy CM, Dushyant Chautala, on Wednesday, said the State is "not moving towards a lockdown" and is only trying to "break the chain of the corona infection", for which "night curfew is an important move".

Chautala said, "I want to convince every person working in Haryana that you do not need to panic. The governance should be smooth in State, for which the precautionary steps are being taken to stop the surge in number of Covid-19 cases."

He also said that on April 8, when Prime Minister Narender Modi had discussed with Chief Ministers of different States, at that time, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar had said that we will not go towards a lockdown, we only have to reduce the infection. So we feel that night curfew is an important step in this direction.

Chautala was present in Gurugram on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti. He also flagged off the cardiac ambulance equipped with state-of-the-art facilities in Artemis Hospital located in Sector 51 of Gurgram. This ambulance has cost more than 50 lakhs.

While interacting with the media persons, Dushyant said that within a year, the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) will developed a network of ambulance in collaboration with all big hospitals and corporate companies, so that within 5 to 10 minutes in each corner of Gurugram, Medical Facility and Medical Care facility can be reached.

In response to media persons, regarding the curfew in the state, Dushyant said that "It is not lockdown, it will not be done to stop economic activity. An efforts on behalf of the state government will continue to reduce the growing pace of Corona infection and breaking the chain in Haryana".

The deputy CM has also denied of potential exodus of migrant workers in the state in view of the possibility of the Lock Down in the wake of Corona Pandemic.

Water supply to remain affected in pockets in city: DJB

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Jal Board on Wednesday said that water supply will remain affected in parts of the national Capital due to high level of ammonia in the Yamuna River.

A senior DJB official said that due to less inflow in river Yamuna at Wazirabad pond, the production from various water treatment plants such as Wazirabad, Chandrawal and Okhla is getting affected due to which water is likely to be available at low pressure for three to four days or till the quality of raw water in the river improves.

It may be noted that water up to 1 PPM can be treated and it was 7.6 PPM on Tuesday and even on Monday it was beyond the prescribed limit.

"Haryana is not only transmitting pollutant water but has also reduced the level of water that it should maintain. The water they are transmitting is untreatable and the pollutants cannot be diluted. We have been forced that neither can we make the water clean and pollutant-free nor can the water treatment plants function in 100 per cent capacity. This is the poisonous water that is being supplied to us by the Haryana government," DJB vice chairman Raghav Chadha had said on Tuesday.

The areas likely to be affected are Part of West Delhi, North Delhi, Central Delhi and South Delhi including Delhi Cantonment and New Delhi Municipal Council areas, the DJB said in a statement..

DCPCR facilitates rescue operations of 331 children

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The 'Delhi Commission For Protection of Child Rights' (DCPCR) has facilitated the rescue operations of 331 children of different age groups in the year 2020-21.

These children were rescued with the help of Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), Delhi Police, Labour Department, Child Line and Child Welfare Committee (CWC) from different places such as factories, bakery units, kharat machine units and auto center units as well as residential colonies where they were working as domestic servants.

Accordingly, the compounds have been sealed by the SDMs and FIRs registered by the Delhi Police. "These children have been produced before the Child Welfare Committees the same day which conducted their social investigation to trace families for their restoration and reintegration," DCPCR said in a statement.

Non-payment of minimum wages, inordinately long working hours and unhygienic working conditions emerged as the common pattern in most cases, it said.

It must be noted that DCPCR has been involved in the rescue operations of 331 children in the year 2020-21. Further, in the preceding three years, DCPCR facilitated the rescue operations of 202 children over all. This is an increase of nearly 490 per cent displaying DCPCR's renewed commitment to eliminating child labour from Delhi.

It also becomes critical as the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent joblessness followed by reduced family income has pushed children towards the menace of labours. Therefore, these children's rehabilitation becomes of utmost significance.

DCPCR has initiated the process of payment of back wages to these children who have been rescued so that their financial integration can begin immediately.

Anurag Kundu, Chairperson, DCPCR said that the menace of child labour can be curbed only through citizen reporting and therefore he strongly encouraged citizens to report instances of child labour through DCPCR's WhatsApp number (9599001855). He highlighted DCPCR's scheme of rewarding citizens who report instances of child labour.

Delhi Police chief reviews night curfew enforcement, visits several places

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police Commissioner, SN Shrivastava on Tuesday night visited several places across the national Capital to review enforcement of night curfew imposed by the Delhi Government due to soaring coronavirus cases.

The CP inspected enforcement arrangements in Khan Market, Nizamuddin, Lajpat Nagar, Kalkaji, Bhairv Temples, Hauz Khas, Aurbindo Marg Picket near All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Rajouri Garden, Zakira flyover, Jhandewalan Temple, Paharganj Market, Delhi Gate and Turkman Gate areas.

During his visit, the CP interacted with police personnel on duty and examined arrangements at eateries and market places. The CP encouraged the police staff on duty and stressed upon following Covid protocols for their own safety too while performing duty.

Senior officers of respective ranges and districts were also present in the field. Shrivastava expressed satisfaction over the hard work police personnel have been putting in while being on the frontline in enforcing Night Curfew and covid protocol.

As per DDMA orders, only those involved in health care and other essential services, and people on personal emergencies have been exempted from curfew on possession of valid movement pass, while rest people have to stay home for the checking the spread of coronavirus.

The CP also directed the staff to facilitate movement of people who have movement passes.

"Delhi Police is taking strict action against violators and till April 14, 2044 First Information Report (FIR) has been registered under Indian Penal Code (IPC) and other laws, in addition to preventive action against 18,329 persons for defying night curfew orders. A total of 42,577 challans have been issued since March 10for violations of Covid protocols," said Chinmoy Biswal, the Public Relation Officer (PRO) of Delhi Police. 2047.

First edition of Babasaheb Digital Kala Festival launched

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government launched the first edition of Babasaheb Ambedkar Digital Kala Festival, a week-long exhibition marking the 130th birth anniversary of social reformer and revolutionary Bhim Rao Ambedkar.

The festival will commemorate the memory of Baba Saheb Ambedkar, an ardent advocate of human rights and education, who has played a pivotal role in drafting the constitution of India. Through such a festival, the Delhi Government seeks to promote the teachings of Baba Saheb Ambedkar in the people, especially the youth in Delhi.

Marking the launch of the festival, Deputy CM and Minister of Art, Culture, and Languages Manish Sisodia said, "The Delhi Government is constantly striving to promote the values and teachings of Baba Saheb Ambedkar, along with the contributions made by Dr. BR Ambedkar in framing India's constitution. Such events will instil and encourage a sense of pride in the people, while they work around the theme of equality for all, which has, in today's times, is struggling to regain its lost essence."

The festival, curated by Anurag Minus Verma, will be launched on the lines of Babasaheb's renowned quote, "We are all equal under the blue sky" which will also be the theme of the festival. Through this exercise, the Delhi government seeks to encourage out-of-the-box and unique interpretations of this quote by Baba Saheb Ambedkar, along with inculcating a new sense of patriotism in the participants.

The participation rules require the participants to upload their content on Instagram/Twitter/YouTube, tagging the ACL handles on each of the platforms. Then, the participants would be required to send the following information on the following t o ambedkar.delhigovt@gmail.com, a social media link of their submission, and a brief description of their work. The categories of the submissions include reels/short video format, poetry/song/rap, or visual arts.

The winners of the competition will be announced on May 1 and the winner will be awarded Rs 75,000, the first runner-up will be awarded Rs 50,000 and the second runner-up will be awarded Rs 25,000. For more information, the participants can visit artandculture.delhigovt.nic.in.

Navy Chief calls for better synergy among Quad navies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Underlining the high level of synergy among the navies of the Quadrilateral countries, Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh on Wednesday said these forces can come together in a plug-and-play mechanism in case of a military need in the Indio-Pacific region.

Making this observation here during the ongoing three-day Raisina Dialogue, the Navy chief said there is immense interoperability between the navies of the Quad grouping.

His remarks came months after the Quad navies including India, US, Japan and Australia carried out the Malabar series of naval drills off the Indian coast.

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

Well done, Modi! says Cong after Govt cancels CBSE Class X exams

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Soon after the CBSE Class 12 examinations were postponed and Class 10 exams cancelled, the Congress took to social media and messaged "well done Modi ji".

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had been rallying for putting off the board exams

The decision was taken by the Prime Minister after a meeting with Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' and other top officials amid growing demands for cancelling or postponing the board exams as Coronavirus cases have seen an unprecedented surge across the country in a deadly second wave.

"Well done Modi ji, listening to sound advice from Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi and the Congress will go a long way in mending our nation. It is our democratic duty to work together for the betterment of our people. It's good to see BJP finally put nation over ego," the Congress tweeted.

After the announcement, Priyanka Gandhi tweeted that a decision must be taken for Class 12 too.

"Glad the Government has finally cancelled the 10th standard exams however a final decision must be taken for the 12th grade too. Keeping students under undue pressure until June makes no sense. It's unfair. I urge the Government to decide now," she tweeted.

She had earlier said it would be "downright irresponsible" of boards like the CBSE to force students to sit for the exams in the circumstances. "Board exams should either be cancelled, rescheduled or arranged in a manner that does not require the physical presence of children at crowded exam centres," she wrote last week to Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank last week.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who had also urged the government to postpone or cancel the exams, also welcomed the move.

"I am glad that the exams have been cancelled/postponed. This is a great relief for lakhs of students and their parents," he tweeted.

Ambedkar gave a strong base to Independent India: Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu remembered Ambedkar for bridging the gaps of inequality

Paying tribute to the framer of the Indian Constitution Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said Ambedkar gave a strong foundation to independent India so that the nation could move forward while strengthening its democratic heritage.

President Ram Nath Kovind also paid rich tributes to Ambedkar on his 130th birth celebrations.

Prime Minister also released four books related to Bhim Rao Ambedkar, whose birth anniversary falls on April 14. The books are written by Kishor Makwana.

Addressing the Association of Indian Universities' 95th annual meet and a national seminar of vice-chancellors through video conferencing, Modi said that Babasaheb Ambedkar gave a strong foundation to independent India.

"Babasaheb Ambedkar gave a strong foundation to independent India so that the nation could move forward while strengthening its democratic heritage," he said.

The event was hosted by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad. Paying tributes to Dr Ambedkar, Modi said in a tweet, "I bow to the great Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar on his birth anniversary. His struggle to bring the deprived sections of the society into the mainstream will continue to be an example for every generation."

"Today, the country is also working to spread the message of Babasaheb to the people. Places associated with Baba Saheb are being developed as Panch Tirtha", said the Prime Minister.

On account of the Covid-19 surge, the authorities are keeping the celebrations in a low key.

President Ram Nath Kovind urged fellow citizens to "imbibe his ideals in our lives by learning from his life and ideas and contribute towards building a strong and prosperous India".

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu remembered Ambedkar for "bridging the gaps of inequality".

Senior BJP leader and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh paid tribute to Ambedar saying Baba Saheb should not just be seen as a Dalit icon. He was a renowned name among world intellectuals not just in India, but globally as well.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla paid floral tribute to Ambedkar saying "Owing to Babasaheb's visions, India progressed at a fast pace after independence that benefitted all fractions of society."

The Centre has announced April 14 as a public holiday for all Central Government offices including industrial units.

India will raise its climate ambitions but not under pressure: Javadekar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday made it clear that it will raise its climate ambitions but not under pressure and that it was suffering because of the mistakes of others and "is not responsible for climate change that is happening".

Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar in his speech after a meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian at the French Embassy also said that India will not allow anybody to forget their historical responsibility.

French minister le Drian said the consequences will be disastrous if the world is not able to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, or even 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.

That's why it is absolutely indispensable that all countries increase their climate commitments by the time the COP26 takes place in Glasgow, as required by the Paris Agreement, he said.

"This increase in ambition must include setting new nationally determined contributions by 2030 and also long-term strategies to achieve carbon neutrality. We must stop building new coal-based power plants and it is essential that we progressively stop this mode of electricity production at a global level," le Drian said.

Javadekar said, "We will complete our commitments, raise our ambitions but not under pressure. And we will also ask countries to provide finance and technological support and about their (climate) actions."

He said India is the only G-20 country to walk the talk on the Paris climate agreement and "we have done more than we promised". The Minister said that the frequency of abnormal (weather) events has increased but "let us not forget that this is not a new phenomenon".

"What we are suffering today was caused 100 years ago. European and American countries and China, in the last 30 years, emitted (greenhouse gases) and therefore, the world is suffering… India is suffering because of the actions of others," he said, adding that historical responsibility is a very important aspect in climate debate.

"We cannot just forget it (historical responsibility), and we will not allow anybody to forget it," Javadekar said.

Everyone is facing common threats, but those who have polluted will have to act more, he said adding that they (developed countries) committed in Copenhagen, 100 billion dollars per year… but where is the money. There is no money in sight," he said.

Under the Copenhagen Accord, developed countries committed to a goal of mobilising 100 billion dollar a year by 2020 to help developing countries mitigate climate change.

AYUSH manufacturing unit makes record ₹164-crore turnover

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In view of increasing demand for AYUSH products and services by people amid Covid-19 pandemic, the Indian Medicines Pharmaceutical Corporation Limited (IMPCL), a public sector manufacturing unit of the Union Ministry of AYUSH, has recorded its highest-ever turnover of ₹164 crore in 2020-21.

The company has recorded an all-time high profit of approximately ₹12 crore, the Union AYUSH Ministry said in a statement here on Tuesday.

Its previous highest turnover was ₹97 crore in 2019-20.

Adding another feather in IMPCL's cap, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation recommended its 18 Ayurvedic products for WHO-GMP/COPP certification subject to certain observations in March 2021.

The WHO provides ''World Health Organization, Good Manufacturing Practices / Certificate of Pharmaceutical Product (WHO-GMP/CoPP)" certification to companies after conducting an inspection.

This certification is an endorsement of the quality of IMPCL's products. It will help IMPCL to commence export of quality medicines.

IMPCL is one of the most trusted manufacturers of AYUSH medicines in the country and is known for the authenticity of its formulations.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was able to cater to the needs of the country in the shortest time, probably the first company in the country to provide Immuno boosting medicines as AurakshaImmuno Boosting Kit.

Maldivian Foreign Minister to begin two-day India visit today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Maldivian foreign minister Abdulla Shahid will begin a two-day India visit on Thursday with a focus on further deepening of ties between the two countries.

Announcing the visit, the Ministry of External Affairs said it is expected to lend further momentum to the close bilateral cooperation.

It said Shahid will hold talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday covering bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest.

"Foreign minister Shahid's visit is expected to lend further momentum to the close bilateral cooperation between the two countries," the MEA said in a statement.

It said Shahid will participate in the Raisina Dialogue in virtual mode.

Maldives is India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region and occupies a central and special place in the prime minister's vision of 'SAGAR' — 'Security and Growth for All in the Region', the MEA said.

Vardhan launches initiative to spread awareness about nutrition

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan has launched an initiative aimed at spreading awareness about nutrition and locally available nutritious food, fruits, and vegetables, a statement said on Wednesday.

Vijnana Bharati (Vibha), 'Global Indian Scientists and Technocrats' (GIST) Forum, Vigyan Prasar, and Pravasi Bharatiya Academic and Scientific Sampark (PRABHASS) have come together to launch mission "Aahaar Kranti" with the motto of 'Uttam Aahaar-Uttam Vichaar' (Good Diet-Good Cognition).

Launching the initiative on Tuesday, Vardhan said, "Today, when the country is reeling under the onslaught of a pandemic like COVID-19, a balanced diet serves as a special tool to reduce the impact of the pandemic. At such a time, the need to create awareness about the importance of a balanced diet has become more vital than ever before."

The statement said the "Aahaar Kranti" movement is designed to address the peculiar problem being faced by India and the world -- hunger and diseases in abundance.

Studies estimate that India produces as much as two times the amount of calories it consumes. However, many in the country are still malnourished. The root cause of this strange phenomenon is the lack of nutritional awareness, it said.

The movement proposes to address the problem by working to rouse the people to the values and richness of India's traditional diet, to the healing powers of local fruits and vegetables, and to the miracles of a balanced diet, it added.

"Aahaar Kranti" will renew the focus on nutritionally balanced diets replete in locally sourced fruits and vegetables.

While Vijnana Bharati (Vibha) and GIST Forum initiated the programme, several other agencies have also joined hands and agreed to pool in their expertise and resources, the statement said.

Besides various central and state government ministries and agencies, the Department of Science and Technology's autonomous body Vigyan Prasar and PRABHASS are a part of this collaborative effort. More organisations will join the mission as it proceeds, it said.

Cong always striving towards achieving Ambedkar's goal: Sonia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday said her party is always striving towards achieving the path shown by Bhim Rao Ambedkar of building a strong nation where every citizen progresses without discrimination.

Paying rich tributes to Ambedkar on his 130th birth anniversary, she said the Congress has always emphasised on the establishment of an egalitarian society.

"Today, when the thinking of conservatism and discrimination is trying to weaken the society, the Congress party is always conscious that every section of the country should progress equally and without discrimination, we all together build a strong nation. This is the unshakable path of Babasaheb," she said in her message.

"Congress party is always conscious that every section of the country should progress equally and without discrimination, we all together build a strong nation. This is the unshakable path of Babasaheb," she said.

"In accordance with Baba Saheb's ideals, the Congress party has always emphasised the establishment of an egalitarian society in the country and waged a decisive struggle against centuries of discrimination, untouchability and inequality.

"Today if even the weakest person in the margins of society can reach the highest position of the country in a democratic manner, then this is our biggest achievement in 73 years and is a true tribute to Baba Saheb's dreams and aspirations," the Congress chief said.

Global warming making Indian monsoon seasons stronger, more chaotic: Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Climate change will make summer monsoon rainfall in India stronger and more erratic, according to a study that predicts extremely wet years in the future, with potentially grave consequences for over a billion people's well-being, economy, food systems and agriculture.

The study, published in the journal Earth System Dynamics, compared more than 30 state-of-the-art climate models from all around the world.

"We have found robust evidence for an exponential dependence: For every degree Celsius of warming, monsoon rainfalls will likely increase by about 5 per cent," said study lead author Anja Katzenberger from the Potsdam-Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) in Germany.

"Hereby we were also able to confirm previous studies but find that global warming is increasing monsoon rainfall in India even more than previously thought. It is dominating monsoon dynamics in the 21st century," Katzenberger said.

The researchers noted that more rainfall is not necessarily a good thing for the farming sector in India and its neighbouring countries.

"Crops need water especially in the initial growing period, but too much rainfall during other growing states can harm plants — including rice on which the majority of India's population is depending for sustenance," said study co-author Julia Pongratz from Ludwig-Maximilian University (LMU) in Germany.

"This makes the Indian economy and food system highly sensitive to volatile monsoon patterns," said Pongratz.

A look into the past underlines that human behaviour is behind the intensification of rainfall, according to the researchers.

Starting in the 1950s, human-made forcings have begun to overtake slow natural changes occurring over many millennia, they said.

At first, high sun-light blocking aerosol loadings led to subdued warming and thus a decline in rainfall.

However, from 1980 onwards, greenhouse gas-induced warming has become the deciding driver for stronger and more erratic Monsoon seasons.

"We see more and more that climate change is about unpredictable weather extremes and their serious consequences," said group leader and co-author Anders Levermann from PIK and Columbia University in the US.

"Because what is really on the line is the socio-economic well-being of the Indian subcontinent," Levermann said.

Access to professional education not Govt largesse, says SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Access to professional education is not a "Governmental largesse" and state has an affirmative obligation to facilitate its reach at all levels, the Supreme Court has said.

This obligation assumes far greater importance for students whose background imposes formidable obstacles on their path to access quality education, the apex court said.

A bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud and M R Shah made these observations in a verdict on separate pleas filed by two students from Ladakh who were not admitted to MBBS degree course in medical colleges here despite due nomination by the Union Territory and in terms of the seats notified by the Centre.

"While the right to pursue higher (professional) education has not been spelt out as a fundamental right in Part III of the Constitution, it bears emphasis that access to professional education is not a governmental largesse. Instead, the state has an affirmative obligation to facilitate access to education, at all levels," the bench said in its judgement delivered on April 9.

"This obligation assumes far greater importance for students whose background (by virtue of such characteristics as caste, class, gender, religion, disability and geographical region) imposes formidable obstacles on their path to accessing quality education," it said.

While allowing the petitions filed by the two students, the top court directed that the admission formalities be completed immediately and, in any event, within a week.

The bench noted that both the petitioners were nominated by the Ladakh administration for admission to MBBS degree course under the 'central pool' seats set apart by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

It noted that one of them has been allocated seat at Lady Hardinge Medical College while the other has been assigned to Maulana Azad Medical College.

"We have been constrained to take up the issue under Article 32, since the fundamental rights of students from Ladakh to pursue professional education are implicated," it said.

Ex-Chief Election Commissioner GVG Krishnamurty dies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Chief Election Commissioner Dr GVG Krishnamurty passed away on Wednesday morning due to a prolonged illness. He was 86. He is survived by his wife Padma Murty, son and senior Supreme Court advocate G.V. Rao, and daughter Dr Radha Bodapati.

Mourning the loss of an illustrious former member of ECI family, Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra recalled that Dr GVG Krishnamurty made exemplary contribution during his tenure in the Commission as Election Commissioner from 1st October 1993 to 30th September 1996.

Modi, Didi two sides of same coin: RaGa

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Beginning his election campaign in Bengal for the Left-Congress-ISF alliance in Bengal Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday launched a massive broadside against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee saying each was complementary to the other insofar as the State's contemporary politics was concerned.

Attacking Modi for trying to defile Bengal's rich culture by inciting hatred and peddling false dreams of "Sonar Bangla" (golden Bengal) which he called a "mirage" he said the Prime Minister and his party BJP was dividing Bengalis for votes.

"Like in Assam, Tamil Nadu and elsewhere the BJP is trying to spread hatred amongst the people and divide them" in the name of caste and religion… the people of other states have learnt with experience that the BJP have only hatred and divisive politics to offer in the name of lofty dreams like Sonar Bangla that they are peddling now," Gandhi told a rally at Goalkpokhar in North Dinajpur district of North Bengal.

The so-called Sonar Bangla was a "mirage" which the BJP was selling in every state to hide its failures at the Centre he said.

Criticising each and every step taken by the Modi Government he said "they promised you unearthing of black money through demonetization but could they do it … they failed in that … and ended up bringing hardship to common man."

Attacking the Modi Government for "its insensitivity when thousands of people were walking back home hundreds and thousands of kms," the former Congress president said, "those thousands of people from your area know it well how they returned home during the lockdown … instead of putting money to your pocket to lessen your hardship they were waiving tax burdens on the large corporate houses of Modiji\s choice saying they would create jobs … but did that happen … No."

During his first rally in Bengal in this election season, Gandhi took a dig at Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and said his party would never align with the BJP and the RSS, unlike the TMC, which in the past had been an alliance partner of the saffron party-led NDA.

Hitting out at Mamata Banerjee he said that the Bengal Chief Minister's remote control was in the hands of Narendra Modi adding they were the two sides of the same coin.

Attacking Banerjee for being part of the BJP's alliance for many years he said "she was in the BJP's closet for many years but did the Congress ever made any alliance with the BJP or the RSS … did the Congress compromise with an ideology that murdered its political Guru (Mahatma Gandhi) … we will prefer to die than to go with the BJP-RSS."

Trying to distinguish differentiate between Banerjee's fight against the BJP and the Congress' struggle against it he said "for Mamata Banerjee it is merely a political fight … but for the Congress it is a battle of ideology on which it cannot compromise."

Reminding the BJP's slogan of "Congress Mukt Bharat" (Congress-less India) he said, "the slogan was coined because they know that the Congress will never surrender before the ideology of RSS."

He attacked the TMC for introducing the culture of cut money and extortion in Bengal he said "the people of Bengal gave an opportunity to TMC. But, they failed in every respect… This is the only state where you have to pay cut money to get jobs … in Bengal there is no industry, no road, no infrastructure … nothing … now the people of Bengal have to go to other states for jobs."

BJP 'outsiders' raised corona cases: Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Apparently putting a new coating to her "outsider" weapon, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said that the "BJP's outsiders" were responsible for the increase in the number of corona cases in Bengal.

Intensifying her tirade against the "BJP's outsiders" she said "in Bengal we had controlled corona … the cases had been reduced" to negligible numbers but "as the election campaign it started spreading because the BJP's outsiders brought it from other States."

She said "I have been repeatedly talking against bringing people from outside states to Bengal for campaigning but they did not listen to me and brought them to our State … these people would not come to Bengal when corona was at its peak … it was only we who were fighting to contain the disease … and now when we had controlled it they brought outsiders who brought the disease with them, infected the local people and fled."

Alleging that the State Government had been continuously asking for vaccines from the Centre she said "now they are coming to ask for votes … but when we asked for vaccines they would not give it to us … we have deposited the required money for the vaccines but they are still not coming."

With the daily cases rising by more than 10 percent --- the latest figure reaching to about 4,800 on Tuesday --- there has been a huge shortage of vaccine in most Bengal hospitals. According to State health department 3 lakh Covishield vaccines reached Kolkata on Wednesday noon and another badge of 2 lakh Covaxin would reach the State by Wednesday night.

Referring to the Cooch Behar police firing that killed four people in Sitalkuchi constituency of the North Bengal district Banerjee on Wednesday said she would get the matter probed and ensure justice for the kin of the victims.

Banerjee visited Mathabhanga Hospital where the injured were being treated three days after the Election Commission lifted the 72-hour ban on political leaders visiting the district.

"I can assure you that whosoever is guilty will be brought to justice after the elections," Banerjee said adding her Government would support the victims family with all kind of support. Four persons Manirul, Samilul, Hamidul and Nur Alam were killed in the firing. Banerjee also met a distant relative of BJP supporter Ananda Burman who was shot dead on the same day by alleged TMC goons in the same constituency and assured them justice too.

"The Government will track everyone responsible for the cold-blooded killing and ensure they are punished as per law," Banerjee said reminding how the wife of a victim was pregnant and that of another had a small child."

Four persons were killed as central forces opened fire at alleged hooligans who "attempted to snatch their rifles" at booth number 5/126 during polls on April 10. The clash broke out when the quick response team of the central forces were escorting a group of voters who had been stopped from voting by miscreants to the booth.

Keralites celebrate Vishu amid pandemic fears

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Despite the emergency situation prevailing in the State, Keralites celebrated Vishu (the Malayalam New Year Day), a day which marks the annual agricultural operations with gaiety though in a subdued manner.

Family members woke up early in the mrning to see the Kani(the first sight) made up of a picture of Lord Krishna resplendent with ornaments, grains, seeds, new cloth and a bunch of currency, which assures an year filled with prosperity and happiness.

The eldest member of the family gave away Vishu Kaineettam (a token gift) in the form of a coin and new cloth to members of the family. Nostaligia marked the occasion as 85 year old V B Radha, the patriarch of Perumbavoor's Vembanattu family gave away Kaineettam to her children, grand children and great grand children.

The cattle herds in agricultural family too were in for a treat in the morning itself as they were worshipped with lighted lamps and pictures of Lord Krishna. Farm workers toiling in the paddy fields assembled in the farm lands in the early hours itself to commence symbolic agricultural operations.

It is an age old tradition for the village astrologers to call on families to provide the annual forecast, popularly known as Vishu Phalam. Village astrologers are gone long back and people call on them in the morning hours to know what is in store for them in the coming year.

"Things will not be as bad as it was in 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic will definitely subside and normalcy would gradually return to the country. There are signs of negativity giving way to optimism," said Parappanangadi Unnikrishna Panickar, Sanskrit and Vedic scholar about the coming days.

True to the prediction, it rained heavily in the State on Vishu Day and the chief minister, who was undergoing treatment for Covid-19 at the Kozhikode Medical College Hospital for the last three days returned to his palatial home at Pinarayi in Kannur. Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan, who was in the ICU since he was questioned by the Customs Department in connection with hawala transaction, was moved back to the hospital ward after it was found that he too had defeated the pandemic.

"Vishu is always the beginning of a new dawn. It is a harbinger of happiness and peace . That's why it is being celebrated in unison by all sections of Kerala society," said Prof P G Haridas, eminent historian.

Bhangipara: Cold horror stalks villages in Sunderbans

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ SANDESHKHALI

Cold horror is a small expression to depict the prevailing tension among the locals in this back-of-beyond village bordering Sunderbans.

Outsiders are clearly not welcome at Bhangipara. Such is the fear that not a single soul here would volunteer to talk.

After much cajoling Rani Mondal (name changed) decides to show some courage but on conditions of anonymity. "Babu you will go today … but tomorrow after the elections if they win they will bomb our houses, attack our children … kill our old people," she says.

Why would she not talk of the young men? "Beche thakle to bolbo (how can I refer to the young men? Are they alive?) … they have been killed by the men of Shahjahan" (a local TMC tough) she alleges.

Even as she walks up to the Jora Mandir area around where the incident took place she says, "our fault was that the BJP got a lead of 150 votes from this area (though the TMC won the seat) during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections… violence started only after that as their goons came and attacked our men just because they were doing BJP."

Her father Hari (name changed) says "they came like an Amphan (the cyclone is the latest symbol of horror in the locals' collective mind), charged bombs … we along with our women hid on the roof or beneath our beds … there were gunshots all around. As the men ran towards the Bheris (fish ponds) they were chased… by the evening it was all over … two bodies were fished out" subsequently.

The two victims were Sukanto Mondal and Pradip Mondal. A third Devdas Mondal is missing still now. His father says "My son was raising a BJP flag at the shop which irked them … they were already wounded by the lead BJP got here … in front of my house my son ran away for his life towards the Bheri … they followed him … there after we do not know what happened. They later brought two bodies but my son has not returned even today … almost two years… look at my eyes … can you find any tears… they have dried up … he helplessly looks at heavens hurling all his complaints up there."

And then he shows his two grand children and a young dahguter-in-law. "There is no relief. At this old age I have to go out silently to work and manage some food for these little ones and the daughter-in-law. I cannot look at their eyes … they have no hope … no pleasure," he says relating the worst part of it all.

"And what is worse is the CID that is probing the case does nothing … often we are told that the police is pressured by the TMC to harass us and even arrest us … what have we done … this was not like that in the CPI(M) Government … they were not so cruel." He would not reveal whether the family did CPI(M) earlier or not.

Padma Mondal the wife of a victim and now a BJP leader shows courage saying "we will not let the culprits go unpunished … the people cannot speak up out of fear … but tomorrow they will definitely."

The alleged perpetrator of the crime Shahjehan however would rubbish the allegations as "false and baseless … they have their land slipping beneath their feet and now they are blaming the TMC." When told to explain his meteoric rise from rags to riches he says "we have been doing business for so many years."

Cut to the nearby village where the family of Abdul Kayum Mollah, have a different tale to tell. "It is the BJP men who attacked us and killed the man here … he was chased and shot dead because he was a TMC," say the victim's family members asking in a hushed tone "Dada BJP ki sotti aschhey (elder brother is BJP really coming).

When asked about the source of the family's earning they say "we do odd work like farming, fishing or sometimes construction labourers…"

When reminded that there is no material difference between the earthly condition of the two sides, both being poor Asfaq Sk a relative of the victim says "Dada jani to … agey to erokom chilo na … ekhon hoi (we know it … earlier it was not like that … today it is like that)."

When asked about their real problems both the sides have similar things to say: lack of income, lack of education and health facilities, lack of job and corruption. "I went for Asha Karmi … they asked for Rs one lakh" says Ameena Khatoon adding the job still eludes her as she could not pay the amount.

And what will they do on the polling day April 17. "God knows babu … will we be allowed to vote?" That is another common refrain on both sides.

₹50cr-worth drugs seized in narco-terror module bust in J&K's Tangdhar sector

PNS ■ JAMMU

Troops guarding the line of control in North Kashmir's Tangdhar sector late Tuesday night foiled a major smuggling bid by recovering a drugs consignment worth ₹50 crores. According to defence sources, troops initially foiled an infiltration bid in the forward area and also recovered a 10 kg of narco consignment worth 50 crores (approximately).

According to a Srinagar based Defence Spokesman Lt Col Emron Musavi, "late Tuesday night smugglers were spotted carrying the narcotics along the Line of Control. Indian Army & BSF troops detected a suspicious movement and challenged the smugglers probably accompanied by Pak based terrorists".

He said, "the contact was near the LoC fence about 500m from the LoC. A brief exchange of fire took place in which one JCO of Indian Army sustained minor injuries. Detailed search in the morning led to recovery of the narcotics haul. The infiltrators managed to escape", he added.

Defence Spokesman said, "this is the second consecutive busting of 'Pak Sponsored Narco Terror Model' in the past one week in the valley."

Incidentally, he said, a 10 KG heroin consignment was recovered from the same general area a week ago in a joint operation. However, he said, this time smugglers were spotted carrying the narcotics along the LoC.

Narco and terrorist infiltration are known to be carried out through the Tangdhar bowl. The police are carrying out investigations to identify and arrest the network involved in the smuggling and infiltration attempt.

The Defence spokesman said, "security forces, police and intelligence agencies continue to carry out synergised actions to counter any effort to carry out infiltration or smuggling of weapons and contraband across the LoC".

Goa to extend 'Tika Utsav' by 10-12 days: CM

Panaji: The Goa government will extend the Covid-19 vaccination drive, 'Tika Utsav', by 10-12 days, said Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Wednesday, urging people above the age of 45 years to take advantage of the vaccination outreach programme.

"'Tika Utsav' will continue for 10-12 days so that those who are eligible get themselves vaccinated. Lockdown is not the solution for Covid-19 but vaccination, maintaining social distancing, wearing face masks is. We should avoid public meetings and unnecessary gatherings," added Sawant while speaking at an event organised by the Directorate of Fire and Emergency Services.

"Get tested immediately if you have COVID-19 signs and symptoms and maintain home isolation. If we need to contain the spread of the infection, then people will have to cooperate. The government will not lag behind when it comes to hospitalisation or providing Covid-19 care kits. Early treatment is the key," said the Goa Chief Minister. The 'Tika Utsav' programme was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a four-day mass vaccination campaign for inoculation of people above the age of 45 years from April 11 to April 14.

Sawant said that while the neighbouring state of Maharashtra had gone into lockdown, a similar fate should not "befall" Goa, urging people to maintain social distancing and adhere to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). ***IANS***

Gujarat CM to meet religious leaders on Covid situation

Gandhinagar: The Gujarat Chief Minister, Vijay Rupani on Wednesday evening, will hold a virtual meeting with various religious leaders of the state on the prevailing situation of Corona infection in the state.

The CM will hold discussions with them and request cooperation from every community in the fight against the virus.

Vijay Rupani will have a virtual meeting with many religious leaders of the state at 4 p.m. in the evening on Wednesday.

Many dignitaries from various religious communities like Ratnasundarji Maharaj Saheb, Namramuni Maharaj Saheb, Vraj RajKumar, Dwarkesh Lalji, Brahmavihari Swami, Sant swami of Vadtal Temple, Tyagvallabh swami, Shernath Bapu, Avichaldasji Maharaj, Dilipdasji Maharaj, Shambhu Prasad Tundiya, Maulana Lukman Tarapuri and Right Reverend Silvance Christian will participate in the meet.

The CM will have discussions with them regarding the current Covid situation in the state, and their role in the fight against the pandemic. ***IANS***

Andhra logs 4K more Covid cases, active cases cross 28,000 mark

Amaravati: Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday reported 4,157 new Covid-19 cases, taking the tally to over 9.37 lakh, while active cases reached 28,383.

The state, which was logging over 2,000 cases for some days, has now the tally double to over 4,000 cases. There were also 18 more deaths, in the past 24 hours, pushing the toll to 7,339.

Meanwhile, 1,606 more persons have recovered in the last 24 hours, raising the number of recoveries over 9 lakh.

East Godavari district reported the highest number of cases at 617, followed by Srikakulam (522), Chittoor (517), Visakhapatnam (417), Kurnool (386), Anantapur (297), Nellore (276), Prakasam (230), Vizianagaram (154), Krishna (135), Kadapa (112) and West Godavari (60). East Godavari's tally has crossed 1.27 lakh, the highest among all the districts, while the state's positivity rate rose to 6.03 per cent, against the national average of 5.32 per cent. ***IANS***

Renaming Harijans as Dalits sabotaged Gandhi's dream: Acharya Kunjhol

KOCHI: On the occasion of the 130th birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar, the chief architect of Indian Constitution, a vedic scholar of repute has called for the abolition of the word Dalit once and for ever and to bring back the name Harijan used to denote the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Acharya M K Kunjhol

"Harijan is the most sanguine word which accorded respect, sanctity and beauty to the depressed and oppressed communities. The word was introduced by Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation. He even named the world famous magazine he launched as Harijan. But certain vested interests sabotaged Gandhi's dream and renamed the communities as Dalit, a term which has no Indianness in it," said Acharya M K Kunjhol, the chief patron of Kerala State Harijan Samajam, a 64 year old organisation working for the upliftment of the Harijans.

Kunjhol, Kerala's living Mahatma, who has been honoured with Padma Sri by the President of India for the selfless and dedicated work he is doing among the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes for the last 70 years, attributed to a deep rooted conspiracy by anti-national elements in getting the name Harijan replaced with Dalit.

When Mahatma Gandho took up the agitation to get the practice of untouchability ameliorated and eradicate caste discrimination, he asked the people to propose a common nomenclature for the scheduled castes and tribes who were being treated as untouchables.

Migrant workers from Bihar relieved after return but worried about work

Patna: After the recent surge in the number of Covid cases in nearly all parts of the country amid the second wave of the pandemic, the people living outside Bihar are now returning to their native State. The Indian Railways have also run special trains to facilitate their return. The migrant workers who have returned to Bihar have now begun to worry about finding work here. Some are thinking about doing farming while many people are thinking about engaging in contractual labour.

Hundreds of people from Mokama, adjoining Bihar's state capital Patna, earned their livelihood working in other states. Many such people have returned to their native villages. Anand Kumar, a resident of Ghoswari village, says that dozens of people from his village had gone to other states to earn money and have now returned home or are preparing to return to their native place fearing a lockdown.

He said he had also come back to his native place when the lockdown was imposed last year in view of the pandemic. He was left without work after the lockdown was lifted following which he again returned to Bihar. Now once again due to the lockdown people are forced to return to their native places.

Subedar Rai, a resident of a village near Ghoswari, used to work as a security guard in Mumbai. His whole family was infected with coronavirus and his wife died of the infection. Following this, he left Mumbai and returned to his native village. He said nobody cares in big cities. "I have returned to my native village facing a lot of trouble. Now come what may, I will not leave Bihar. I will work in the fields," he added.

Ram Surat, a labourer who works in a Pune factory, has also returned to Bihar. He had returned home last year when the situation due to the pandemic had worsened. When the situation improved, the factory owner called him back to work, but now everybody has returned to their homes. He has a family in Bihar. "I will stay in Bihar for a few days and when the situation improves, then I will return to work." He is relieved that he has returned to his native state.

However, asked how will he get employment here, he says that he could survive for some days but if the situation due to the pandemic persists for a long time, then it would become difficult.

Ramnandan, who lives in Chanka village of Purnia district, does not want to leave Bihar now. He said he returned home last year and is now doing farming. What is the use in moving out of Bihar. Advising other people, he says that one should search for work in Bihar. He said the state government is also working towards giving work to people.

People from Bihar travel in search of work to most parts of the country. Due to the surge in Covid-19 cases, factories and businesses are being shut down in many states, due to which people are returning to their native states. However, the number of infected cases is also rapidly increasing in Bihar. The people who have returned to their states are relieved that at least they have returned to their villages. ***IANS***

Maha logs 58,952 new corona cases, 278 deaths

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Notwithstanding a marginal drop in the number of Covid-19 cases, the pandemic situation continued to be grim in Maharashtra on Wednesday, as the state recorded 58,952 fresh cases and 278 new deaths.

On a day when the Maharashtra government began to enforce stringent restrictions, including a ban on the movement of people in public places without a valid reason, prohibitory orders under section 144 of CR.PC and night curfew for 15 days, the number of infections dropped from Tuesday's tally of 60,212 to 58,952, while deaths came down from 281 to 278 in various parts of the state.

With 58952 fresh cases, the total infections climbed from 35,19,208 to 35,78,160. Similarly, with 258 new deaths, the total Covid-19 toll rose from 58,526 to 58,804.

As 39,624 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March last year went up to 29,05,721. The recovery rate in the state for the first time in several days dropped from 81.44 per cent to 81.21 per cent.

The number of "active cases" total cases in the state rose from 5,93,042 to 6,12,070. The fatality rate in the state dropped from 1.66 per cent to 1.64 per cent.

With 54 fresh deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Mumbai rose from 12,023 to 12066, while the infected cases went up by 9931 to trigger a jump in the infections from 5,35,264 to 5,45,195.

While Pune accounted for a maximum 1,12,213 "active cases" in the state, Mumbai stood second with 86,635 active cases, followed by Thane (84,098), Nagpur (65,368), Nashik (44,880), Aurangabad (14,680), Ahmednagar (17,937), Nanded (13,917), Bhandara (12993), Jalgaon (12126), Latur (13622) Buldhana (4849), Parbhani (8847), Beed (8517), Nandurbar (7158), Chandrapur (7898) and Gondia (6536).

Of the 2,28,02,200 samples sent to laboratories, 35,78,160 have tested positive (15.86 per cent) for COVID-19 until Wednesday.

Currently, 34, 55,206 people are in home quarantine while 28,494 people are in institutional quarantine.

Going all out

The Govt's decision to procure COVID jabs from abroad should be welcomed for a variety of reasons

The Indian Government's "vaccine *maîtri*" may have earned it laurels among the nations that received the approximately 6.45 crore COVID shots, but it has left it clutching at straws and getting the flak in its own backyard. With the Coronavirus cases rising exponentially across India and with more deaths being recorded due to its new strains, the Centre is facing criticism that in its enthusiasm to earn global brownie points it put its own citizens at risk by distributing the shots to other nations instead of ensuring that all its citizens were inoculated first. As the second wave of infections tears across the country, there are calls for opening up the inoculation process for everyone as the new strain is not sparing children and the youth this time around.

Hence, faced with a shortage of the COVID jabs the Centre first gave the nod for the use of Russia-made Sputnik Vaccine for emergency use and moves are now afoot to enlarge the COVID-19 vaccine basket by giving approval to the shots manufactured in the US, the UK and Japan. The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEGVAC) has recommended that shots being manufactured abroad as well as those which have already received approval for "restricted use by the USFDA, EMA, UK MHRA, PMDA Japan may be granted emergency use approval in India". It is understood that the "vaccines, which are listed in the World Health Organisation's emergency use listing, may also be granted emergency use approval in India".

The decision has come at the right time as it would encourage imports of bulk drug material and help in optimal utilisation of domestic fill-and-finish capacity which will, in turn, provide a fillip to our vaccine manufacturing capacity and total jab availability for domestic use. The Centre, trying its best to calm the citizens, has assured them that there is no vaccine shortage and over 1.67 crore doses are still available. While there is some strength in the argument that the Government should have catered to its citizens first, the fact remains that the healthcare authorities and the public, too, is to a certain extent responsible for the state we are in today. First of all, given the fact that vaccines are direly needed at this time, how do we explain the criminal average wastage of 6.5 per cent in India? Plus, if people had listened to the Government, got inoculated in massive numbers and observed the Corona protocols diligently, there would not have been such a surge in cases. When the number of infections dipped after the first wave, had we shunned vaccine hesitancy, things would have moved with assembly-line precision and a large part of the population would have had the shots by now. However, it's not too late and the Centre is doing its bit to provide succour to its citizens. We need to calm down, behave like responsible citizens and help the Government in its endeavour in any way we can. After all, this is a situation that none of us had ever faced before.

PICTALK

Nihangs show their horse-riding skills on the last day of Baisakhi Mela in Bathinda district PTI

Double whammy

Our insouciance is responsible for the alarming rise in pollution and Corona cases in the Capital

Both the pandemic and the pollution have made life miserable for the residents of Delhi. It's a double whammy this year — unlike last year when Delhiites had some relief during the Coronavirus-induced lockdown as the level of pollutants fell drastically, thanks to the restriction on vehicular movement and the ban on industrial activity.

However, this relief was short-lived since the Capital's air quality started to deteriorate with the lifting of curbs. As the COVID-19 cases surge towards another peak, Delhi is witnessing the worst air quality since 2018. As the country is fighting the pandemic with indigenous vaccines (now with the imported ones, too), masks, social distancing and the "Test-Track-Treat" methodology, it must also think of cutting down on pollution. We must remember that one's immunity plays a vital role in fighting the virus and pollution certainly doesn't help it. Hence, lowering the pollution level will only aid our fight against the contagion. The Particulate Matter (PM) is the biggest contributor to Delhi's pollution and the main factors behind the increase in its concentration include vehicular emissions, biomass and garbage burning and industrial smoke effluents.

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a meeting with the Chief Ministers stressed that there is no need for another lockdown as the country now has enough infrastructure to control the infection. But unfortunately the Governments have failed to control the pollution in Delhi — which is ranked the world's most polluted Capital and 10th most polluted city across the globe in the *World Air Quality Report 2020* by a Swiss air technology company, IQAir — and the only solution in sight to control the PM levels in the Capital is another lockdown. But it's not right to blame only the Governments as the citizens also are no less responsible for this pathetic situation. Actions like car pooling, switching off the ignition at stop signals, using public transport, use of electric vehicles, and so on, are far from being our habit. Similarly, simple things like wearing masks properly, maintaining social distance, sanitising hands regularly and strictly adhering to the COVID-appropriate behaviour are not followed, which helps the infection spread. Until we mend our ways, we are doomed to lose both battles, against the pandemic and the pollution.

Elections in the time of COVID

PRIYADARSHI **DUTTA**

With half the phases in the Bengal polls remaining, the virus management measures appear to be missing on the ground

The Congress candidate from the Srivilliputhur Assembly constituency, 63-year-old PSW Madhava Rao, passed away of COVID-19 complications five days after the Tamil Nadu election concluded on April 6. If he wins the election posthumously, the constituency will head for a by-election. Tamil Nadu is one of the 16 States in India experiencing a significant surge in fresh Coronavirus infections. However, the pictures of bulging election rallies/road shows there capture only people's indifference towards the virus. The wearing of masks seems to be a luxury rather than a compulsory practice.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has laid down strict COVID-19 protocols for the elections in five States. It forms a part of the February 26 announcement of the poll schedule. The guidelines remain virtually unchanged since the Bihar Legislative Assembly election in October-November 2020. However, they seem to be honoured more in the breach than in observance, at least with regard to campaigning.

The instruction is that the District Election Officer (DEO, who is mostly the District Magistrate) should identify dedicated grounds for public gatherings with clearly marked entry and exit points, put markers to ensure social distancing norms by the attendees, and the nodal district health officer should ensure that the COVID-related guidelines are adhered to by everyone in the district. The DEO and the District Superintendent of Police should ensure that the number of attendees does not exceed the limit prescribed by the State Disaster Management Authority for public gatherings. However, the swelling crowds at the rallies/road shows seem to throw these protocols out of the window.

While elections in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and Assam were over by April 6, those in the State of West Bengal will continue till April 29. There, only four of the eight phases have been completed until now. The elections are already scarred by violence, and the media is fully fixated on it. By contrast, the large-scale flouting of the pandemic norms has not engaged the media's attention sufficiently.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi repeatedly exhorts people to wear masks and maintain physical distancing norms in public. He is emphatic that nobody should be lax about the COVID-19 protocols. These are indeed meant for the people's own safety, and tens of millions of ordinary Indians like me follow his advice in letter and spirit. However, does he follow his own advice at the mammoth rallies that he has been addressing frequently in West Bengal? The crowd strength at his rallies is so oppressive that there is hardly any place to stand. There was palpable fear of a stampede at his rally in Kolkata's Brigade Parade Ground on March 7.

As the camera zooms in on different segments in the crowds at the Prime Minister's numerous rallies, it is easy to spot that masks are a rarity. Does Modi demand that those not wearing masks or flouting the social distancing norms should leave immediately? Far from it, the Prime Minister seems to be oblivious of the subject as he vigorously launches a broadside on Mamata Banerjee's "misrule". The official candidates of his party — who otherwise pretend to follow Modi religiously — throw their masks (read caution, please) to the wind while going to file their nomination papers or campaigning.

> AHEAD OF THE FOURTH GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 1967, THE CHIEF MINISTERS OF TAMIL NADU AND WEST BENGAL SHOWED THE WAY FOR DEVELOPING A CODE OF CONDUCT THROUGH ALL-PARTY MEETINGS. THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA OFFICIALLY ADOPTED IT IN 1968

None of the political parties seem to behave responsibly against the threat of COVID-19. Their delinquency is punishable under Sections 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code as specified in Order No 40-3/2020-DMI (A) of November 25, 2020, by the Ministry of Home Affairs. However, there are hardly any publicised incidents of punishment on this account until now.

With respect to the Coronavirus, no political party can evade moral responsibility. They should have by themselves appointed nodal office-bearers for ensuring COVID-appropriate arrangements. If elected to govern, they themselves will have to deal with the pandemic upsurge. It is shameful that their behaviour should be COVID-inappropriate in public while seeking votes. The battle against the virus cannot be wholly dependent on vaccinations. Experience has shown that even those vaccinated can contract COVID-19.

The second wave of the pandemic has gripped India even as half the phases in the West Bengal election remain. It devolves upon all political parties to come together and take recognisable measures so that the poll campaign does not aggravate the situation. It might involve curtailing big rallies/road shows featuring star campaigners. One is reminded how ahead of the Fourth General Elections in 1967, the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal showed the way for developing a Code of Conduct through all-party meetings. The ECI officially adopted it in 1968. Such all-party meetings on the COVID-19 situation are the need of the hour.

(The writer is an author and independent researcher based in New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WE ARE NOT PREPARED AT ALL

Sir — This refers to the editorial '*Double mutant strikes*' (April 14). Your article is right on the money when it says that this variant multiplies quickly. You rightly raised the point about the lack of data and studies — that is peer-reviewed — it does not give the guarantee that these vaccines would work. One does need to be an Einstein to know that if things keep spiralling downwards, the day is not far when we surge past the US in becoming the worst-hit country.

We are importing vaccines but the recent halt in the rollout of Johnson & Johnson's vaccine in the US is also concerning as blood clots have been reported in patients who took this jab. It is bizarre that a country producing top doctors and scientists cannot figure out how this virus operates. The health briefings are an elephant dart to the public's face as all it does is present a rosy picture. It seems that our pandemic response is absolutely misguided and an absolute disgrace.

Sadly, our people could not refrain from going to events like the Kumbh Mela. Even the politicians are busy holding rallies as their priority is to win elections rather than to control the virus. All this has led to pandemic fatigue as people have been following the rules for long, for something that isn't even their fault. It's too late in the day to wish for this pandemic to have never afflicted humankind. The only thing to do now is to just mask up and stay home!

Sean Colin Young | *New Delhi*

EXERCISE CAUTION WHILE CAMPAIGNING

Sir — It doesn't behove Prime Minister Narendra Modi to speak insultingly of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and repeatedly call her "Didi o Didi". Such words belittle the dignity of a women and the Election Commission must take note of it. Mamata was right in saying that the way the PM is cracking jokes on her, it sounds like a young man making a pass at a local woman. This is certainly below standard. "I know many things about you, Modi and Shah. But I have the dignity not to stoop so low," she said. She targeted Modi, saying that only someone who did not give due recognition to the women in his life can crack such jokes. However, Mamata also has crossed her limits several times in past.

Our political leaders must exercise caution while speaking in public. The common people follow the politicians blindly and such statements set a wrong precedent in politics. There are politicians like Uttar Pradesh's former Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan who have made insulting remarks against women. The politicos should maintain dignity and decorum in public life.

G David Milton | *Tamil Nadu*

STOP THE HATE SPEECHES

Sir — The overzealous campaign of the BJP's Suvendu Adhikari, with the choicest of abuses for our Islamic brethren, follows the culture of his new political masters. Sadly, such leaders vouch for the constitutional ethos and cry "India first" at every possible opportunity! Despite the rampant abuse of religion and attempts to create a rift among communities, these leaders surprisingly are not prosecuted. Hate speeches have become the order of the day in elections.

These things work in elections since the people are still not educated or well-informed enough and fall into the trap of the political leaders. We will never have good and accountable governance unless and until we vote for those who are secular in the real sense and do not create rift among people. Else, we cannot continue to blame the politicians for our plight as we only vote them to power and give them the opportunity to make the laws to govern us.

Kajal Chatterjee |*Kolkata*

Punish vaccine hoarders

Amid the current surge in the number of Coronavirus cases, several States have reported the shortage of anti-viral drug Remdesivir. It is surprising that Gujarat BJP chief CR Patil has announced that 5,000 doses of Remdesivir would be made available free of cost by the party in Surat. But he didn't explain how he managed to get the stock despite the Government mandating that not more than six doses of medicine will be sold without a doctor's prescription.

The Government must respond and explain that when people are unable to get the injection despite standing in queues for hours, how did 5,000 injections reach Patil? Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani's innocent response was that he is unaware of Patil's claim. "I don't know. Ask Patil," said Rupani. This response is careless and is not expected from a CM. It is a blatant case of corruption and a CBI inquiry must be initiated to find out how he managed to stockpile the Remdesivir injection. Worse still, this is the situation despite the Gujarat High Court pulling up the State Government over the worsening Coronavirus situation.

The COVID-19 patients are experiencing unimaginable difficulties due to the shortage of beds, oxygen and medicine supply and lack of proper testing and tracing. Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi claims that India has "walked the talk" on helping the world counter the pandemic despite its "limited resources", much is needed to be done to effectively deal with the rising COVID cases at home. Nailing the corrupt politicians who stockpile or hoard the vaccine is one such step.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | *Faridabad*

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

The 'Tika Utsav' will continue for 10-12 days. Lockdown is not the solution for COVID-19 but vaccination, social distancing and wearing masks is.

Goa Chief Minister
— Pramod Sawant

It is the lockdown that has been overwhelmingly important in bringing down infections and deaths. It has not been achieved by the vaccination programme.

British Prime Minister
— Boris Johnson

I have always been fond of singing. It's my second love after acting. I am so glad that my fans have loved my renditions. I hope to do a lot more soon.

Actor
— Sara Khan

I'm very happy with the progress of the team over the last 18 months. If we continue to build on this, I am sure we can defeat any team.

Indian hockey captain
— Manpreet Singh

The UP Government is playing not with statistics, but with the lives of people. The situation in the State has turned explosive.

Congress leader
— Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra

FIRST COLUMN

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SOUTH

If we want real integration, North Indians must study the history and literature of South India, too, right from school

MARKANDEY **KATJU**

All Indians, including those from the South, have read about the great Mauryan Empire, the Gupta Empire, the Empire of Harshavardhan, the Mughal Empire, and so on in their school history books. But, how many North Indians have heard of Krishnadeva Raya of the Vijayanagara Empire (whose statue along with his two queens, still stands in the Tirupati temple), or of the great Chola and Pandya kings? Regrettably, very few North Indians would be aware of these great kings from the South. Most Indians have read the '*Ramayan*' and the '*Mahabharata*', which are epics about North Indian kings, and most Indians have read the works of Surdas, Tulsidas, Kabir, and the stories of Munshi Premchand. But how many North Indians have read the great Tamil epics '*Silappathikaram*', '*Manimekalai*', or the great Tamil treatise '*Tirukkural*' by Tiruvalluvar, about whom the great Tamil poet Subramania Bharati wrote: "Tamil Nadu is known throughout the world because of *Tirukkural*." How many have heard the '*Tiruppavai*' by the poet saint Andal, which is sung in the month of January all over Tamil Nadu, or the great poetry of Subramania Bharati who wrote powerful verses for women's emancipation around 1910 much before anyone dared to do so in the country? Very few.

North Indians know of Hindustani music but how many know of Carnatic music, and its trinity of Tyagaraj, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Shyama Shastri? Hardly any. How many North Indians have heard of the great Keralite social reformer Narayan Guru, who belonged to the low-caste Ezhava community and fearlessly criticised and campaigned against the inhuman caste system? Practically none. For long, North Indians have regarded South India as a dark land populated by uncivilised people and are blissfully unaware of the South's great achievements in various fields. Indeed in the '*Ramayan*', Kishkindha, which is believed to be in the present State of Karnataka, was regarded to be a land populated by monkeys from whom Lord Rama raised a '*vaanar sena* (monkey army)' to invade Sri Lanka. Regrettably, even today, many North Indians look down on South Indians due to their ignorance of the culture and achievements of the South. For instance, South Indian temples are massive and unbelievably beautiful. They reveal the high level of knowledge of architecture and geometry of the ancient and medieval South Indians. For example, the Brihadishvara temple of Tanjore is simply astounding and one wonders how the builders could use such huge stones to create it. In fact, it reminds one of the Egyptian pyramids. The gigantic rock relief 'Descent of the Ganges' in the ancient port city of Mahabalipuram, capital of the Pallav Empire, is truly amazing.

The large number of Roman coins found in South India show the extensive trade between it and ancient Rome from the time of Emperor Augustus (who reigned from 27 BC to 14 AD). This indicates how highly developed the economy in ancient and medieval South India was as they, unlike North Indians, were seafaring people, with extensive commercial contacts in Southeast Asia. The Chola king Rajendra Chola is believed to have executed military campaigns in Southeast Asia (Sri Lanka, Sumatra, and so on), which could only have been possible with the aid of a powerful navy. In Ilango's epic '*Silappathikaram*' one comes across these lines: "May the Pandya king prosper, who ruled over the South, after conquering the Ganga and the Himalayas in the north." At first I thought this was only poetic exaggeration, however, later I read of credible accounts of a South Indian king (perhaps Rajendra Chola) leading a Napoleonic invasion of north India up to the Ganga and even beyond (apart from invading Sri Lanka, the Malaya peninsula, southern Thailand and so on.) If we want real integration of India, North Indians must study the history, culture and literature of South India, too, right from school and give the South Indians the respect they deserve.

(The writer is a former judge of the Supreme Court of India. The views expressed are personal.)

Irreconcilable differences?

ANIL **GUPTA**

While India insists on de-escalation in Eastern Ladakh, the Chinese prefer the *status quo*. As it appears, both sides are unwilling to relent

The 11th round of India-China military talks to defuse tension in Eastern Ladakh, that was held after a gap of nearly two months, has again ended without any major breakthrough. The marathon talks lasted 13 hours as has been the trend in the past, but the Chinese side this time was rigid and uncompromising. Ever since the successful disengagement of troops from the lake area and the Kailash Range in February this year, a stalemate exists as far as further disengagement is concerned from the areas of Hot Springs, Gogra, Demchok and over stopping of Indian patrols in Depsang.

Immediately after the disengagement was completed, the 10th round of talks was held between the military commanders of the two nations. But it failed to arrive at any consensus as far as further disengagement from the remaining areas was concerned. However, the talks were dubbed as "constructive" and both sides hoped for a fruitful outcome. A joint statement issued by the two countries after the talks positively appraised the disengagement from the lake area, terming it a significant step that would provide a good basis for resolution of other remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Western Sector.

Though the much-awaited 11th round has once again ended in a stalemate, there are two noticeable differences. Unlike in the past, no joint statement has been issued by the two nations. In another first, the Chinese side has responded with a statement from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with the Press statement issued by the spokesperson of its Western Theatre Command instead of its Defence Ministry. The statement issued by the PLA was full of rhetoric and laced with diplomatic niceties, indicating that it may have been drafted at the Ministry level but was issued by the PLA. This indicates some sort of unhappiness or disagreement which may need intervention at the highest level.

The PLA's statement said, "We hope India can treasure the current positive situation of de-escalation in the China-India border regions, abide by related agreements reached by the two countries and the two militaries in previous meetings, meet China halfway and safeguard peace and stability in the border regions together"; once again reiterating the "half-way" offer rejected outrightly by India in the past. What's the point of talking about de-escalation when the Chinese have not even completed the promised disengagement?

A couple of weeks earlier, General Naravane, the Indian Chief of the Army Staff, had observed that the threat in Eastern Ladakh has "not gone away altogether" since the PLA was still maintaining its considerable troop strength in the "rear areas" as before. "De-escalation will take place only when these elements go back to their garrisons," he had said. The much-needed de-escalation still eludes both sides.

While the Indian side insisted on complete disengagement from Hot Springs, Gogra, Kongka La and Demchok, including the lingering issue of Depsang, the Chinese did not concede to troop pullback from these friction sites as earlier agreed to, leave alone discussing Depsang. The disengagement from the Depsang plains is believed to be the bone of contention since it is not directly related to last year's aggression. Hectic diplomatic activity had preceded the 11th round of talks for "maintaining peace and tranquillity and providing conditions for the progress of bilateral relations." The Indian Foreign Minister, in a telephonic conversation with his Chinese counterpart, had insisted on "early resolution of remaining issues along the LAC and disengagement at all friction points."

> TO WARD OFF ANY THREAT IN THE AREA, INDIA HAS ALSO BUILT UP A STRONG FORCE THERE, INCLUDING ARMOURED VEHICLES. THE LOGISTICS OF SUSTENANCE OF SUCH A LARGE FORCE AND KEEPING THE ARMOURED FLEET FUNCTIONAL IN SUCH EXTREME COLD WEATHER CONDITIONS IS A HERCULEAN TASK

The writer is a political commentator, security and strategic analyst. The views expressed are personal.

In a virtual meeting of the Working Mechanism of Consultation and Coordination on India China Border Affairs (WMCC), held in the last week of March, it was decided to hold the 11th round of talks between the Corps Commanders as early as possible in order "to further ease the situation on the ground and jointly safeguard the hard-won peace and stability in the border areas."

All eyes were thus set on the 11th round of negotiations, hoping not only for disengagement from the remaining areas but also for the resolution of the Depsang imbroglio. So, the big question is, why are the Chinese so sensitive about this area and unwilling to concede? The Depsang plains are sandwiched between the Aksai Chin and Siachen glacier. Located at the height of 16,000-17,000 feet above sea level, the area provides good mobility to the armoured vehicles. The Karakoram Pass and the Sasser Law Pass, both strategically important to India and located within its territory, are on its flanks.

Much of these plains had been under Chinese control since the mid-1950s. Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) is also located adjacent to the plains. In 1962, the Chinese occupied much of the Depsang plains west of the DBO, with India left with a small bulge. The new road built by us to connect the DBO with the Shyok area and beyond is under the observation of the Chinese and remains vulnerable to its artillery fire. The area is strategically important because China and Pakistan can jointly threaten India with a pincer movement in a strategic collusion and cut off the vital area from the rest of Ladakh. Conversely, India can threaten Aksai Chin and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), though a build-up for any large-scale offensive would pose serious challenges.

Apart from the varying perception of the LAC, another peculiar factor in the area is the Limit of Patrol (LOP). India and China differ on the alignment of the LOP as well. The Chinese perception of the LOP is almost 20 km beyond our perception inside our territory. The tensions in this area are not recent. The Chinese had intruded in the area in 2013 and again in 2015 during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping and then during the 2017 Doklam crisis.

The crux of the problem lies in both sides denying each other access to the Patrolling Points (PPs) located on the LOP. Earlier Indian troops had been patrolling up to PP 11, 12, 12A and 13 and had not moved beyond that till the perceived LAC. But lately, the PLA has been preventing Indian troops from even patrolling till these PPs and the phenomenon has become more pronounced after the Doklam stand-off. Unlike the Chinese incursions in the Fingers Area (between Finger four-eight), the Chinese did not physically move into the area.

The Indian patrols can move in vehicles only up to an area called "Bottleneck" beyond which their movement is on foot. A kilometre or so beyond the bottleneck is "Y-Junction" where the route bifurcates, with one fork leading to PP10 to 12 and the other fork leading to PP13. When Indian patrols approach Y-Junction, the PLA troops come in vehicles from a nearby post and stop them from going further up to the LOP. In a *quid pro quo*, the Indian troops prevent the PLA's men from going ahead of the "Bottleneck" area to their perceived LOP.

To ward off any threat in the area, India has also built up a strong force there, including armoured vehicles. The logistics of sustenance of such a large force and keeping the armoured fleet functional in such extreme cold weather conditions is a Herculean task. While India insists on de-escalation in this area simultaneously with the others, the Chinese prefer the *status quo*. As it appears, both sides are unwilling to relent. Indian troops are still in possession of a feature in the lake area that can prove as a "trump card" for hard bargaining with the Chinese to secure our interests in the Depsang plains.

POINT COUNTER POINT

IN THE ELECTION, THE CONSCIOUS PEOPLE OF BENGAL HIT SO MANY FOURS AND SIXES THAT THE SEATS OF THE BJP HAVE BECOME CENTURIES.
—PRIME MINISTER
NARENDRA MODI

I CAN SAY THAT AFTER THE ELECTIONS ARE OVER, THE BJP WILL NOT EVEN GET 70 OUT OF THE TOTAL 294 SEATS.
—WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER
MAMATA BANERJEE

Time to bridge the healthcare gap and tap indigenous potential

There has to be support from the Government for medical Research and Development activities towards advanced health solutions

KM **CHERIAN**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the disparity among the haves and have-nots in access to healthcare in the country. However, everyone should have working and living conditions that are conducive to good health. The collaboration of various stakeholders in the health sector, who must work as a team as well as individually, is essential to achieve a fairer and healthier world in which all members of society have access to quality healthcare services irrespective of their socio-economic status.

The first step towards achieving universal access to affordable health services is to have uniform, unbiased and economical healthcare facilities available for all. This will help in early detection and treatment of various diseases and infections. Preventive healthcare measures are of utmost importance in ensuring the overall health of a community.

The writer is a Padma Shri awardee and a cardiothoracic surgeon credited with India's first bypass. He is Chairman and CEO of Frontier Lifeline Hospital. The views expressed are personal.

While we have a plethora of health schemes in India like the 'Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)' to cater to the health of our citizens, it's the execution part of such schemes that we lack in. Efforts are required to ensure that people are enrolled, databases are updated regularly and citizens avail the benefits of the scheme.

The Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model can help in achieving the goal of accessible healthcare and realising the targets in the field. Private and Government entities need to collaborate and work in consonance, supplementing each other's effort. They have to come up with specific strategies for various sections, such as those below the poverty line.

It is imperative to monitor health inequities and help provide better access to affordable and quality healthcare. Many people in our country struggle to avail primary healthcare services. It is important that the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in every State cater to the healthcare needs of migrant workers who are from varied backgrounds.

Fostering and nurturing indigenous technology is extremely important in building affordable healthcare infrastructure in India. There has to be support from the Government for medical Research and Development (R&D) activities towards advanced health solutions.

As far as possible, bureaucratic hurdles must be removed so that innovators and scientists are able to avail the benefits of various policy initiatives. There has to be some provision for financial support and tax benefits so as to encourage these R&D entities. For instance, if a patient needs a heart valve replacement, Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR) is an alternative to conventional heart surgery but the long-lasting results of it are still in question.

It seems that there is an industry-wide push to make these procedures popular, without really thinking about the long-term results. Currently, these valves are highly expensive in India (approximately ₹22.5 lakh) owing to which a majority of the people cannot afford it. Even the cost of conventional valve replacement (approximately ₹3 lakh) is also out of reach for many. The solution is indigenisation. The Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation (TAVI) using Nitinol stents developed by the National Aeronautical Lab (NAL) and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) is promising in this respect. Unfortunately, there has been no support from any Central Government agency.

We all know that several organs are received only from human donors and there is a wide gap in the supply and demand. Today, science has reached a stage where these organs could be manufactured using one's own cells through the 3D printing technology or by using a biological scaffold — like a shark fin — on which it could be grown. Shark skin is another potential tissue substrate to create biological tissue in view of its inherent tensile strength and durability. The Governments, both Central and States, as well as financial institutions mainly banks, should support these initiatives.

Unfortunately, due to ignorance on the part of regulatory bodies and other law enforcing agencies, even the licence for producing or manufacturing these has been poorly formulated and prioritised. Another important area is the realm of stem cell research with its tremendous regenerative potential, but we face too many hurdles in manufacturing and commercial production.

Further, it's critical to create awareness about various health issues in regional languages that people understand. Plus, there is a pressing need to emphasise upon the importance of nutrition and immunity development in maintaining individual health.

Vaccination can help in keeping vaccine-preventable diseases away but there are new viruses and strains that are being discovered every day. Recently, we have witnessed how the second wave of the COVID-19 virus has taken the country by storm. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that our population has a fairly strong immune system, along with affordable healthcare and indigenous R&D in medical science.

Iran Prez calls 60% enrichment an answer to 'evilness'

Dubai: Iran's President on Wednesday called his country's decision to dramatically increase its uranium enrichment after saboteurs attacked a nuclear site "an answer to your evilness," saying Israel hoped to derail ongoing talks aimed at reviving Tehran's tattered nuclear deal with world powers.

This weekend's sabotage at the Natanz nuclear facility appears to be part of an escalating shadow war between the two countries. Israeli authorities have not commented on the attack, but are widely suspected of having carried it out.

Iran announced on Tuesday it would increase uranium enrichment up to 60%, its highest level ever, in response to the attack. That could draw further retaliation as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed never to allow Tehran to obtain a nuclear weapon. While Iran's move keeps enrichment below weapons-grade levels of 90%, it is a short step away.

Speaking to his Cabinet, an impassioned President Hassan Rouhani said the first-generation IR-1 centrifuges that were damaged in the attack would be replaced by advanced IR-6 centrifuges that enrich uranium much faster.

"You wanted to make our hands empty during the talks but our hands are full," Rouhani said.

He was referring to ongoing talks in Vienna that are aimed at finding a way for the United States to re-enter Tehran's nuclear agreement with world powers and have Iran comply again with its limits. The accord, which former President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. From in 2018, prevented Iran from stockpiling enough high-enriched uranium to be able to pursue a nuclear weapon in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

Rouhani added: "60% enrichment is an answer to your evilness. ... We cut off both of your hands, one with IR-6 centrifuges and another one with 60%."

Rouhani also accused Israel of being behind the Natanz attack.

"Apparently this is a crime by the Zionists. If the Zionists take an action against our nation, we will respond," he said, without elaborating.

In Jerusalem at a Memorial Day commemoration, Netanyahu appeared to reference Iran.

"We must never remain apathetic to the threats of war and extermination of those who seek to eliminate us," he said.

Rouhani in his comments Wednesday insisted Iran is still hoping that the Vienna talks lead to a negotiated settlement over its program — and the accompanying lifting of punishing sanctions.

France, Germany and the United Kingdom, all parties to the nuclear deal, issued a joint statement Wednesday expressing their "grave concern" over Iran's decision to increase enrichment.

"This is a serious development since the production of highly enriched uranium constitutes an important step in the production of a nuclear weapon," the countries said. "Iran has no credible civilian need for enrichment at this level."

Saudi Arabia, a regional rival to Iran, similarly issued a statement, saying enriching at that level "could not be considered a program intended for peaceful purposes."

"The kingdom calls on Iran to avoid escalation and not to subject the security and stability of the region to more tension, and to engage seriously in the current negotiations," Saudi Arabia said.

Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful, though the West and the International Atomic Energy Agency says Tehran had an organized military nuclear program up until the end of 2003. An annual US intelligence report released Tuesday maintained the American assessment that "Iran is not currently undertaking the key nuclear weapons-development activities that we judge would be necessary to produce a nuclear device."

Iran previously had said it could use uranium enriched up to 60 per cent for nuclear-powered ships. However, the Islamic Republic currently has no such ships in its navy. ***AP***

GLOBE TROTTING

TERROR RE-EMERGES IN BALOCHISTAN

Quetta : Pakistan's Balochistan continues to keep the country's security forces under constant check as terror elements continue to surface from different parts of the province, carrying out terror attacks, targeted killings, kidnappings and bomb blasts, raising serious questions over the performance of the security forces and sending fear down the spines of the locals.

RISE IN AFGHAN CIVILIAN CASUALTIES: REPORT

Kabul: A UN report on Wednesday showed that at least 573 civilians were killed and 1,210 others wounded in the first three months of 2021, which is a 29 per cent increase as compared to the same period last year.

GLOBAL COVID CASELOAD TOPS 137.2 MILLION

Washington: The overall global Covid-19 caseload has topped 137.2 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 2.95 million, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

Hong Kong's delayed legislative elections set for December

AP ■ HONG KONG

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has said that the semi autonomous Chinese territory's legislative elections will take place in December, more than a year after they were postponed by authorities citing public health risks from the coronavirus pandemic.

Lam also said on Tuesday that laws will be amended so that inciting voters not to vote or to cast blank or invalid votes will be made illegal, although voters themselves are free to boycott voting or cast votes as they wish.

"When a person willfully obstructs or prevents any person from voting at an election, we will consider it corrupt conduct," said Lam.

Lam said that the elections will take place on December 19. The elections were initially slated to be held last September.

Lam was speaking a day ahead of the first reading of draft amendments to various laws in the city's legislature, to accommodate Beijing's planned changes to the city's electoral system.

Beijing in March announced changes to Hong Kong's electoral system, expanding the number of seats in the legislature while reducing the number of directly-elected seats from 35 to 20.

The move is part of a two-phase effort to rein in political protest

and opposition in Hong Kong, which is part of China but has had a

more liberal political system as a former British colony. China imposed

a national security law on Hong Kong last year and is following up

this year with a revamp of the electoral process.

The crackdown comes in the wake of months of pro-democracy protests in 2019 that brought hundreds of thousands to the streets and turned violent as the government resisted the movement's demands.

In the current 70-member legislature, voters elect half the members and the other half are chosen by constituencies representing various professions and interest groups.

Myanmar charges doctors over civil disobedience protests

Yangon: Myanmar's ruling junta has charged at least 19 medical doctors for participating in civil disobedience protests against the military's February 1 coup, a state-run newspaper reported on Wednesday.

Doctors, nurses and medical students have marched and joined strikes to show their opposition to the military takeover that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's democratically elected government and put a halt to the progress Myanmar had made toward greater democratization after five decades of military rule.

The doctors charged are accused of supporting and participating in the civil disobedience movement "with the aim of deteriorating the state administrative machinery," the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper wrote.

The military government has already issued arrest warrants for 100 people active in the fields of literature, film, theater arts, music and journalism on charges of spreading information that undermines the stability of the country and the rule of law.

This isn't the first time doctors have been targeted. Earlier this month in Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city, security forces used stun grenades and fired guns to break up a march by medical workers protesting the army's takeover. The online news site The Irrawaddy reported that four doctors were arrested.

Protests continued Wednesday across Myanmar even as people boycotted the official celebration of Thingyan, the country's traditional New Year, usually a time for family reunions and merrymaking.

In leaflets and social media posts last week, people were asked not to hold any Thingyan celebrations, saying it would be disrespectful to "fallen martyrs" to enjoy the festival.

The government's violent response to anti-coup demonstrations has seen 714 people killed by security officials, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Last week, at least 82 people were killed in one day in a crackdown by security forces on protesters, according to reports from independent local media and AAPP. ***AP***

US President to present on Wednesday details of plan to withdraw all troops from Afghan

Washington: US President Joe Biden plans to present on Wednesday the details of his plans to have all American troops out of war-torn Afghanistan by September 11 this year, the 20th anniversary of the 2001 terrorist attack on the twin towers in New York.

Ahead of a formal announcement, a senior official said Biden has decided to draw down the remaining US troops from Afghanistan and finally end the US war there after 20 years. There are currently 2,500 US troops in Afghanistan.

"The president will deliver remarks tomorrow on the way forward in Afghanistan, including plans and timeline for withdrawing US troops in close coordination with our partners, allies and the Afghan government, also his commitment to focusing on threats and opportunities we face around the world," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

According to an official, Biden has reached a conclusion that the United States will complete its drawdown and remove its forces from Afghan before September 11.

"We will begin an orderly drawdown of the remaining forces before May 1 and plan to have all US troops out of the country before the 20th anniversary of 9/11," the official said. He said the withdrawal of troops is not conditions-based.

"The president has judged that a conditions-based approach, which has been the case in the past two decades, is a recipe for staying in Afghanistan forever," said the senior official. ***AP***

EU to negotiate major vaccine contract extension with Pfizer

Brussels: EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen announced plans Wednesday for a major contract extension for COVID-19

accines with Pfizer stretching to 2023.

In a sign of confidence in a company that has been a mainstay of Europe's vaccination drive so far, von der Leyen said the EU will start negotiating to buy 1.8 billion doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine through 2023.

Von der Leyen expressed full confidence in the technology used for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which is different from the one used for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

"We need to focus on the technologies that have proven their worth," von der Leyen said.

European Commission currently has a portfolio of 2.3 billion doses from a half dozen companies and is negotiating more contracts. ***AP***

Nancy invites Biden to address joint session of US Congress

Washington: US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi has invited President Joe Biden to address a joint session of Congress on April 28.

This would be President Biden's maiden address to a Joint Session of Congress.

"Nearly 100 days ago, when you took the oath of office, you pledged in a spirit of great hope that 'Help Is On The Way'. Now, because of your historic and transformative leadership, Help Is Here!" Pelosi wrote in a letter to Biden on Tuesday.

"In that spirit, I am writing to invite you to address a Joint Session of Congress on April 28, to share your vision for addressing the challenges and opportunities of this historic moment," she said. ***PTI***

'China-India border tensions 'remain high' despite some force pullbacks'

Washington: China-India border tensions "remain high" despite some force pullbacks this year, the US intelligence community has told Congress, asserting that Beijing seeks to use coordinated, whole-of-government tools to demonstrate its growing strength and compel regional neighbours to acquiesce to its preferences, including its claims over disputed territory.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said in its latest annual threat assessment report to the US Congress that Beijing will continue to promote the multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to expand its economic, political and military presence abroad, while trying to reduce waste and exploitative practices, which have led to international criticism.

The BRI is a multi-billion-dollar initiative launched by Chinese President Xi when he came into power in 2013. It aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes.

"China-India border tensions remain high, despite some force pullbacks this year. China's occupation since May 2020 of contested border areas is the most serious escalation in decades and led to the first lethal border clash between the two countries since 1975," the report said.

"As of mid-February, after multiple rounds of talks, both sides were pulling back forces and equipment from some sites along the disputed border," it said. ***PTI***

Ex-US officials visit Taiwan amid China tensions

Taipei: A former US senator and two ex-State Department officials arrived in Taiwan on Wednesday for talks with the island's leaders at a time of tense relations with China.

Chris Dodd, a Democratic senator from Connecticut from 1981 to 2011, was accompanied by two former deputy secretaries of state, James Steinberg from the Democratic Obama administration and Richard Armitage, who served under Republican President George W Bush.

The delegation will meet President Tsai Ing-wen on Thursday and exchange views with other government departments during their three-day visit, the Foreign Ministry said.

The US has repeatedly expressed concern about Chinese military activity near Taiwan including frequent military flights.

Taiwan Foreign Ministry spokesperson Joanne Ou said the government welcomed the delegation from President Joe Biden's administration, whose visit "conveys the US's firm friendship and support for Taiwan."

China proposes unification with Taiwan under the "one country, two systems" model it has enforced in the former British colony of Hong Kong, virtually eliminating political opposition and strongly restricting freedom of speech. A large majority of Taiwanese favor the current system of de facto independence while maintaining close economic ties with China.

The US has only unofficial relations with Taiwan but is bound under American law to ensure the island can defend itself from attacks and to treat all threats against it as a matter of "grave concern." ***AP***

Putin gets second Covid vaccine shot

Moscow: Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday he got his second Covid-19 vaccine shot, three weeks after getting the first dose. The Russian leader announced getting the jab, which was kept out of the public eye, at a session of the Russian Geographical Society, in which he took part via video link.

"Right now, before entering this hall, I have also gotten the second jab. I hope everything will be fine. I don't even hope as much as I'm sure of it," Putin said.

The president told reporters after the event that he didn't experience any adverse effects after the second shot. "As you see, everything is normal, no side effects," Putin said, adding that doctors told him he developed "a good immune response" after the first shot.

Putin got his first coronavirus shot on March 23, also out of sight of the cameras, and the Kremlin wouldn't reveal which of the three vaccines currently approved for use in Russia the president has taken.

The Russian leader's vaccination comes several months after widespread immunization against Covid-19 started in Russia — a delay that puzzled many, with some critics arguing that it was contributing to the already existing public hesitancy about the vaccine.

Russian authorities have given regulatory approval to three domestically developed shots — Sputnik V, EpiVacCorona and CoviVac. All three received authorization before completing advanced trials experts say are necessary to ensure their safety and effectiveness in line with established scientific protocol. ***AP***

New Zealand bans live cow exports due to welfare concerns

Wellington: New Zealand announced Wednesday it is banning the export of live cows and other farm animals by sea due to welfare concerns.

Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor said the ban would take up to two years to be fully enforced to give those who had invested in the business a chance to transition out.

The country temporarily suspended such exports last year after a ship carrying 5,800 cattle that was bound for China sank in stormy weather near Japan, killing more than 40 crew members and the animals. Officials had already begun a review of live exports the previous year. ***AP***

Lanka bans 11 extremist groups, including ISIS, al-Qaeda

Colombo: Sri Lanka has banned 11 hardline Islamist organisations, including the Islamic State (ISIS) and al-Qaeda, for their links to extremist activities in the country, according to an official announcement.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa under a special gazette notification issued on Tuesday proscribed the radical groups under the Prevention of Terrorism (temporary) Provisions Act.

The notification specifies that any person who acts in contravention or conspires to act would be sentenced to prison terms between 20 and 10 years.

Among the banned organisations are local Muslim groups, including the Sri Lanka Islamic Students Movement.

In the immediate aftermath of the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bomb attacks, Sri Lanka had banned the local Jihadi group National Thowheeth Jamaath (NTJ) and two other outfits.

The NTJ suicide bomb attacks on churches and luxury hotels here had killed 270 people while injuring 500 others.

A special probe panel appointed in 2019 by former President Maithripala Sirisena had recommended the banning of Muslim extremist organisations who advocate radicalism in the Buddhist-majority country.

The report also asked for the banning of an extremist Buddhist group, BBS or the Forces of Buddhist Power. The panel said that the BBS' actions had contributed to the radicalisation of Muslims.

The gazette, however, has excluded the Buddhist group.

The panel report was rejected by all political parties despite the head of the local Catholic church Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith urging the implementation of its recommendations which he said would give some justice to the victims of the bombings. ***PTI***

Queen returns to royal duties after husband death

London: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II has returned to royal duties, four days after her husband Prince Philip – the Duke of Edinburgh's death last Friday.

The 94-year-old monarch hosted an audience with Earl Peel for his retirement as he formally stepped down as Lord Chamberlain, in charge of organising royal ceremonies. During a private in-person event held at Windsor Castle on Tuesday, the Queen accepted her former royal aide's wand and office insignia.

"Earl Peel had an audience of The Queen today, delivered up his Wand and Insignia of Office as Lord Chamberlain and the Badge of Chancellor of the Royal Victorian Order and took leave upon relinquishing his appointment as Lord Chamberlain, when Her Majesty invested him with the Royal Victorian Chain," read the details in the Court Circular, a daily list of the official events attended by the Queen and the royal family.

According to their official website, the royal family carries out more than 2,000 official engagements throughout the UK and overseas every year.

While the UK's national mourning after the passing of Prince Philip on April 9 will run until the morning after his funeral at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle on Saturday, the royal family is observing two weeks of mourning.

A royal official said members of the family would continue to undertake engagements "appropriate to the circumstances".

Over the weekend, Prince Andrew – the Queen's son, said his father's death had left a "huge void" in his mother's life.

Earl Peel would have overseen the funeral arrangements – referred to as Operation Forth Bridge – before handing responsibility to his successor a week before his death.

Former MI5 spy chief Baron Parker has been in place as the new Lord Chamberlain since April 1 and will be in overall charge of Saturday's funeral.

Coronavirus lockdown measures mean only 30 people are able to attend the Royal Ceremonial event, which will include the Queen's close family. Inside the chapel, the royal family will wear face masks and keep to social distancing rules. ***PTI***

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that **Sh. Shobhraj Yadav** S/o Sh. Dudhnath Yadav is intending to sell Residential Plot No. 23, area measuring 25 Sq. Yds.. out of Khasra No. 1014/2, Situated in the area of Subhash Park Village Makanpur, Khora Colony, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & District Ghaziabad, U.P., to **Smt. Sapna Devi** W/o Sh. Rakesh Kumar Prajapati, to be financed by M/s. DMI Housing Finance Pvt. Ltd. The Original GPA dt. 05.03.1999 vide doc. No. 2029 pertaining to the aforesaid property has been lost and LAR NO. 179354/2021 has been registered on 26.03.2021 with UP Police.
If any person(s) have any objection(s) or claim in this property, then contact the undersigned within 14 days from date of this notice on below address, failing which, it will be assumed that there are no claims or issues in respect of the aforesaid property.
Raghav Tiwari (Advocate)
Ch. 830, Patiala House Courts, New Delhi – 110001
Mob.:+91-8076188328

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given by our client Mrs. Rakesh Kumari Paul that the partnership firm M/s Aloha Enterprises subsisting between Mrs. Rakesh Kumari Paul and Mr. Rahul Mamtani having Franchise of Geetanjali Salon at C-364, Upper GF, Vikaspuri, Delhi-110018 is dissolved w.e.f 16.04.2021 and our client shall not be responsible in any manner with respect to the acts, deeds or things done by Mr. Rahul Mamtani for and on behalf of the firm.
Sd/-
Yogesh Goel (Advocate)
Enrl. No. D/1956/2010
742/45, Shambhu Nagar, Tri Nagar, Delhi-35

LOST & FOUND

I, Ashok Wadia son of Late Shri Krishan Lal, authorised signatory of M/s Dals Overseas Private Limited having its registered office at A-186, Okhla Industrial Area Phase-1, New Delhi-110020 have lost the original perpetual lease deed of property No. A-186, Okhla Industrial Area Phase-1, New Delhi-110020, in the name of M/s. Attock Saw Mills. If any body found it please contact at 08373919137.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Known to all that my client Nirmal Bafna is the owner of land measuring 6 bighas, Khasra nos. 77/55/1,15/2min,16/2min,25/1min,Village Ghevra, Delhi-110081 And he has lost original three sale deeds dt. 28.04.2008 related to above property i.e.(1)Sale deed executed by Vijay Krishan Khanna in favour of Nirmal Bafna and (2) Sale deed executed by Ajay Krishan Khanna in favour of Nirmal Bafna and (3)Sale deed executed by Kumud Krishan Khanna in favour of Nirmal Bafna. Police complaint dt.12.04.2021 was lodged with Delhi Police. It is informed that any deal with said lost deeds by any person except my said client regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person found said deeds or is having right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned and within 8 days of this publication.
AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 760, Dwaka Court Sector-10,Dwarka,New Delhi-75
M:- 9899013918

Duronto Special Train between Delhi Sarai Rohilla and Yesvantpur Jn.

For the convenience of passengers, Railways have decided to run the Duronto Special Superfast Express Train between Delhi Sarai Rohilla and Yesvantpur Jn. as per following schedule:-

06593/06594 Yesvantpur Jn.-Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Yesvantpur Jn. Duronto Special Express (Weekly)

Train No. 06593		STATIONS	Train No. 06594	
ARR.	DEP.		ARR.	DEP.
---	23:40	YESVANTPUR JN.	08:10	---
03:38	03:40	GUNTAKAL JN.	02:58	03:00
08:45	08:50	SECUNDERABAD	20:55	21:10
13:35	13:40	BALHARSHAH JN.	16:40	16:45
22:02	22:10	HABIB GANJ	07:45	07:50
01:30	01:35	JHANSI	03:50	03:55
07:35	---	DELHI SARAI ROHILLA	---	22:10

Days of Run : 06593 Ex. Yesvantpur Jn. on Saturday from 17.04.2021 to 19.06.2021 **and 06594 Ex. Delhi Sarai Rohilla** on Monday from 19.04.2021 to 21.06.2021
Accommodation : 1st AC, 2 Tier AC & 3 Tier AC

Note: The above Special Train will have the reserved accommodation only.

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table and stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

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

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Hiring to grow by 7% in Apr-June: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The intent to hire in the current quarter is likely to rise by 7 per cent over the previous three months if further lockdowns and workplace operating rules are not enforced, mainly driven by demand in healthcare, pharmaceuticals, educational services, ecommerce and technology start-ups and IT, according to a report.

In fact, out of the 21 sectors reviewed, more than 8 sectors will witness a 9-11 per cent rise in their intent to hire in the current quarter, TeamLease Employment Outlook Report has revealed.

"Indian economy has been regaining the lost ground and the same was reflecting in hiring as well. Be it the IMF, OECD or Fitch, all have been positive and this was bolstering the business sentiment and the intent to hire. However, if we resort to lockdowns it will derail and further delay the recovery.

"In fact, it will impact the scope of growth in employment negatively. If we continue with our efforts and not opt for lockdown, the business optimism will remain intact and so the hiring.

The intent to hire will grow from 27 per cent point in January-March to 34 per cent in the current quarter," TeamLease Services co-founder and executive vice president Rituparna Chakraborty said.

The report is based on a survey among 712 small, medium and large companies across the 21 sectors pan-India from January to June.

The report further revealed that healthcare, pharmaceuticals, educational services, ecommerce and technology start-ups and information technology are the key sectors, who are likely to ramp up their talent pool.

In fact, more than 58 per cent of the corporates in healthcare and pharmaceuticals sectors, which is nearly 11 per cent higher than the January-March period, are keen on hiring talent.

Educational services, ecommerce and technology start-ups and IT have also indicated similar enthusiasm with 55 per cent, 51 per cent and 50 per cent the companies, respectively, expressing intent to hire.

According to the report, while there is an overall positivity, power and energy, BPO/ITeS, media and entertainment, consulting, marketing and advertising, travel and hospitality may take more time to reach the kind of intent to hire enthusiasm that the other sectors are expressing.

Further, from a geography perspective, while metro and tier I cities (32 per cent) take the lead in terms of overall intent to hire, tier-III cities are not far behind.

Delving deep into cities barring for Kochi, Coimbatore, Nagpur and Kolkata most of the towns have expressed a growth in keenness to hire.

Meanwhile, with regard to functional areas similar to the previous quarter, sales (41 per cent) and marketing (34 per cent) continues to be the most sought after functional roles.

However, when it comes to hierarchy the preferences seem to have changed substantially as the intent to hire senior-level talent has dropped by 4 per cent point over January-March, the report added.

70% employers resume hiring for blue collar jobs: Survey

Mumbai: With the vaccination drive in full swing in the country and high optimism on the economic recovery, the hiring of blue collar workers is resurging as 70% of employers polled in a survey said they have resumed recruitment. Of the 70 % employers polled in the second edition of OLX People Survey, nearly 16% said they are hiring 100 per cent of capacity, while 54% are hiring up to 50% of capacity. About 60% of employers stated that they have faced no challenges in availability of talent, despite the fact that a large number of gig workers had preferred to return to their native place at the height of the pandemic.

Recruitment activity logs 2% drop in March over previous month: Report

IANS ■ MUMBAI

The recruitment activity saw a drop of 2 per cent in March 2021 over the previous month, mainly dragged by a decline in job postings in sectors including banking/financial services, insurance, production and manufacturing, according to a report.

The overall data indicate that there was a slight decline in job posting activity in March, according to Monster Employment Index, a job analysis report by Monster.Com, a Quess Company.

Markets undeterred by Covid, fundraising increases

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Despite the uncertainty prevailing in FY 2020-21 owing to Covid-19 pandemic, fundraising in FY 2020-21 was better than that in FY 2019-20 for both Public Issues and Rights Issues, the finance ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

During FY 2020-21, ₹46,029.71 crore and ₹ 64,058.61 crore were raised through Public Issues and Rights Issue respectively, as against ₹21,382.35 crore and ₹55,669.79 crore raised last year. This is an increase of 115 per cent and 15 per cent respectively in FY 2020-21 as compared to last year.In FY21, in all 56 public issues were launched, including 55 initial public offers (IPO) and only one follow on public offer (FPO). The number of rights issue was also a high of 21.A finance ministry tweet said that last year around 2003 issues of Corporate Bonds for an amount of ₹7,82,427.39 crore also happened, surpassing the amount raised (₹6,89,686.19 crore) through 1,821 issues for the fiscal year 2019-20.Thus, while the number of issues increased by 10 per cent in FY 2020-21, the amount raised increased by 13.5 per cent as compared to the previous financial year.

With regard to mutual funds, the finance ministry said that Indian capital market has shown its resilience to withstand the ripples caused by exogenous shocks like the pandemic.

Tech stocks turn attractive for mutual funds amid pandemic

IANS ■ MUMBAI

Technology stocks were among the favoured stocks among mutual funds amid the pandemic.

Technology sector saw a massive rise in weightage in FY21 to 11.9 per cent (up 300 bps YoY). The sector is now the second in terms of sectoral allocation by MFs, said a Motilal Oswal Financial Services Report. A year ago, it was in the third position.

In terms of value increase on a month-on-month increase in March, three of the top five stocks were from technology - Infosys (up Rs 7,000 crore), TCS (up Rs 3,960 crore), and HCL Tech (up Rs 1,690 crore).

Stocks that saw a maximum decline in value MoM were of Reliance Industries, SBI, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Axis Bank, Bharti Airtel, Coal India, HDFC, Vedanta, and Info Edge.

The Fund Folio report also said that the year saw a notable change in the sector and stock allocation of funds. The weightage of domestic cyclicals increased by 160 basis points to 58 per cent, led by an increase in the weightage of automobiles, NBFCs, cement, real estate, chemicals, and infrastructure.

Weightage of defensive stocks decreased 100 basis points to 32.5 per cent, led by consumer, utilities, and telecom. Global cyclicals' weightage, too, fell 60 basis points to 9.5 per cent.

The consumer sector slipped to fourth place from second place a year ago, with a 240 bps decreased in weightage to 7.4 per cent.

Metals improved its position to 14 from 16 a year ago, with the weightage increasing by 80 bps to 2.6 per cent.

Assets under management (AUM) of the mutual fund industry witnessed a growth of 41 per cent in the last financial year to touch a new high of Rs 31.4 lakh crore. The growth was primarily led by an increase in AUM of equity funds (Rs 4.09 lakh crore), income funds (Rs 2.39 trillion) and other ETFs (Rs 1.29 lakh crore), the report said.Equity AUM, including ELSS and index funds, of domestic mutual funds reached new highs of Rs 10.2 lakh crore (up 67 per cent YoY) in FY21, led by a rise in market indices.

Global stocks follow Wall St higher after US inflation rises

AP ■ BEIJING

Global stock markets and Wall Street futures rose Wednesday after traders shrugged off higher US inflation and a decline in Japanese machinery orders.

London and Paris opened higher while Shanghai, Hong Kong and Seoul rose. Tokyo was off less than 0.5%.

On Tuesday, Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index climbed 0.3% to a new high, propelled by tech and consumer stocks on optimism the vaccine rollout will allow business activity to return to normal. Johnson & Johnson fell 1.3% after US regulators suspended use of its single-dose vaccine to investigate possibly dangerous blood clots.

The US government reported consumer prices increased by a stronger-than-expected 0.6% in March, the fastest rate since 2012. Higher inflation normally fuels fears interest rates might be raised to keep prices stable, but the Federal Reserve has said the economy will be allowed to "run hot" to ensure a recovery is in place.

Traders "took the well-telegraphed inflation pick-up' in stride," Stephen Innes of Axi said in a report. Markets also are "seemingly unfazed" by the J&J suspension.

In early trading, London's FTSE 100 was up less than 0.1% at 6,896.64. Frankfurt's DAX declined less than 0.1% to 15,222.10 while the CAC 40 in Paris gained 0.2% to 6,196.15.

On Wall Street, the future for the S&P 500 index was up less than 0.1% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was unchanged.The Dow, which includes J&J, fell 0.2% on Tuesday. The Nasdaq, with more technology stocks, gained 1.1%.

In Asia, the Shanghai Composite Index advanced 0.6% to 3,416.72 and the Hang Seng in Hong Kong added 1.3% to 28,855.83.The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo shed 0.4% to 29,620.99 after government data showed February machinery orders fell by an unexpectedly wide margin of 8.5% from the previous month, adding to concern about the country's recovery.

Land value within 500 metre of upcoming metro corridors to rise 10-15%

IANS ■ MUMBAI

As several cities add metro rail to their public transport facilities or extend their existing networks, a JLL report said that land value within 500 metre of upcoming metro corridors is expected to increase by 10-15 per cent, according to a JLL report.

Noting that India was introduced to the metro rail as an alternative mode of transport three decades, the report said: "Since then, the advantages of the metro rail system have increased many-folds. Primarily it has been the enhanced connectivity to the suburbs of the city, thus enabling distribution of the city population to a larger extent of land resulting to congestion reduction in the city."

Covering a total of 760.62 km across India with another 578.34 km under construction, the past two decades has seen a tremendous growth of the metro rail.

Cities including Kochi, Chennai, Bengaluru, Nagpur and Nashik have seen significant expansion of new metro lines, which was highlighted by the Finance Minister in the Union Budget hearing in January 2021.

Further, two new technologies including MetroLite and MetroNeoare are being planned to provide affordable connectivity options in tier II cities and peripheral parts of tier I cities.

"The real estate market has seen a steady growth along the metro corridors, owing to increase in developments alongside the routes. Furthermore, on an average, the land value within 500 metre of metro corridors has increased by 15-20 per cent, especially in residential and commercial areas," said A. Shankar, Head - Strategic Consulting and Valuation Advisory, India, JLL.

He further said that it has been observed that appreciation in land value has been on a rise after the metro operation and increase by 2-5 per cent annually over other locations, compared to the construction and planning phase.The deployment of metro corridor directly impacts the real estate sector as it increases the land value, land use change and densification alongside the metro corridor.

SIP collections drop to ₹96,000 cr in FY21 amid pandemic-led disruptions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Mutual fund industry saw its collections through SIPs dropping 4 per cent to Rs 96,000 crore in the 2020-21 fiscal, as COVID-19 induced lockdowns led to income uncertainty.

Going forward, success of the vaccination drive, better than expected economic scenario and higher incomes can be the factors that will have an impact on systematic investment plan or SIP flows, Gopal Kavalireddi, Head of research, FYERS, said.

While a few of the economic indicators like GST collections, auto and housing sales look positive, IIP and inflation data along with intermittent lockdowns can affect the economic progress in the ongoing fiscal, he added.

A total of Rs 96,080 crore was collected through SIP in just concluded fiscal, lower than Rs 1,00,084 crore garnered in 2019-20, as per the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI).

Inflows into SIPs have averaged about Rs 8,000 crore for the 12 months till March this year.

Systematic investment plans or SIPs have been the the preferred route for retail investors to invest in mutual funds as it helps them reduce market timing risk.

The mutual fund SIP contribution has increased steadily over the years.

From Rs 43,921 crore collected in 2016-17, Rs 67,190 crore in 2017-18, Rs 92,693 crore in 2018-19, the SIP contribution hit the Rs 1 lakh crore mark in 2019-20.

Quantum Mutual Fund Chief Executive Jimmy Patel attributed the decline in SIP numbers to coronavirus-induced lockdown as several investors chose to stop their SIPs.

"With the coronavirus pandemic resulting in lockdowns in March 2020 and raising income uncertainty, many investors opted to pause their SIPs. This was evident from the decrease in SIP inflows post March 2020. From a high of Rs 8,641 crore the contribution decreased for 11 consecutive months, before it could breach the previous highs," FYERS' Kavalireddi said.

Bharti Airtel restructures its corporate structure

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Bharti Airtel on Wednesday announced a new corporate structure with focus on four verticals - Digital, India, International and Infrastructure.

The new structure envisages Airtel Digital Ltd folding into listed entity, Bharti Airtel. This will now house all of the digital assets spanning Wynk Music, Airtel X stream, Airtel Thanks, Mitra Payments platform used by a million retailers, Airtel Ads, Airtel IQ, Airtel Secure, Airtel Cloud and all future digital products and services, the company said in a statement. The telecom business of the company will be housed in a newly-created entity, Airtel Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Bharti Airtel. Bharti Telemedia, the 100 per cent arm operating DTH services, will sit alongside Airtel Ltd for now.

There is need for positive regulatory framework for internet cos: Facebook India head

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Facebook India Head Ajit Mohan said there is a need for a "forward-looking and positive regulatory framework" for internet companies, and that organisations also need to be more transparent about how they use customer data.

The executive noted that India has seen an "explosive shift" in terms of access to the internet and this expanded access gas-driven the emergence of entirely new models, a feat that no other country has managed to do so much in such a short period of time.

"We absolutely do believe that the internet needs new rules, not just in India but around the world. We operated for a very long time with not enough clarity on the traffic lights. And this is the moment when we should think especially in democratic societies, think about how we navigate complex issues where there are competing trade-offs. I'm hoping that we can emerge with a very forward-looking and positive regulatory framework," he said at the Raisina Dialogue.

Mohan, Vice President and Managing Director, Facebook India, said that there are a few areas that the regulations can focus on.

"One is transparency mandates. Make it the company's to be more transparent about how data is used. Second, there's a lot of concern about algorithms, and how machines are controlling people's lives. I think we would be very keen to lean in and say how do we protect user agency where people have the opportunity to make explicit choices that drive algorithms," he said.

Mohan added that a lot of the conversation has been about how large tech companies benefit from large sets of data.

"I think we have been very forward in saying we are open to creating frameworks that still protect the interests of privacy and safety when data moves around, but make it easier for users to move data between competing platforms. I do believe that we are a partner in this. But I agree with the framework that we need rules and we hope those will be forward-looking and positive," he said.

NORTHERN RAILWAY

Principal Chief Materials Manager
Headquarters Office, Baroda House, New Delhi-110001
Mail ID : salenr365@gmail.com

No. 117-S-Sales-Auction Programme- 2021-22 **Dated. 12.04.2021**

e-AUCTION NOTICE NO. June/2021

E-Auction will be conducted for disposal of Ferrous Scrap, Non Ferrous Scrap, Other Misc Scrap, Condemned Loco, Coaches and Wagons, Scrap Rail and other scrap P Way material. Used lead Acid Batteries/Used oil/Refused oil will be sold only to recyclers registered with State Pollution Control Board. Auction programme is as under.

e-AUCTION DATES FOR 'June, 2021.

S. No	Depot conducting auction	1st round	2nd round	3rd round	4th round
1	Alambagh/Lucknow 0522-2451257	1	8	15	22
2	Shakurbasti 011-27015387	2	9	16	23
3	Jagadhari 01732-252388	7	14	21	28
4	Sr.DMM/LKO 0522-2234756	7	14	21	28
5	Sr.DMM/FZR 01632-244154	3	10	17	24
6	Sr.DMM/UMB 0171-2611203	2	9	16	23
7	Sr.DMM/MB 0591-2413141	3	10	17	24
8	Sr.DMM/DLI 011-23365311	1	8	15	22

E-Auction will be held from 10:00 AM on wards as per above programme

1. The details of item to be sold in auction will be available in catalogue at **www.ireps.gov.in.**
2. The intending purchasers may inspect the scrap material before the auction during working hours at nominated locations.
3. To participate in e-auction, purchasers need to get themselves registered with The details on last sold rates in auctions are available at **www.railnet.gov.in.**
4. ireps. For further details regarding registration and other conditions of e-auction, please visit Railway website **'www.ireps.gov.in'**.

(Amir Chand)
Dy. Chief Material Manager/Sig/C-I

846/2021

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client HDFC Ltd. who had disburse a Loan to Mrs. Kusum and Mr. Nitin Arora, against the mortgage of Property bearing No. A-1006, 10th Floor, Trident Embassy, Greater Noida, Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P. has come to the notice that the original property documents viz Agreement to sell dated 29.12.2017 executed between M/s. HT Media Ltd and Mrs.Kusum and Mr. Nitin Arora is not traceable. It is hereby appealed to the general public that whosoever finds the document mentioned hereinabove may kindly return the same to the HDFC Ltd., The Capital Court, Munirka, Outer Ring Road, Olof Palme Marg, New Delhi-110067.

Karnail Singh, Advocate
Ch. No. 153, Saket Court Complex, Saket, New Delhi

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is for information of general public that the original Sale Deed of Upper Ground Floor of Property No. C-40, situated in Shashi Garden, Mayur Vihar-1, Delhi-110091, jointly owned by Sh. Vikrant Vikram Singh and Sh. Uttam Kumar, by virtue of Sale Deed duly registered as document no. 2778. addl. book no. 1, volume no. 5263, pages 125 to 130, dated 15-02-2011, sub-Registrar-VIII, Delhi, has been lost/misplaced. If anybody has any right, title or interest in the said property and/or has any type of objection in the same, may approach to the above noted owners withing 10 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Naqi Asad (Advocate)
214/4,New Lahore, Shastri Nagar, Delhi-110031, Enrl. No. D-761/200

AXIS BANK

Retail Asset Centre, Delhi: Lower Ground Floor and Upper Ground Floor, Himalaya House, K.G. Marg, Delhi-110001.
Also at: Axis Bank Ltd., Axis House, Tower T-2, 2nd Floor, I-14, Sector-128, Noida Expressway, Jaypee Greens Wishtown, Noida (U.P.)-201301
Corporate Office: 'Axis House', Block-B, Bombay Dyeing Mills Compound, Pandurang Budhkar Marg, Worli, Mumbai-400025, **Registered Office:** 'Trishul', 3rd floor, opposite Samartheswar Temple, Law garden, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad-380006

POSSESSION NOTICE UNDER SARFAESI ACT 2002

Whereas
The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of Axis Bank Ltd. under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notice upon the Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagor(s) mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.
The Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagor(s) having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagor(s) and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ here under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates.
The Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagor(s) in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of Axis Bank Ltd.
The Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagor(s) attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Name of Borrower / Co-borrower	Description of Property	1.Date of Demand Notice 2.Date of Possession 3.Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)
1.Mr. Hitesh Agarwal S/O Mr. Ramesh Chand Agarwal U-23/35 Ground Floor, Pink Town House, U Block, DLF Phase-III, Gurgaon-122022, Haryana **Also At:** Mr. Hitesh Agarwal S/O Mr. Ramesh Chand Agarwal 28A Deepali Jeevan Jyoti Nagar, Kishangarh, Madanganj, Ajmer, Rajasthan-305801 **Also At** Mr. Hitesh Agarwal S/O Mr. Ramesh Chand Agarwal Price Water House & Co. Chartered Accountants LLP Building 8, 7th & 8th Floor, Tower-B, DLF Cyber City, Gurgaon-122002,Haryana **2. Mrs. Khushboo Garg** W/o Mr. Hitesh Agarwal U-23/35 Ground Floor, Pink Town House, U Block, DLF Phase-III, Gurgaon-122022, Haryana **Also At** Mrs. Khushboo Garg W/o Mr. Hitesh Agarwal Shastri Nagar Colony, Ajmer Road Kekri, Ajmer, Rajasthan-305404 **Mrs. Khushboo Garg** W/o Mr. Hitesh Agarwal 28A Deepali Jeevan Jyoti Nagar, Kishangarh, Madanganj, Ajmer, Rajasthan-305801	Immovable Asset: Residential Ground Floor Dwelling Unit called 'Town House' having its covered area of 76.50 Sq. Mtrs. (823 Sq. Ft.) bearing No. U-23/35 together with impartible and undivided prorate share of land in Plot No. 35, Road No. U-23, measuring 125.07 Sq. Mtrs. In the Residential Colony Known as DLF City, Phase-III, (Earlier known as DLF Qutub Enclave Complex), situated in and around Village Nathupur, Tehsil & Distt. Gurgaon (Haryana) Bounded as under:- East: Property No. U-23/36 West: Property No. U-23/34 North: Road South: Property No. U-22/19	1.23-09-2019 2.12-04-2021 3.Rs.71,16,421/- (PHR005602405672) & Rs.4,95,378/- (HTR005602473530) Plus further Interest, incidental expenses and cost

The above-mentioned Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagor(s) are hereby given a 30 days' Notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days' from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date : 15-04-2021
Place : Gurugram

Sd/-,
Authorized Officer,
Axis Bank Ltd.,

SEARCH FOR MISSING LADY

Ram Devi

General public is hereby informed that one lady namely **Ram Devi, W/o Sh. Shiv Dayal, R/o H.No. H-2/5 Budh Vihar, Phase-I, Delhi.** Age about 40 yrs., Height 5', Wheatish Complexion, Long face, Medium Built wearing dark blue colour suit-salwar and chappal in feet has been missing since **22.03.2021** from the area of **PS Vijay Vihar, Delhi.**

In this regard a case **DD No. 61-A Dt. 22.03.2021** has been lodged at **PS Vijay Vihar, Delhi.** Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing lady but no clue has come to light so far. Any person having any information or clue about this missing lady may kindly inform to the following.

E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in
Fax: 011-23011334
Ph.: 011-23014046
011-23015218

S.H.O.,
PS Vijay Vihar, Delhi.
Ph.: 011-27061294, 27061295

DP/782/RD/2021

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

YOGENDER KUMAR

General public is hereby informed that one person namely **Yogender Kumar Gupta S/o Sh. Anand Swaroop Gupta** R/o H.No.2, Pkt-16, Sec-24, Rohini, Delhi has been missing/kidnapped from the area of PS: Budh Vihar, Delhi since 24.03.2021. In this regard, a case **DD No. 51A Dated 24.03.2021 has been registered at P.S. Budh Vihar, Delhi.** The description of the missing person as under.

Age: 47 Years, **Complexion:** Wheatish, **Height:** 6', **Face:** Round, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Blue colour shirt & jeans and black colour shoes in feet. Sincere 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 the missing/kidnapped person then please inform P.S. Budh Vihar, 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.
PS: Budh Vihar, Delhi
Ph: 011-27052772/73

DP/770/RD/2021

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

RAJESHWARI

SOORAJ

General public is hereby informed that one lady Namely **Rajeshwari W/o Sonpal** R/o E-82, Prem Nagar-I, Kirari, Delhi has been missing/kidnapped from her house since dated 16.03.2021 with her 8 years old son namely Sooraj S/o Sonal, Height 3' 6" Face: Round. In this regard, a case **DD NO. 46A dt. 18.03.2021 has been registered at P.S. Prem Nagar, Delhi.** The description of the missing lady is as under.

Age: 35 Years **Complexion:** Shallow, **Height:** 5', **Face:** Round, **Wearing**: White Colour Saaree. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out her but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone has any information about the missing/Kidnapped lady and her son then please inform P.S. Prem Nagar, Delhi at following Tel No./ e-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in and Website: http://cbi.nic.in providing clue about the person.

Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax No. 011-24368639

Sd/- SHO
PS: Prem Nagar, Delhi
PH.: 9315164042, 9850870322

DP/783/RD/2021

Bollywood
'I am very happy that I am able to keep the audience entertained through my work.'
—Fatima Sana Shaikh
10

TAKE YOUR CALL

One out of five students face the indecision of whether they should study in India or abroad. ASHISH FERNANDO shares six factors that can help you decide

One out of every five students face the indecision of whether they should study in India or abroad. Here are six factors that can help you have a better future.

Every student planning their higher education faces many choices. Some of the most important decisions to make range from choosing the right course, a good university and even the right country. Where you choose to pursue your education can drastically change your future. Most students who decide between their country options, compare the pros and cons with the same burning questions:

❒How does the cost of education differ?

Depending upon the course you choose, studying in India can be cheaper than studying in a university abroad. India has some of the world's most affordable higher education options. Thus, Indian universities also attract a lot of global students, especially from European and African countries.

However, that does not mean that studying abroad cannot be affordable. Students from all financial and academic backgrounds study abroad. If you seek hard enough, you are bound to find an institution that has education costs similar to what you would pay in India. The cost of your education also includes your cost of living, of course. It's important to consider that while living abroad may provide a global outlook on things, staying with your families might be more cost-effective. So, if you're still confused, it's better we consider the next factor.

❒How do we judge the education quality?

The curriculum, the faculty and the scope of research or the subjects taught are the three things every student should look at when judging the education quality of an institution. In India, most institutions fall under a standard government-set curriculum or a private education system. However, getting into the apex universities like the IITs and IIMs can be highly competitive with an admission rate as low as 7 per cent. However, institutions abroad tend to have coursework that differs slightly for each university. This means that a student who plans to apply for an MBA can choose to do so in STEM specialisations instead of a traditional module. These kinds of niche specialisations and programmes are often unavailable in India. The handpicked faculty members, advanced teaching methods and higher admission rates in universities abroad, often make it a better option for students.

❒What about job opportunities?

The intention behind almost the entire higher education journey leads to one destination: A well-paying, satisfactory job. Since the degrees from Indian universities are sometimes more affordable, the return on investment is often considerable. However, foreign university degrees are often held in the same regard as a degree from a prestigious Indian university. This gives students an edge over others applying for similar jobs in India. Applying to one of the numerous jobs overseas also gives you diverse career options and a higher return on investment.

> **The curriculum, the faculty and the scope of research or the subjects taught are the three things every student should look at when judging the education quality of an institution**

❒Where is it safer?

The physical safety concerns are an inevitable issue faced by every institution worldwide. Many students feel a modicum of comfort in studying in your own country. However, there are many others who note the safety protocols in universities abroad and pursue education there. Student concerns are taken very seriously and help is immediate. In times such as the global pandemic when education has largely gone digital, safety is a severe concern. Indian universities have put strict restrictions on campus learning. While many universities abroad have also done the same, most institutions in countries like the USA, the UK, Australia and Canada, have introduced a partial lecture schedule on campus.

❒Which option is better for a career profile?

Whether you plan on staying overseas or coming back to India, pursuing education abroad gives you a global outlook on life. It develops your perspective and decision making skills, thus, helping you build a well-rounded career. However, if you plan on choosing a career that has a greater scope and career options in the Indian industries, staying in India might be what you need to do.

As you might have noticed, all these factors depend upon one major choice — the course. Be it the curriculum, cost, career or even jobs, the decision you make hinges upon the programme of your choice. The only thing to keep in mind is that country choices are never limited, all that matters is a student's preference.

(The writer if the founder and CEO of iSchoolConnect.)

'A great reference point'

Actor NUSHRRATT BHARUCCHA shares how her househelp enabled her to get a deeper understanding of her character in *Ajeeb Daastaans*

Actor Nushrratt Bharuccha plays a household named Meenal in the forthcoming anthology film *Ajeeb Daastaans*. She recalls how her own help at home helped her prepare for the role.

"I started observing my own household to understand her mannerisms and characteristics. She was a great reference point for me and, unknowingly, helped me to get a deeper understanding of my character," the actor shared.

"For three to four hours that she would come, she would make all of us at home happy and 'feel at home' with her fun banter. That is what I wanted my character to portray," she claimed.

The segment featuring Nushrratt is titled *Khilauna*, and it stars Abhishek Banerjee and child star Inayat Verma in pivotal roles. It is directed by Raj Mehta, who shot to fame making the comedy *Good Newwz* in 2019. His segment in *Ajeeb Daastaans,* however, comes with a dark twist.

Ajeeb Daastaans has four segments, with the other stories directed by Shashank Khaitan, Neeraj Ghaywan, and Kayoze Irani. The anthology also stars Fatima Sana Shaikh, Jaideep Ahlawat, Konkona Sen Sharma, Aditi Rao Hydari, Shefali Shah, Manav Kaul and Tota oy Chowdhary.

"Meenal's story is that of an ordinary girl who is struggling to make ends meet, and provide for the best for herself and her sister. I could feel a similarity in Meenal's life and my household, who too works hard to provide for her son," Nushrratt said.

Dying to collaborate with Mohit again: Arjun

Actor Arjun Kapoor is heading to Goa to start shooting for *Ek Villain 2* that also stars John Abraham, Tara Sutaria and Disha Patani. The actor last shot in Goa for his critically acclaimed film *Finding Fanny* with Deepika Padukone and he is excited to go back to the picturesque locations to reunite with his *Half Girlfriend* director Mohit Suri.

Arjun says, "I have been dying to collaborate with Mohit again and we had an amazing time during *Half Girlfriend,* a very different film for me. I really enjoyed myself. He has given me my career's best music. I always say this to my friends and people around me that apart from Aditya Chopra, it is Mohit who has always believed in me so much."

He adds, "He is somebody who I am looking at keeping my head down and learn from again. I really want to get into doing action big time again and I want to experience working with Mohit on such a big film. To do a sequel, to do a franchise, and to be able to work with an ensemble cast, it's a big one. He, as a director, has been able to bring together John, Me, Tara, Disha, and of course, banging music."

Arjun says he has been a big fan of Mohit since the beginning and is supremely excited about the magic he will make with his music again. He says, "I am a big fan of Mohit Suri. I loved *Awarapan*. I have to say I have been very fortunate that I have had *Ishaqzaade*, *Two States* and *Half Girlfriend*. I really feel I have been lucky."

He adds, "He is a great guy to collaborate with. He is so young with his thinking and he allows you to be you. So for me, I think that balance is very important. I am looking forward to working with him again and hoping to give something new to the audience."

TREND TOOL

To keep your car safe...

...here are five anti-theft devices

The announcement of the vehicle scrappage scheme by the government of India has brought a significant change in the Indian automobile industry and is expected to generate demand for new vehicles. While buying a new car/vehicle is on a surge, buyers/owners of new cars need to take care of its security. We have shortlisted top anti-theft devices that one should have to secure his/her brand new car.

SAFE CAMS DASH CAMS: Installation of CCTV security cameras in your neighbourhood or society won't be enough to protect your car from being stolen. A dash cam provides you with a security system for the vehicle. Usually, the dash cameras are used to record the on-road activity while the vehicle is on move, but when the vehicle is parked, it keeps the view of interiors as well and the installed sensors help to figure out if a car is being broken into and start recording. Safe Cams' SC02 Dual Dash Camera with 64 GB memory would be your best option for ensuring the security of your car both on-road and in the parking lot.

STEERING WHEEL LOCK: This is one of the oldest and most widely used theft prevention devices across the globe. There are many brands and variants available in the market with different specification. Disklok' Security Wheel Lock is the strongest and the premier wheel immobiliser.

GPS TRACKERS: If all the installed devices failed, a GPS tracker will be there to locate your car in real-time. There are many trackers available in the market and most of them allow for live tracking and other important features like controlling engine immobilising. LetsTrack is one of the companies that provide 24 hours real-time tracking of your vehicle.

VEHICLE ALARM SYSTEM: Alarm systems are the first line of defence against theft as they start ringing as soon as something untoward happens with the car. Avital's Omega K-9 1 is one of the top sellers on Amazon. Car alarm with keyless entry vehicle security system with shock sensor.

SECURITY TIRE CLAMP: One of the best methods to keep a car safe is to lock its tyre with a tyre security clamp. It is the cheapest of all security devices and can be easily available both online and at car servicing vendors.

TREND BLAZER

SHEFALI SHAH ON WHAT TERRIFIES HER

Actor **SHEFALI SHAH**, who took her acting to the next level with the International Emmy-winning series *Delhi Crime*, says she tackles self-doubt every day.

"It's every single day I go to work. For me, it gets difficult to get out of the vanity van because I have this fear that I am going to stand there dumbfounded when the director says 'action'. Not one day has gone by where I am not terrified. There is a fear that I might just not know," Shefali said.

fairtalk

SONAKSHI SINHA

'I tie up with causes I strongly believe in and, as celebrities, I feel we can make a difference because we have a voice. It should be used to make the world a better place. So, if there is any cause that is for the upliftment and development of society, why not?'

dailytalk

SOHUM SHAH

'I feel there is an impact of social media but everyone thinks differently. Social media numbers can get you work. But the process which I follow, it doesn't matter to me. I only cast people on acting skills. If I want to be cast, it also has to be (based) on my work.'

OLLY TO RELEASE HIS 'BEST' SONGS

Singer **OLLY ALEXANDER**, who was part of the band Years & Years with Mikey Goldsworthy and Emre Turkmen, will soon be sharing some unreleased songs.

"Some of the songs I never want to throw them away because they still are my babies and I still like parts of them. Maybe another artist would listen and like it, and want to do something, like their own thing, so I've kept a lot of them just in case. But, to be honest, the ones that are the best ones, I'm going to put them out," he said.

STEP TAKEN TO RELIEVE JAIPUR TRAFFIC

A major step has been achieved for solving the traffic congestion in Jaipur by creating the Jaipur Central Region as a traffic light-free city. In a meeting, chaired by the Minister of Urban Development, Shanti Dhariwal, a few important decisions were taken. It was attended by Gaurav Goel, IAS, JDC, VS Sunda, Chief Engineer, JDA and Anoop Bartaria, Consultant Designer and CMD, Sincere Architects along with their team.

The feasibility report of four intersections — B2 Bypass, Laxmi Mandir Tiraha, OTS Crossing and Jawahar Circle — were discussed and approved.

These projects have been designed to create a confluence of art, heritage and technology in pursuit to remove the traffic lights on these junctions. The feasibility report included the construction of heritage structures on all the four crossings conserving the heritage and architectural style of Jaipur. In all the crossings, the salient features of them are as under:

B2 BYPASS

❒A grand arch in marble and stone craft will be built on the B2 Bypass, which will be 80 feet high.

❒An underpass connecting the Jawahar Circle to the Mansarovar side will be built. The underpass will be six lanes, which will be unique and decorated with traditional murals of art on both the sides. For turning traffic, two clovers are to be built.

❒A detailed traffic survey and analysis has already been conducted.

❒Smart underpasses and smart cloverleaf bridges will be created, which will be equipped with all IT based systems and IoT platforms.

❒Street illumination and heritage lighting has been made a part of this project.

❒Beautiful marble sculptures and traditional scenes of Rajputana will be sculptured in marble and metal on the heritage structures.

❒First time in Jaipur, you will have pedestrian crossing, which will be totally ramped. It is going to be friendly for physically-challenged and senior citizens.

❒A crossing for cyclists along with pedestrian crossovers will be made.

❒The project will tantamount to multiple benefits — it will save fuel around 9.5 lakh liters every year, which will, in turn, result in substantial reduction in air pollution and improve its quality; ease of travel will result in ease of living; it will also result in reduction of stress levels in travellers as there will be no congestion and of course, will save time.

JAWAHAR CIRCLE

❒The traffic light on the interface of JLN Road and Jawahar Circle is being removed by creating two major entry transitions, cuts in the median towards Jawahar Circle. The outer ring of Jawahar Circle is going to have a dedicated cycling track and outer ring will be treated for pedestrian comfort and vehicular travel by stone cobble floorings.

❒A welcome monument abutting the road coming from airport on the south end of Jawahar Circle has been planned. The monument will be built in white marble and there will be series of arches and pillars highlighting the elements of Jaipur architecture. In this entire development of Jawahar Circle, major plantation will also be done to enhance the lanes.

❒The parking on the inner road has been designed strictly according to the traffic engineering norms and the entries and exits will be controlled for security and safety of the people.

❒Heritage lighting and signages will be also undertaken in the project.

❒Pet friendly stations, WiFi zones, cafe huts, senior citizen support services and more has also been planned.

LAXMI MANDIR TIRAHA

❒The total amount of cars travelling on Laxmi Mandir Tiraha is 2.0 lakh per day. The signal light of the Laxmi Mandir is being removed by closing the median and for the traffic coming from the Sahakar Bhawan Road on the Tonk Road will be moving on the road between Apex Bank and Nehru Place. An underpass will be constructed which will cross over the Tonk Road and will open towards Sanganer side, thereby eliminating the traffic light at the junction.

❒In continuity of the same, the Gandhi Nagar traffic light is also proposed to be eliminated by creating an underpass and cloverleaf bridge.

❒A statue of freedom fighters will be built in the garden court of Laxmi Mandir Tiraha.

❒Sufficient parking a facilities for the occupants abutting the road is also being planned.

❒Around 6.50 lakh litres of fuel will be saved per annum.

OTS CROSSING

❒The OTS *Chauraha* will also be free of traffic light and will result into a smooth movement in all directions.

❒After an indepth study of movement of traffic, a design has been prepared, which will take care of the six lane traffic on JLN road. A clover on the Jhalana road will be made, which will take care of the turning traffic.

❒A unique gallery of heritage pictures for pedestrian and cyclist traffic connecting all four directions has been planned. This will save 7 lakh litres of fuel per annum. The design has been done by Anoop Bartaria of M/s Sincere Architects Engineers Private Limited.

All the projects will have unique heritage lighting and night illumination will be built in this. The innovative sculptures will enhance the night life of Jaipur.

CRPF celebrates Valour Day

On the occasion of Valour Day, Kuldiep Singh, DG, CRPF paid homage to the bravehearts who sacrificed their lives at the altar of duty. In a solemn ceremony, he paid rich tributes to the martyrs by laying a wreath at the National Police Memorial at Chanakyapuri, New Delhi. Later in the day, an investiture ceremony to facilitate the Gallantry Medal recipients and families of those bravehearts who were awarded Gallantry Medal Posthumously was conducted at Shaurya CRPF Officers institute, New Delhi. Kishan Singh, the surviving veteran of the Sardar Post Battle, was also facilitated in the ceremony.

Extending his best wishes to the personnel and their families, the DG said that the force owes its numerous milestones of success to the martyrs and veterans who scripted several sagas of valour while serving the nation with courage and commitment. He said that the force shall remain indebted to 2,235 martyrs who laid down their lives at the altar of duty.

Valour Day is celebrated each year to commemorate the exceptionally awe-inspiring battle at Sardar Post in Rann of Kuchh, Gujarat, where mere two companies of CRPF repulsed the attack of a full fledged Pakistani military brigade on April 9, 1965. Even when faced with sudden onslaught from a numerically superior enemy carrying modern arms and ammunition, the bravehearts of CRPF fought with exceptional courage and bravery. Not only did the CRPF repulse the attack, but it also neutralised 34 Pakistani soldiers and captured four alive. In this battle, seven bravehearts of CRPF made supreme sacrifice.

Powergrid bags ISTD national award

Maharatna entity, Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID) has bagged the third place for Innovative Training Practices (Public Sector category) 2018-19 at the 29th National Award ceremony held recently at New Delhi by Indian Society for Training & Development (ISTD). The award was received by Anil Saberwal, Executive Director (HRD, RB & CC) at SCOPE Complex, New Delhi.

Fact check

Bharat Bhushan Ashu categorically refutes media reports of Bardana shortage as malicious misinformation

Outrightly rejecting the media reports regarding non-availability of bales with procurement agencies as malicious propaganda, Bharat Bhushan Ashu, Food Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister, Government of Punjab, underlined that there is no question of shortage of bardana in the *mandies* at all.

Tendering for Bardana procurement is a continuous process which starts much before the season as part of planning and goes on as and when the need arises. One cannot be sure of full quantity receipt through one tender only, the Minister pointed out that the last tender floated on April 12 and was necessitated only because permission from GoI to use used bags was received very late.

We have already got jute bales indented through the Jute Commissioner and NAFED, Ashu said that PP bales are also being received from various HDPE/PP bag suppliers. This, in addition to the permission to use good quality used bags already received by the state from Government of India on April 12, he pointed out hitting out at those trying to create an issue where none exists.

Pointing out that season is already in full swing with farmers bringing their crops to *mandies*, Ashu said that as on Tuesday, 5,44,334 MTs of wheat has already been procured in the mandies by the procurement agencies out of which 44,728 MT has been procured under DCP for distribution in the state under Smart Ration Card Scheme.

Urging all the farmers to follow all health advisories as a safeguard against COVID, the Minister said due arrangements have been made to ensure that farmers bring their produce in a staggered way as per token issued by Mandi Board Punjab so that COVID-19 protocol can be maintained in order to curb the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

Reiterating Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh government's commitment to ensure smooth procurement experience for farmers, Ashu said that state is fully geared up to ensure our farmers don't have to face any difficulty whatsoever during the season like last four years.

DOPPW & NCC commemorate *Amrut Mahotsav*

Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare is organising various activities to commemorate 75 years of India's Independence — *Bharat Ka Amrut Mahotsav.*

The department has started an awareness campaign entitled series of 75 important rules for family pensioners to know on social media, which was started from March, 2021. In this campaign two tweets per week are being disseminated through social media during coming year. These tweets are put in the form of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). As on April 12, 2021, five tweets have been disseminated by DoPPW on Rules for Family Pensioners to create awareness.

In another initiative, 75 offices across Ministries/Departments have been identified by DoPPW for extensive training on *Bhavishya* system. All these offices will be imparted training through VC followed by question-answer session to clear any doubt. Training (online pension processing module) will be across the Central Government Organisations. CAPFs offices covering different locations across country will also be covered in this regard as maximum number of cases pertain to them.

DoPPW has also planned to arrange an online workshop on pension awareness rules for senior central govt pensioners/family pensioners aged 75 years and above covering different cities in India. It will be started from May 2021. It will cover maximum number of cities from all parts of India. The workshop will be conducted region wise.

Besides, DoPPW will also publish a digital publication of 75 *anubhav* write-ups, including those already awarded. It will be starting from June 2021.

As part of the *Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav*, National Cadet Corps (NCC) also paid homage to the martyrs of the nation's freedom struggle, who lost their lives on April 13, 1919 at the Jallianwala Bagh. National Cadet Corps also launched the pan India campaign to educate people against use of 'single use plastics'.

NCC has a strong cadet base of 14 lakh in the country, who have been quite vocal about environment issues. Cadets throughout the country gathered at 75 places. The cadets remembered and paid gratitude to the freedom fighters through *nukkad nataks*, patriotic songs, speeches and skits. This enthusiastic and patriotic tribute by the cadets of NCC filled the environment with patriotic fervour with many locals also joining the event. The social media was flooded with the #NCCrememberSJallianwala.

The cadets gathered at these 75 locations after doing plog run and spreading the message of cleanliness and a special message to the countrymen to stop using single use plastics. The message was spread on the social media by #NCCagainstPlastic.

The National Cadet Corps, a premier uniformed youth organisation of the country, has contributed significantly in nation building since its inception. It has transformed the lives of millions of youth by shaping their character and showing them the path of unity and discipline, which is also the motto of NCC. The corps has made notable and praiseworthy contributions in spreading awareness among the masses on important issues like water conservation, environment protection, digital awareness and *swachhta abhiyan*.

SCOPE organises *tika utsav*

Partaking in Prime Minister's call for *Tika Utsav* (National Vaccination Festival) to combat COVID-19, Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE) organised a workplace vaccination camp for employees of Public Sector Enterprises.

Gurdeep Singh, CMD, NTPC; Atul Sobti, DG, SCOPE; B V N Prasad, CMD, CCI, Directors and other senior officials were among those who got vaccinated at the camp.

The vaccination drive was held in coordination with Chief District Medical Officer and District Magistrate (South East), New Delhi. Earlier, SCOPE had avidly participated in Government's Public Health Response Campaign for COVID-Appropriate Behaviour.

Jammu Tourism celebrated Vaisakhi

Directorate of Tourism Jammu organised the Vaisakhi Festival at Dera Baba Banda Bahadur, Reasi, in collaboration with the District Administration, Reasi. The festival was celebrated with great fervour while following the COVID-19 protocol and guidelines.

Hundreds of devotees paid obeisance at the revered shrine at Dera Baba Village of Reasi, which is situated approximately 30 km from the Katra town. The devotees from across the UT and also from neighboring states of Punjab and Haryana visited the Dera Baba Banda Bahadur Shrine.

It is worthwhile to mention here that the shrine is situated at the village of revered Sikh warrior and leader Baba Banda Bahadur Singh *ji* who was a close confidant and follower of Guru Gobind Singh Ji. On this occasion, one medical camp was also organised by the District Administration Reasi and RT-PCR tests were conducted randomly. All necessary protocols which are in place were followed during the said festival.

CAPTAIN'S CALL

IT WAS AN EXCELLENT FIGHT BACK BY EACH ONE. YOU DON'T SEE A GAME LIKE THIS OFTEN. WE WILL TAKE LOTS OF CONFIDENCE FROM THIS GAME (VS KKR) AS WE MOVE FORWARD
— ROHIT SHARMA

TODAY VS

LIVE FROM 7:30PM IST
STAR SPORTS 1 NETWORK

NEVER SAY DIE

Shahbaz, Maxi lead RCB to second successive win as Sunrisers collapse in 150 run chase

Royal Challengers Bangalore spinner Shahbaz Ahmed celebrates after he takes wicket of Sunrisers Hyderabad batsman Abdul Samad during IPL match in Chennai IPLT20.com

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Left-arm spinner Shahbaz Ahmed (3/7) dished out a match-winning performance after Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell's half-century to help Royal Challengers Bangalore notch up a six-run win over Sunrisers Hyderabad in the Indian Premier League match at MA Chidambaram Stadium on Wednesday.

Put in to bat, RCB managed 149 for eight on the back of Maxwell's 41-ball 59 before Shahbaz changed the complexion of the match by dismissing Manish Pandey (38), Jonny Bairstow (12) and Abdul Samad (0) in one over, as SRH ended at 143 for nine in the stipulated 20 overs.

The victory propelled RCB to the top of the table.

Chasing a modest total, SRH lost opener Wriddhiman Saha (1) cheaply in the beginning of the third over. However, skipper David Warner (54) and Pandey looked to make short work of the chase, galloping towards the target with the Sunrisers needing 73 off the last 10 overs.

The duo looked in ominous touch, smashing boundaries every over to keep the score board ticking until the 14the over when the Australian, who hit seven fours and a six, was dismissed off a Kyle Jamieson off-cutter.

RCB gained confidence after Warner's dismissal, their bowlers limiting the boundaries. With the pressure mounting, Bairstow, Pandey and Samad tried to target Shahbaz but mistimed their shots to return to the pavilion in the 17th over.

Vijay Shankar (3) and Jason Holder (4) too struggled. Rashid Khan injected some hope in the SRH camp smashing 18 off nine balls before he was run out.

Earlier, SRH bowlers, led by West Indian all-rounder Jason Holder (3/30) and star spinner Rashid Khan (2/18), put up superlative show and picked up wickets at regular intervals.

For RCB, Maxwell was the top scorer, hitting five fours and three maximums with skipper Virat Kohli (33) Shahbaz Ahmed (14) and Kyle Jamieson (12) providing valuable contributions.

SRH COLLAPSE IN RUN CHASES (SINCE 2019)

Fall	Opposition team	Venue	Runs reqd
15/8	Delhi Capitals	Hyderabad	55 off 29
32/8	Royal Challengers Bangalore	Dubai	43 off 29
14/7	Kings XI Punjab	Dubai	27 off 24
29/7	Royal Challengers Bangalore	Chennai	35 off 24

LOWEST TOTALS DEFENDED SUCCESSFULLY BY RCB

Score	Opposition team	Venue	Year
126/8	Chennai Super Kings	Chennai	2008
133/8	Rajasthan Royals	Cape Town	2009
145/9	Kings XI Punjab	Durban	2009
149/8	Sunrisers Hyderabad	Chennai	2021

Not getting over excited with wins, we have plans: Kohli

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chasing a maiden title, Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Virat Kohli on Wednesday said his team has plans in place and is "not getting over excited" with two wins in as many outings in the ongoing IPL.

"To be very honest, we are not over excited with wins this season. We have plans. We traded Harshal (Patel) from Delhi, gave him a specific role and he's doing a great job," Kohli said at the post-match presentation.

Kohli, who used seven bowlers against Mumbai Indians last week and Sunrisers on Wednesday, said the luxury of having extra options has helped the team.

"Not as exhausted as I am proud (of the team). You are never really out of the game in these conditions. The extra bowling options made those impact performances in the middle overs.

"I told the guys don't think that we struggled to get to 149. If it was tough for us, it will be tough for them as well. Our execution under pressure was spot on. It kept getting tougher and tougher with the old ball. I think Maxi's innings was the difference for us," he added.

Losing captain David Warner commended his bowlers but rued the missed chances with the bat.

"Our bowlers were fantastic to restrict them. Maxwell batted well and set the platform. We needed two set batsmen at the end, but we failed to do that. We needed to build a partnership and play proper cricket shots.

PLAYER	RUNS
1. Nitish Rana (KKR)	137
2. Sanju Samson (RR)	119
3. Manish Pandey (SRH)	99

PLAYER	WKTS
1. Harshal Patel (RCB)	7
2. Andre Russell (KKR)	6
3. Rashid Khan (SRH)	4

MOST SIXES	
1. Sanju Samson (RR)	7
2. Deepak Hooda (PBKS)	6
3. Nitish Rana (KKR)	6

SUMMER SLAM

MOTION PICTURE

Chennai Super Kings players Narayan Jagadeesan, R Sai Kishore, Suresh Raina and C Hari Nishaanth wear traditional dress on occasion of Tamil New Year @ChennaiIPL

Delhi Capitals pacer Kagiso Rabada bowls during training session after he completes six-day quarantine @DelhiCapitals

KOHLI FLOATED IDEA OF MAXI JOINING RCB

All-rounder Glenn Maxwell said that RCB captain Virat Kohli had first floated the idea of him joining the franchise during the India's limited overs leg of Australia last year. " We chatted after the ODI and T20I series in Australia. He talked to me about potentially playing for RCB. If I got the opportunity, he said 'we would love to have you'," Maxwell said in a video tweeted by RCB. "He floated the idea back even then. There was a long process in work. Thankfully, I am playing for RCB now," he added.

DC AWAIT NORTJE'S 2ND TEST RESULT

DC' pacer Anrich Nortje will not be available for the team's second IPL match against Rajasthan as his Covid-19 test reports are still awaited. There are reports that Nortje has tested positive but DC management hasn't yet come out with any official statement.

POINTS TABLE

		P	W	L	NRR	PTS
1	RCB	2	2	0	+0.175	4
2	DC	1	1	0	+0.779	2
3	MI	2	1	1	+0.225	2
4	PBKS	1	1	0	+0.200	2
5	KKR	2	1	1	+0.000	2
6	RR	1	0	1	-0.200	0
7	SRH	2	0	2	-0.400	0
8	CSK	1	0	1	-0.779	0

Injured Royals look to bounce back

KEY PLAYERS

PRITHVI SHAW
Shaw is in good form recently and his aggressive batting in the powerplay overs set the tone

JOS BUTTLER
In Jofra Archer and Ben Stokes' absence, Jos is now the most experienced player in the team

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Coming off a heart-breaking loss in the first match and hit by star all-rounder Ben Stokes' injury-forced ouster, a beleaguered Rajasthan Royals would hope for another inspirational knock from new skipper Sanju Samson when it faces a confident Delhi Capitals in an IPL match at Wankhede Stadium on Wednesday.

While DC made a superb start under new captain Rishabh Pant, clinching a seven-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings in their opening contest, RR suffered a four-run defeat against Punjab Kings in a high-scoring match on Monday night.

As if the loss was not enough, RR were dealt a severe blow on Tuesday when Stokes was ruled out of the remainder of the tournament with a broken finger. He sustained that injury during the agonising defeat.

In his absence, the pressure would be on the likes of Jos Buttler, Shivam Dube and Riyan Parag to deliver the goods and provide ample support to their young skipper, who has been sensational in the first match.

The likes of Manan Vohra (12), Buttler (25) Dube (23), Parag (25) all got starts but failed to lend the much-needed support to Samson.

The major worry for RR team management would be the performance of its bowling unit.

RR bowling unit looked rusty and completely out of sorts in their opener.

Barring young Chetan Sakariya (3/31), who had a fantastic debut, all other RR bowlers went for runs and looked completely clueless against opposition batsmen.

Mustafizur Rahman, Chris Morris, Stokes, Shreyas Gopal, Rahul Tewatia — all went for big runs and need to pull up their socks quickly.

Last edition's runner-up side DC, on the other hand, had a perfect start to their campaign as they defeated three-time champions CSK with consummate ease.

Opting to field, DC had allowed CSK to pile up a competitive 188 for 7 but Shikhar Dhawan and Prithvi Shaw made a short walk of the target with a 138-run opening partnership, that laid the foundation for the win.

On the bowling front, Chris Woakes (2/18) and Avesh Khan (2/23) had a good outing in the first game and would look to carry on their form but the likes of Ravichandran Ashwin, Tom Curran, Amit Mishra and Stoinis had a forgettable outing and would be desperate to make amends on Thursday.

The contest will also witness test of wits of two new captains in Pant and Samson.

VENUE: WANKHEDE STADIUM, MUMBAI

HEAD TO HEAD

Matches	22
Rajasthan Royals	11
Delhi Capitals	11

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

Delhi Capitals beat Rajasthan Royals by 46 runs in Sharjah

Delhi Capitals defeated Rajasthan Royals by 13 runs in Dubai

95

Sanju Samson who smashed 95 sixes in 76 innings of 80 matches, needs just five sixes to become the second Rajasthan Royals batsman after Shane Watson (109 sixes in 78 matches) to complete a century of sixes in Indian Premier League

68

Rishabh Pant led Delhi Capitals to a seven-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings on captaincy debut in IPL. He led Delhi Capitals for the first time after playing 68 matches

Faisel Features

Pant thinks like Kohli & Kane: Ponting

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting feels Rishabh Pant's thought process as captain is quite similar to Virat Kohli and Kane Williamson, as the former Australian captain describes the sprightly Indian wicketkeeper-batsman as a "winner".

Pant won his debut match as captain in the IPL against Chennai Super Kings and Ponting believes that his energy is simply hard to miss.

"Someone like him (Pant), you want him to get involved in the game as early as possible, and bat for as long as possible," Ponting told *cricket.Com-au*.

"The way he thinks, he is actually a bit like Virat or Kane. Now, if they are in at the end, you are going to win more often than not no matter how many runs are required," the legendary Australian said.

"He is energetic and you can hear that from behind the stumps, he loves being in the contest and he is a winner," the DC coach was all praise for his captain.

Ponting understands that there will be questions about Pant's glovework but asserts that he has shown remarkable improvement during the England series.

"...He's just brilliant. The comparisons are always going to be there for someone who bats like that," he responded to Pant's being compared with his former teammate Adam Gilchrist.

Rishabh Pant @DelhiCapitals

"*Gilly's* keeping is better than Rishabh's no doubt about that. The way I saw him keep on turning pitches in India (vs England), I thought he kept way better than I thought he could," said Ponting, known for his bluntness.

"If his keeping improves, with his batting, he could be India's keeper in Tests for next 10-12 years no doubt."

The coach had no hesitation in revealing that the last edition of the IPL wasn't Pant's finest.

"He was disappointing for us in the tournament last year. He had gone (to the UAE) with a lot of overweight.

"He turned up a bit underdone, did his *hammy* (hamstring) in the third or fourth game and missed a couple of games. And when he came back, he couldn't get back to the level we expected him to be," Ponting recollected.

But he is impressed with how he has worked on his fitness since the start of the Australia tour.

"If you look at him now, he has trimmed down, he is fit, focussed and winning games for India, that can only be good for him and the DC."

Babar Azam dethrones Kohli

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam on Wednesday ended Indian captain Virat Kohli's long reign at the top of the ICC rankings for batsmen to become only the fourth from his country to attain the pole position.

The 26-year-old right-hand batsman's 82-ball 94 in the third game ODI series against South Africa helped him gain 13 rating points to reach 865 points.

He now leads the Indian captain by eight points, the ICC said in a statement.

Babar had started the series at 837 rating points but moved up to 858 (ahead of Kohli) after his score of 103 in the first match.

He dropped to 852 by the time of the last weekly rankings update with a score of 32 in the second ODI.

In Tests, Babar has attained a best of fifth position and is currently ranked sixth while in T20Is he is third but has been number one in the past.

PSG knock holders Bayern Out

Parisians lose 1-0 but reach semis on away goals

AFP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain knocked holders Bayern Munich out of the Champions League on Tuesday despite Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting scoring against his old club as a 1-0 defeat in the second leg at the Parc des Princes could not prevent the French giants from winning a tremendous quarter-final tie on away goals.

Neymar twice hit the woodwork for PSG in the first half and Choupo-Moting then put Bayern in front five minutes before the break.

But the reigning European champions could not get the second goal they needed after losing 3-2 at home in the first leg last week.

Neymar celebrates with Leandro Paredes after PSG win @neymarjr

PSG have revenge following their 1-0 defeat in last season's final in Lisbon, and the dream of winning a first European Cup remains alive for the Qatar-owned club.

Mauricio Pochettino's team, who had already eliminated Barcelona in the last 16, can now look forward to a semi-final against Manchester City or Borussia Dortmund.

"I am delighted, despite the defeat. We were facing a great team, the European champions, but we are going back to the semi-finals," Neymar told broadcaster *RMC Sport*.

Chelsea reach first semis in 7 years

AFP ■ SEVILLE

Chelsea reached the Champions League semi-finals for the first time since 2014 despite a 1-0 defeat against Porto in Tuesday's quarter-final second leg in Seville. Thomas Tuchel's side will play Real Madrid or Liverpool for a place in the final after producing a masterclass in game management to win 2-1 on aggregate. Chelsea smothered Porto with an intelligent defensive approach until Mehdi Taremi's stunning bicycle kick in the last minute of stoppage-time. But that sublime strike was out of character with the rest of Porto's display as they laboured to overturn the 2-0 first-leg deficit.