

WORLD 9
IRAN TESTS ADVANCED
NUCLEAR CENTRIFUGES

SPECIAL 11
JUST PLAY

SPORT 12
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Violence mars Bengal polls

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

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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

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

Four persons Hamidul, Manirul and Samilul (three of



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

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

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

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

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

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Politicians' entry in Cooch Behar banned for 72 hr

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

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

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

The composition of the



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

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

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

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Daily Covid cases cross 1.5L mark, and counting

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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11 pilgrims die in Etawah road accident

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

At least 11 pilgrims were killed and 35 people were injured when a mini truck met with an accident in Badarpur area of Etawah district on Saturday.

The mini truck was overloaded with over 54 people who were going for darshan at Kalka Devi temple in Lajhna area from Pinhat village of Agra. SSP Dr Brajesh Kumar Singh, who reached the spot, said the accident occurred on Saturday evening.

He said around 55 people were going on a mini-truck to visit Kalka Devi temple and the driver could not control the speed of his vehicle and it fell 25 feet down the road on Chakranagar-Udi road near Kasoua in Badpura area.

The SSP said 11 people died on the spot and more than three dozen people were injured. Among the injured, the condition of 10 was said to be critical.

The deceased were identified as Banwari, Mahesh, Lallu, Rajesh, Rajendra, Gulab Singh, Manoj, Kishan, Hakim Singh, Guddu and Ramdas.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed grief over the deaths in the accident and announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh each to the families of the deceased. He also directed the officials to provide proper treatment to the injured.

CAPSULE

100M JABS! INDIA FASTEST VACCINATING COUNTRY

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

Air bubble opens Lanka for tourists

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stick to Covid behaviour or face campaign ban: EC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Pointing to the recent rise in



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

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

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

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

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

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

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Situation worsens in UP: 12,787 new cases, 48 deaths

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The second wave of the global novel coronavirus pandemic has become extremely frightening in Uttar Pradesh. More than a thousand doctors and medical staff are also infected in the state.

There was a record addition of 12,787 new coronavirus infections in the last 24 hours in UP while 48 COVID-19 patients died during this period, confirmed Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad on Saturday.

Now, the number of active cases in the state has gone up to 58,801. In the last 24 hours, 12,787 positive cases were detected across the state while the number of COVID-19 patients who recovered was only 2,207.

Lucknow continued to be a hotspot of the state. In Lucknow, 4,059 new coronavirus positive cases were detected during the past 24 hours while 23 people succumbed to the deadly virus. There are now 16,990 active cases in Lucknow and there is acute shortage of hospital beds for the COVID-19 patients.

After Lucknow, 1,460 new coronavirus positive cases were reported in Prayagraj with two casualties. There are 6,902 active cases in Prayagraj.

The other districts reporting high numbers of new coronavirus positive cases included Varanasi (983) Kanpur Nagar (706 with 6 deaths).

Covid test of 2.12 lakh people was conducted in the last 24 hours. This is the highest ever number of Covid tests in a day in the state. As many as 2.04 lakh Covid tests were conducted two days ago.

As many as 422 new positive cases were reported in Gorakhpur, 236 in Meerut, 235 in Jhansi, 221 in Gautam Buddha Nagar, 188 in Ballia, 186 in Jaunpur, 161 in Muzaffarnagar, 159 in Ghaziabad, 144 in Bareilly, 140 in Ghazipur, 139 in Barabanki, 127 in Rae Bareilly, 127 in Mathura, 117 in Basti, 106 in Sultanpur and 101 in Mirzapur.

The officials here admitted that the situation was deteriorating day by day due to new cases being detected in every district of the state.

India, China agree to defuse LAC stand-off expeditiously

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

These were the highlights of the meeting of the Corps Commanders at Chushul-Moldo border meeting point on the LAC on Friday. This was the 11th round of talks since the face-offs began in May last year. The meeting lasted for more than 10 hours.

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



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

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

Both sides agreed that it was important to take guidance

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

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

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

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

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Patriotic fervour at Kumbh spl yajna

Balak Yogeshwar Das to start rituals today for the martyrs' souls

GAJENDRA SINGH NEGI ■ HARIDWAR

At Kumbh Mela which is considered as the largest religious gathering in the world, one can witness various saints engaging in different religious activities, rituals and spiritual affairs. However there are some like ascetic Balak Yogeshwar Das, who draw the attention of everyone with his unique approach and Sadhna.

In every Kumbh and Ardh Kumbh, Das since 2003 has been organising a massive 100 Shatkundiya Yajna for peace to the souls of those who have laid their precious lives for the nation. This year the Yajna would commence on April 11 and continue till April 26 at the temporary Shaheed Nagar in the Kumbh Mela area.

When this correspondent



visited the Shaheed Nagar set up in three acres of land located at Bairagi camp on the banks of the Ganga in Haridwar, Das was busy giving final touches to the preparations. This year the invitations have been sent to families of 450 martyrs which include those who laid down their lives in the 26/11 Mumbai attack, Pulwama attack and Kargil war.

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It relieves pain: Kargil war widow

Haridwar: Like numerous others like her, Sharda Bhau of Akhnoor in Jammu & Kashmir considers Das responsible for the positive change in her life.

Widow of Havildar Daler Singh Bhau who attained martyrdom in Tololing hills in 1999

during the Kargil war told *The Pioneer* that Das visited her house after the death of her husband and persuaded her to attend the Yajna which was being organised in the town. "The grief gets reduced by sharing and it happened with me."

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Victim's satisfaction criterion of police success: CM Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Reiterating that the satisfaction of the aggrieved should be the only criterion of the success of policing, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that this message should be clear in the rank and files of the force.

The chief minister expressed happiness that the image of Uttar Pradesh Police was changing after 2017.

"Owing to the professional commitment, practicality, efficiency and police reforms, the UP Police have been a much-demanded force for deployment even in elections of other states," he said while handing over appointment letters to newly selected deputy superintendents of police through Combined State/Senior Subordinate Services Examination-2018 conducted by Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission, at a ceremony in Lok Bhavan

on Saturday.

Congratulating the newly-appointed DySPs for being part of the world's largest civilian police force, the chief minister said that till four years ago, every appointment in UP was questioned.

"Discrimination and nepotism used to be the order of the day and merit was ignored in the recruitments while today every appointment is based on fairness, transparency and honesty," the chief minister pointed out, saying, "In the present government, not a single appointment can be questioned as only qualified and competent are selected."

He took pride in stating that the credibility of the UP Public Service Commission had been restored.

The chief minister was all praise for UP Police for setting high standards in front of the global community on many occasions like Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations in

Varanasi in 2019 followed by a huge event like Prayagraj Kumbh.

"Not only this, the Lok Sabha elections were also two months later. People were apprehensive as to how all this would be managed. It was so heartening that about 7,000 delegates from 76 countries in Varanasi not only praised the event in Kashi, but appreciated the efficiency of UP Police," he recalled adding, "Similarly, it was not easy to conduct a peaceful election at 1,63,000 booths in the 80 Lok Sabha constituencies, but it was done in the most professional manner."

The chief minister was particularly happy with the work done by the UP Police in the Prayagraj Kumbh where about 25 crore devotees had come. "It was the standard of the UP Police which received admiration from the whole world," he said.

Yogi said that all necessary

steps were being taken at the government level for police reforms. He said the much awaited police commissionerate system had been introduced at four places but it was up to the force to make it a success.

The chief minister also told the new officers about the challenges of police and the importance of duty. Referring to the dignity, integrity and discipline of the post, he said that recently the government had compulsorily retired three erring senior police officers.

Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma, on this occasion, congratulated the newly appointed DySPs and said that the police personnel also had to face different types of pressures at times.

"Understanding the situation of the occasion, exercising discretion and taking quick decisions with firmness and restraint is the hallmark of a good officer," he said.

UP to provide millions of jobs in fish farming: Govt

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Looking at the immense potential of employment generation and income growth from fisheries, the Yogi Adityanath government is going to provide golden opportunities to the youth by providing them with jobs in fish farming.

An official spokesman said here on Saturday that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath believed that fisheries had immense employment potential and could play an important role in rural development and the economy.

This easy-to-start business will provide employment opportunities to millions of youth, starting from low capital. It will also help in increasing the income of the village panchayat from the ponds built on the barren gram panchayat land in the village.

The spokesman claimed that the previous governments did not do any significant work in this direction due to which the fisheries sector, which offered huge employment opportunities, remained backward. He said under the Yogi government, many beneficial schemes were going to be started by the Fisheries Department which would not only promote fisheries business but also provide jobs to the needy to help them become self-reliant once again.

Several schemes are being run by the Fisheries Department for the farmers.

Along with imparting training on fisheries, efforts are being made by the government to expand this business on a larger scale. Now farmers can increase their incomes by farming as well as fisheries. It is worth mentioning that the state government has increased the duration of fishery reservoirs from three years to 10 years as compared to previous governments. This is the reason that the state has produced 26.44 lakh metric tons of fish during the last four years. As many as 1191.27 crore fishery seeds were produced in four years and 5,902 fish farmers were distributed Kisan Credit Cards.

The state government also provided the benefit of free fishermen accident insurance scheme to the farmers by implementing the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana under the Self-Reliant India Campaign.

It is noteworthy that the present government has allotted houses to 2,215 fishermen in the state in the last four years. Along with this, the fishermen of UP have increased the facilities by operating the Fish Farmer app. People are directly being benefited from the construction of 57 fish seed hatcheries and 385 fish seed rearing units in the state. Recently, Uttar Pradesh received the first prize of the Best State of Inland Fisheries under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. This undoubtedly is one of the biggest achievements of the state government.

Senior SP leader Shyama Charan Gupta passes away

Lucknow (PNS): Senior Samajwadi Party leader and two times MP Shyama Charan Gupta passed away late Friday night. A businessman, Shyama Charan Gupta was elected MP from Banda on SP ticket. Later he became a BJP MP from Allahabad. Gupta was admitted to a private hospital in New Delhi after he tested positive for coronavirus infection on March 31 and succumbed to the virus. He was 76 and survived by two sons and a daughter. Family members said he breathed his last in the hospital at around 11:30 pm on Friday night.

Initially he was admitted to the Covid ward of Swaroopnagar Hospital in Prayagraj but when his health deteriorated he was shifted to the hospital in Delhi. The wife of the former MP is also coronavirus positive and is in home quarantine here. Gupta won the Lok Sabha polls for the first time in 2004 from Banda constituency on SP ticket and later won the Allahabad parliamentary seat on BJP symbol in 2014. He was also the mayor of Allahabad in 1989. SP president Akhilesh Yadav and SP leader and Rajya Sabha member Reoti Raman Singh expressed grief at the death of the former MP.

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Foundation stones of Jewar airport, film city to be laid soon

Lucknow (PNS): Uttar Pradesh government is likely to soon announce the schedule for the foundation laying ceremony/bhoomi pujan of its flagship projects -- international airport at Jewar and film city -- in Noida. The ceremony is likely to be presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Official sources said the state government had asked the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development

Authority (YEIDA) to start preparations for the bhoomi pujan of several projects, including the Jewar international airport and the proposed Film City project. With a series of events planned, the bhoomipujan of the Noida international airport being the biggest draw. Sources said the YEIDA has begun the process for hiring an agency which has the experience of handling such top events. Officials said the authority will also

carry out the groundbreaking ceremony of the Film City project later this year after completing all formalities. The UP government has already handed over 1,334 hectares of land to Swiss company Zurich International AG which won the bid for executing the international airport project. The company is likely to start work on the airport project at the ground by June this year. Officials said the firm was currently in the process of complet-

ing the required formalities before starting the work on the ground. The state government has also sanctioned Rs 2,000 crore for acquiring 1,365 hectares of land for the expansion of airport projects. Official sources said the YEIDA would start working on the acquisition of land for the second phase once the social impact assessment survey was completed. The process of shifting of utilities and the farmers on the acquired land is on so

that the airport work can begin. A total of 8,971 farmers' families have given either their agricultural land or houses for the airport. Of them, 3,627 families will be displaced. Each farmer/family will be given a plot which is 50 per cent of their existing land/house. The administration has allotted at least 1,000 plots to the farmers who will be displaced while the remaining will be shifted after allotment of land by the end of next month.

Record underprivileged children given scholarships by UP govt

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a bid to provide better, equal and accessible education to the underprivileged and deprived sections of society, the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh has set a new record in providing scholarships to the children belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the minority communities.

To ensure socio-economic and educational empowerment of minorities, especially girls, through '3Es (Education, Employment and Empowerment), the Yogi government, in four years of its rule, has set another record in providing scholarships timely, directly to the students' accounts and has also eliminated any obstructions faced by students in their goal of attaining education. Making this claim here on Saturday, the official spokesman

in the UP government said that scholarships worth Rs 5,309 crore and Rs 71.49 crore were issued to students above 10th standard belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, respectively.

He said apart from this, the Yogi government also provided financial assistance amounting to Rs 109 crore to as many as 4.5 lakh students belonging to the minority communities, thereby securing their future.

The spokesman said the scholarship aimed to encourage meritorious students of economically weaker sections of the minority communities and other backward sections to pursue higher education and enhance their employability by providing financial assistance.

He said that in yet another achievement, the Yogi government, in four years, set a record in providing scholarships worth Rs 391.75

crores and Rs 3.7 crores to students below 10th standard belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, respectively, without discrimination and with utmost transparency.

He said scholarships worth Rs 576.48 crore and Rs 4217.15 crores were also given to students below and above 10th standard belonging to Other Backward Classes.

Besides, he said, the state government also took care of students belonging to minorities and general categories. The spokesman said that scholarships amounting to Rs 109.6 crore were also given to 4,31,730 students below 10th standard belonging to the minority communities, whereas, scholarships amounting to Rs 899.92 crore were provided to over 12,57,210 students above 10th standard belonging to the minority communities.

Scholarships amounting to Rs 59.58 crore were also given to over 2,32,552 students below 10th standard belonging to the general category and scholarships amounting to Rs 2052.65 crore to students above 10th standard belonging to this category. The spokesman further said that Atal residential schools, where children of the workers would study for free and get other facilities, were set to be built at each of the 18 divisional headquarters across the state.

Besides, as many as 103 Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Government Ashram Vidyalaya schools are functional in the state.

Over 42 government inter colleges have also been constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK) which seeks to provide better socio economic infrastructure facilities to the minority communities.

Uttar Pradesh's prisons go hi-tech CCTV surveillance units in all jails

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With zero-tolerance policy towards crime and criminals, the Uttar Pradesh government on the directions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, has equipped sensitive jails of the state with hi-tech gadgets to keep a close vigil on the activities of the hardened criminals, especially to ensure that the inmates do not enjoy luxury or homely comfort and run their criminal activities freely from within the safe boundaries of prisons.

The government has come up with new and innovative ways to keep a check on criminals who have also gone hi-tech with the passing time.

An official communiqué released on Saturday said that after getting inputs on how the listed gangsters lodged in jails were not just enjoying homely comfort in the prisons but were also using latest technology to operate their gangs and execute sensational crimes, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath issued directives to upgrade the jails in Uttar Pradesh with hi-tech gadgets so that the criminals could not do so and stayed there just like any other prisoner.

The communiqué said to improve and strengthen the security system in district jails of Lucknow, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Azamgarh, Chitrakoot and Bareilly, the state government had equipped them with advanced facilities to keep the notorious criminals under round-the-clock surveillance.

Devices ranging from drone cameras to deep search metal detectors have been installed in these prisons. The condition of these five district prisons has been improved by using modern techniques. Under this, concertina fencing has been done on the main wall of the jails. Each prison has one unique non-linear junction detector (NLJD) and five drone cameras. Besides, five night vision binoculars, 25 hand held metal detectors have also been provided.

To protect these devices from being damaged by high voltage fluctuations, heavy duty stabilisers have been installed while 48 additional high megapixel CCTV cameras have been installed in the district prison of Lucknow. According to the release, CCTV surveillance units have been installed in all the prisons of the state. Along with this, 30 cameras have been installed in each prison of the state.

Talking about the current arrangements, there are 220 additional cameras of 4/5 mega pixels in 55 prisons of Uttar Pradesh. In total, there are 3,080 cameras installed in all the jails of the state. Feeds of these cameras are available for viewing in Headquarters Video Wall/Command Centre. The live feed of all the district prisons can be seen directly at the headquarters.

Not only this, a state-of-the-art FG-1 pole metal detection system has been installed in all the prisons to monitor the detainees. A multi-zone door frame and 3-5 handheld metal detectors have also been provided to all prisons of the state.

Speaking about the use of technology in the jails, Director General, (Jails) Anand Kumar said, "The state government has made an intercom system for internal communication in all the prisons. A public address system has been arranged so that the detainees can be addressed simultaneously."

Digital cameras for photography and multimedia projectors have also been provided to all prisons for the promotion of good prison practice. For the entertainment of the prisoners, LED televisions have been provided and geysers have been installed to make hot water available during the winter season.

Uttar Pradesh Security Headquarters has provided deep search metal detectors to keep a check on smuggling of prohibited items like surgical blades, knives or any kind of metal objects hidden underground, drains, terrace and other places in prisons. A total of 121 deep search metal detectors have been arranged in Dr Sampurnanand Prison Training Institute for use. Besides, each district prison of the state has been provided with one or two deep search metal detectors. Handheld and static wireless sets have been provided to strengthen communication systems within the prisons.

At present, all the prisons of the state have at least 10 handheld and one static set as well as 20 handheld and one static set in large prisons.

Using modern technology, video conferencing units have been arranged in prisons and district courts of the state for remand of under-trials.

So far, video conferencing units have been established in 73 district courts and 70 prisons in the state. Remission of prisoners under consideration, under Section 167 (2) of Criminal Procedure Code, is being processed through these units. So far, remand of about 17 lakh prisoners have been accomplished through video conferencing.

This has reduced the risk of security and at the same time saved the government money.

Latest passport size photograph of candidate duly self attested half on photo and half on application

CLASSIFIEDS

सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि पहले मेरा नाम Haider Mehdi था जो अब बदलकर Haider Mehdi Kazmi हो गया है। मबिय में मुझे इसी नाम से जाना व पहचाना जाये। Haider Mehdi Kazmi S/o Simamat Husain Kazmi 257, Rani Mandi Allahabad.

NOTICE

As per letter no. 123 / D / Geo Building No. 85 / E / 2 Dabauli Original Allottee Krishna Gopal, Son of Late Ramcharan's original allotment letter and possession letter has actually been lost somewhere, the use of which would be unconstitutional. Atul Kumar Agnihotri S/O Braj Kishor Agnihotri Resident of 85 / E / 2 Dabauli Kanpur.

सूचना

में आर्मी नं. 15344202 M N.K. सुनील कुमार सिंह S/O दोनबादुर सिंह ग्राम व पोस्ट गहमर जिला गाजीपुर उत्तर प्रदेश मेरे सविस्तर रिकॉर्ड में पत्नी का नाम सुनीता देवी व पुत्र का नाम SUARYA SINGH गलत दर्ज हो गया है जबकि पत्नी का सही नाम नूतन सिंह व पुत्र का सही नाम SURYA SINGH है।

NOTICE

"My self Smt. Prason Gupta, W/o Ram Narayan Gupta, owner of the Bhukhand No. 172, Block - LIG-02, Jaurauli Phase-02, Kanpur, of which area is 63.00 Sq.Mtr. of in chain deed a Original registered POA which Doc. No. 2004 Dated 29.12.2005 have missed on the way, which use of above document by any person will be illegal."

NOTICE

I have disconnected my relation from my son Vikram Singh Nemi and daughter in law Amanpreet Kaur and have evicted them from my movable property. Any work done by them will be at their own responsibility. Sardar Kuldeep Singh, Address: 113/162 Ramgali Harjendar Nagar-2 Kanpur-208007

NOTICE

This is to notify to all concerned that I, Dinesh Kumar, S/o Ram Swarup, R/o Vill & Post Ghorwara, Pargana and Tahsil Dalmou, District Raebareilly, purchased a house No. B-654 area 33.14 sq.mt. from Rajjan Lal, S/o Ram Asrey through sale deed on 11.04.2012. The said house was purchased by Rajjan Lal from U.P. Awasi Vikas Parishad, Lucknow, on 14.07.2005 through a sale deed detailing Vahi No. 1, Khund 3308 pages 233-246 Kramank 3333. The original deed happened to be lost somewhere while photocopying. The said sale deed is not pledged to any bank/financial institution.

NOTICE

I, JC-353471n Naib Subedar/ Skt Rajendra Kumar Pal declare that name of my wife has been changed from Lata Devi to Lalti Devi

NOTICE

I have changed my name from "Mohammad Iqbal" to "Sanawar Iqbal". For future references people know my name as Sanawar Iqbal, 116/958, Roshan Nagar Rawatpur, Kanpur.

NOTICE

I have changed my son's name from "Aqif Iqbal" to "Akif Iqbal". For future references know his name as Akif Iqbal, S/o Sanawar Iqbal, 116/958, Roshan Nagar Rawatpur, Kanpur.

सूचना

सूचित किया जाता है कि प्रार्थी के पुत्र के स्कूल दस्तावेजों में अचिन्त्य कुमार (ACHINTYA KUMAR) की जगह अचिन्त्य कुमार गौड़ (ACHANTYA KUMAR GOND) हो गया जो कि गलत है जबकि सही नाम अचिन्त्य कुमार (ACHINTYA KUMAR) है अचिन्त्य कुमार (ACHINTYA KUMAR) और अचिन्त्य कुमार गौड़ (ACHANTYA KUMAR GOND) दोनों एक ही व्यक्ति है JITENDRA KUMAR S/o RAM CHANDR GOND, R/o -A-1438 Indra Nagar, Lucknow.

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30-39 years age group accounts for maximum Covid-19 cases

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Majority of people who have tested Covid positive in Lucknow in the last one month are aged between 30-39 years, according to a senior official from the CMO office. This age group accounts for 1,040 of the total cases detected so far while the 20-29 group for 979. The data analysed by the CMO office from March 1 to 31 shows that 159 who tested positive were in the age group of 0-9 years, 343 in the age group of 10-19 years, 979 aged between 20-29 years, 1,040 between 30-39 years, 844 between 40-49 years, 897 between 50-59 years, and 710 aged above 60 years.

As for the overall figures from January 1, 2020 to April 1 this year, a total of 87,185 people have tested positive in Lucknow, including 2,897 in the age group of 0-9 years, 5,823 between 10-19 years, 19,354 between 20-29 years, 14,711 between 30-39 years, 15,341 between 40-49 years, and 10,772 aged above 60 years.

A senior official from the Health department said the



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath taking stock of arrangements and operations at the Integrated Control and Command Centre in Lucknow on Saturday

infection is spreading rapidly and all the strategies have been the same as last year, like strengthening containment activities and limiting the attendance of employees in government and private offices to 50 per cent.

He said they will start another round of focused sampling from April 12.

Incharge of Balrampur Hospital Dr GP Gupta said they will start the Covid facility with 250 beds from Sunday. "We have sent the staff to Lok Bandhu hospital for training.

We have also allotted their duties. The staff consists of an anaesthetist, a physician, a resident doctor, two interns, eight nurses and 10 ward boys on each floor besides two sanitation workers," he said. On Saturday, 6-7 staffers of the hospital tested positive.

"We are also not allowing those with cough and fever in the hospital. A total of 15 doctors have already tested positive," he said. He added that the Covid hospital will have five doctors on each floor of the superspeciality block.

"We have already apprised the additional chief secretary of the demand for more doctors. We will also be running the OPD services simultaneously till further orders from the government. In the OPDs, rapid antigen tests will be conducted and focus will be on social distancing during consultation. On Saturday, 70-80 people were tested till afternoon and reports of five came out positive. Their samples have been sent for RT-PCR test," Dr Gupta said.

Dr Sudhir Singh from KGMU said that there is no passive quarantine for doctors on Covid duty. "The doctors who work for 15 days are not allowed to go home but stay in the premises. The workers stay in night shelters for 15 days after which they are tested for Covid. Those who test positive are kept in isolation while for others it is business as usual," he said.

Looking into the surge, Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences has started telemedicine services through which patients can consult doctors without having to visit the hospital.

Mutated version likely but no evidence as yet

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

There is a likelihood of a mutated version of coronavirus which is causing the ongoing rapid surge though the Health department has not got any scientific evidence to this effect, a senior health official. "There is something odd about this virus, which is not behaving as the earlier one. However, as of now, we have not got any scientific evidence," he said. Another doctor said that the way the disease is spreading implies the presence of a mutant strain of virus.

However, he pointed out that the mutation can be detected only after a number of strains are analysed. "It is an expensive process and currently the Central government lab which is equipped to handle this is already testing the samples from other states," he added. A senior doctor from Lok Bandhu hospital said that the manner in which the disease is spreading is a clear indication that the virus has mutated. Another doctor said that India is in the grip of a second wave and it appears that the it is because of a highly infectious virus.

Surveillance officer tests Covid positive

Lucknow (PNS): State surveillance officer Vikasendu Agarwal tested positive for coronavirus infection on Saturday. He has mild symptoms such as fever, sore throat and cough and is working from home even as his oxygen saturation levels are normal.

Meanwhile, three more professors tested positive for Covid on Saturday, according to Lucknow University Teachers Association (LUTA) Vineet Kumar Verma. Besides, Yogesh Srivastava, an employ-

ee from the examination department of Lucknow University, succumbed to Covid-19. "Two professors and 3-4 employees have already died due to Covid-19," Verma said. A meeting was held by Divisional Commissioner Ranjan Kumar, Commissioner of Police DK Thakur and District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash to discuss the ways to contain the spread of coronavirus. Directions were issued for digital mapping of the containment zones. It was also decided that rapid response

teams carrying out contact tracing and testing would be increased from 124 to 250.

Directions were also issued for the supply of adequate number of antigen and RT-PCR test kits. The DM also directed more officials for active duty in the mass containment zones. He said that a separate section would be set up in the Integrated Control and Command Centre for the supply of necessary food items in the containment zones and the officials would work in three shifts.



श्यामाचरण गुप्त
श्याम गुप्त के संस्थापक,
पूर्व मेयर, पूर्व सांसद

शोक संदेश

श्याम गुप्त के संस्थापक, पूर्व मेयर, पूर्व सांसद हम सबके प्रेरणा स्रोत, श्यामाचरण गुप्त जी का निधन दिनांक 09-04-2021 (दिन-शुक्रवार) को देर रात्रि मैक्स हॉस्पिटल दिल्ली में हो गया, दिनांक 10-04-2021 (दिन-शनिवार) को अन्तिम संस्कार लोदी गार्डन नई दिल्ली पर सम्पन्न किया गया।

मनोज अग्रवाल
महाप्रबंधक - श्याम गुप्त

शोकाकुल
समस्त गुप्त परिवार
एवं श्याम गुप्त परिवार

Over 3 lakh students to spread awareness of Covid vaccination

Lucknow (PNS): Over three lakh students studying in engineering and management institutes of the state will now make people aware of the Covid vaccination campaign and try to clear up their misconceptions about the vaccine.

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Technical University will honour such students for their noble cause.

Giving details of the awareness drive on Saturday, AKTU Vice Chancellor Prof Vinay Pathak said that after Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath personally took over the command to protect people from novel coronavirus infection, the youth power of the state had also come forward to make people aware of Covid vaccination. He said that taking the charge of Covid management, the chief minister had set up monitoring committees for COVID-19 control and he himself took stock of the Covid vaccination arrangements in Prayagraj and Varanasi and at the same time, he sent his ministers to the field.

Pathak said that inspired by the chief minister's personal involvement in COVID-19 management, more than three lakh students of AKTU affiliated institutes had come forward to offer their human resources. He said that the students had taken a resolve to carry forward the campaign of the UP governor and chief minister.

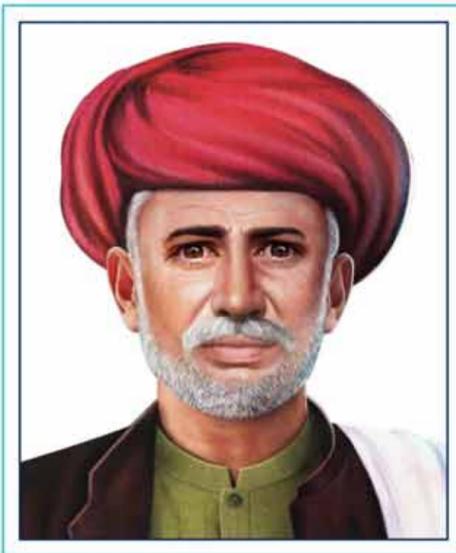
Pathak revealed that AKTU and IET Lucknow were going to start an awareness campaign on Covid vaccination. He said the students were motivating their parents and other citizens to take the Covid vaccine and would send photos of their parents to the university through WhatsApp. Such students would be honored by the university through letters of appreciation. More than 4,000 students of the Institute of Engineering Technology (IET) will also participate in this campaign with AKTU. IET Director Prof Vineet Kansal said that the involvement of students with this campaign would give a boost to the Covid vaccination campaign and the students would clear up all misconceptions about vaccinations in a better way. The AKTU along with its students will conduct an awareness campaign on vaccination in the villages with the help of NSS and National Cadet Corps units. During this campaign, through the villages and Anganwadis adopted by the university, the confusion about the vaccination among the rural people will be cleared up. They will be provided information about the vaccination centres close to their homes.

No shortage of Remdesivir, says Health Minister

Lucknow (PNS): Amidst reports of shortage of Remdesivir injections, Health Minister Jai Pratap Singh said there is no such crisis in Uttar Pradesh.

"We procure this drug for the government hospitals from UP Medical Corporation. The tender for this has already gone through and the supply began from Saturday," he said. However, the minister said that since there has been a sudden surge in cases across the country, the supply was impacted a bit but the need in UP will be fulfilled. "This is the biggest surge in India. If the production company is not able to supply due to their production constraints, we will have to wait for some time," he added.

Meanwhile, drug inspector Brijesh Kumar said he has been flooded with queries regarding the injection from patients across the city. "The shortage is because of the increase in demand, with a large number of people testing positive. It is not available over the counter. When some hospitals approach us with the demand of this injection, we approach the consigning agent and make necessary arrangements," he added. Meanwhile, president of People's Health Organisation Dr Ishwar Gilada said the only medicines that work in Covid-19 are steroids and Remdesivir. "There is an acute shortage of Remdesivir injections and it is having cascading effects everywhere. Its MRP of the drug sold by companies ranges from Rs 2,800 to Rs 5,400 while the procurement rate at hospitals ranges between Rs 600 and Rs 1,000," he said. He added that they have written to the Central government, asking for a compulsory licence to ramp up Remdesivir production. "It can bring down the procurement cost to below Rs 500 per vial and save lakhs of patients as also several more globally, who will benefit from the made-in-India generic Remdesivir. We have also asked for rationalising the use of Remdesivir with strict adherence to guidelines and for the making of multiple Remdesivir stores or banks with strict sales control," he said.



(11 अप्रैल, 1827 - 28 नवंबर, 1890)

महात्मा ज्योतिबा फुले जी



(14 अप्रैल, 1891 - 06 दिसंबर, 1956)

बाबा साहब डॉ. भीमराव आंबेडकर जी

को शत्-शत् नमन।

माननीय प्रधानमंत्री जी की प्रेरणा एवं आह्वान पर सामाजिक क्रांति के अग्रदूत महात्मा ज्योतिबा फुले जी की जयंती से भारतीय संविधान शिल्पी भारत रत्न बाबा साहब डॉ. भीमराव आंबेडकर जी की जयंती तक आयोजित 4 दिवसीय

टीका उत्सव

11-14 अप्रैल, 2021

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सूचना एवं जनसम्पर्क विभाग, उत्तर प्रदेश

Man arrested for duping people by promising government contracts

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A fraudster was arrested for duping several unsuspecting people on the promise of facilitating them contracts in government and quasi-government institutions.

The accused was identified as Kanhaiya Lal Sharma of Jopling Road in Hazratganj.

According to the police, Sharma floated a company called Svaraj Infotech Limited and would introduce himself as the director of the firm which only existed on papers. The accused was named in several other cases of fraud, including in Varanasi, Banda and Basti districts.

On February 3, Sharma duped a contractor, Ganga Sagar Chauhan, of Rs 59 lakh in the name of facilitating soil digging work in metro. He duped Rajesh Sharma of Aishbagh of over Rs 1 lakh on the pretext of facilitating him a contract. Sharma also took huge sum of money from Anmol Pasi of Hardoi for a contract in Saubhagya Yojana.

The Banda police had issued an arrest warrant against Sharma. The accused was arrested late on Friday night following a raid on his flat.

Meanwhile, the Mahanagar police challaned four persons at a hookah bar in a restaurant on Saturday for

violating the Covid protocols. Those challaned were identified as Mauji Lal, Saurabh Kumar (both of Sitapur), Shiv Kumar of Malhabad, and Santosh Kumar Thapa of Nepal. The police said Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act was also slapped on the accused and 10 hookahs were recovered.

Meanwhile, the Gudamba police registered a case against a contestant in fray for the post of gram pradhan in Paikaramu village and his supporters for violating Covid protocols.

The police said that on the call of Mohammed Rehan, over 500 of his supporters had

come on bikes and by cars and SUVs. The police said Rehan could not show the permission letter when asked.

GUN-RUNNER NABBED

A gun-runner was nabbed by a team of STF in Gomti Nagar Vistar police station area on Saturday. The accused was identified as Ram Pravesh Yadav of Laar in Deoria district. The team recovered 20 country-made pistols and several cartridges. The miscreant confessed to his crime and disclosed that he developed interest in weaponry during his stay in Khandwa district in Madhya Pradesh where his father worked in a sugar mill.

Two interstate bootleggers held

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two interstate bootleggers ferrying a mini-truck loaded with Harayna-made liquor, adulterated liquor and instruments used in the process were arrested by a police team in Gomtinagar on Friday night.

Those arrested were identified as Adarsh Pratap Lodhi of Hardoi and Ashok Kumar Yadav of Farrukhabad. The police recovered 238 cartons filled with 6,624 bottles of different brands. The team also

recovered 10 sacks filled with potatoes. The police said that the accused were habitual offenders and were sent to jail from Hardoi and Gurgaon for the similar crime in the past.

The police said they got a tip-off about a mini-truck parked close to a culvert near Janeshwari Mishra Park on Friday night. The team was also informed that the accused were filling empty cans from liquor bottles after mixing urea-like substance in it. The police said the accused were going to deliver the goods to

Bihar which has become a dry state.

The police said the accused told them that they were ferrying the goods to Bihar where they get good rates.

As per their confession, they set out from Sonapat in Haryana on April 8 and Ajay Pradhan of Hapur is the gang leader. Adarsh told the police that he met Ajay during his stint in Bhondasi jail in Gurgaon. Both exchanged contact numbers with each other so that they could be in touch.

Adarsh said he and his aide

had supplied the goods to Muzaffarpur (Bihar) in the past too. He said Gajendra Pal and Neelu Pal work for Ajay Pradhan and they used to assign the work to him. He said he used to get Rs 30,000 for each delivery. The accused were given the truck laden with bottled water before they left Sonapat. On the way, they got a call from their handlers and were asked to pour liquor in the cans mixing water and urea in it. The mini-truck owner was identified as Jitendra of Mainpuri district.

Man rapes friend's wife, arrested

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A man allegedly raped his friend's wife at her house in Gomtinagar. After a case was lodged by the victim on Friday, the accused was arrested. He was identified as Aniket of Ferrozabad and a sum of Rs 2.3 lakh, a gold chain and two gold rings were recovered from his possession. He was arrested following a tip-off.

The slain servant, Brajmohan, was said to be the mastermind of an incident in which over Rs 2 crore were stolen from railway engineer Puneet Kumar's residence. The police had earlier arrested Teerath aka Manjeet, his wife

Meanwhile, a police team on Saturday arrested another miscreant involved in the murder of the domestic help of a railway engineer in Cantonment. The accused was identified as Aniket of Ferrozabad and a sum of Rs 2.3 lakh, a gold chain and two gold rings were recovered from his possession. He was arrested following a tip-off.

The slain servant, Brajmohan, was said to be the mastermind of an incident in which over Rs 2 crore were stolen from railway engineer Puneet Kumar's residence. The police had earlier arrested Teerath aka Manjeet, his wife

Nisha, Udayraj and Mohan Singh, and recovered Rs 70 lakh from them.

MYSTERIOUS DEATH

A Madaon resident took ill while resting on a bench at a shop in Ghazipur police station area on Saturday and died later. Police sent the body for autopsy. The deceased was identified as Sudhir Awasthi (45) of Sitapur. He and his wife Meenu were staying in a house in Madaon. Meenu told the police that Sudhir had gone to a shop to have breakfast. Thereafter, he lay down on a bench and was found dead later.

THEFT

Thieves struck at a house in Banthra on Friday night and made off with Rs 5,000 in cash and ornaments. They also attacked the house owner when he woke up and confronted them. Reports said Raj Kumar of Aurawan village and his family were asleep when the thieves entered the house and stole a box. They returned to steal another box but Raj Kumar woke up and caught hold of the box. "The thief attacked me with a brick and fled with the box. The empty box was later recovered around 500 metres away from my house," he told the police.

RLD leader expresses grief over Etawah road mishap deaths

Lucknow (PNS): Rashtriya Lok Dal National Secretary Anil Dubey expressed grief over the death of 11 pilgrims in the Etawah road mishap in which 20 devotees were also injured when a mini truck ferrying them overturned on Saturday. He expressed his sympathies to the families of the deceased and demanded the UP government to provide medical treatment to the injured. He wished speedy recovery of the injured.

Meanwhile, RLD (Youth) national spokesman Rohit Agrawal flayed the state government for the flawed policy to tackle the coronavirus pandemic which had taken a grim form. He expressed deep sympathy over the untimely death of COVID-19 patients and said the state government had failed to take measures to contain the surge in coronavirus infection.

SP to set up 'Baba Saheb Vahini'

Lucknow (PNS): A day after announcing to celebrate the birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar as Dalit Diwali, Samajwadi Party President and former Chief Minister of UP Akhilesh Yadav, announced to set up 'Baba Saheb Vahini' across the state to push the ideology of Dalit icon Dr Ambedkar. In a tweet on Saturday morning, Yadav said, "To activate the thoughts of the architect of the Constitution, Baba Saheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, on the occasion of his birth anniversary, we pledge to set up 'Baba Saheb Vahini' of the Samajwadi Party at district, state and country levels to overcome inequality, injustice and achieve the equitable goal of social justice."

Earlier, the SP chief had given a call to celebrate 'Dalit Diwali' on Ambedkar Jayanti. Speaking to the media on Saturday, Yadav said, "The UP assembly polls would be the



election of the nation. The Bharatiya Janata Party can stoop to any low to win the elections. That is why we are welcoming everyone to the Samajwadi Party."

"Socialist leader Dr Ram Manohar Lohia and Baba Saheb Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar wanted to work together but somehow they could not. If the Samajwadi Party is welcoming those who follow Baba Saheb then why does the BJP and the Congress have a problem," he asked.

"People today are upset as no facilities are being given to them in the BJP rule. There are no medicines in hospitals and the poor have to run from pillar to post for their treatment. People are being administered anti-rabies vaccine instead of anti coronavirus vaccine; such is the condition of health infrastructure in the state in the BJP rule. What was achieved from 'taali' and 'thaali'? This government is running on advertisements and event management," he said.

Youth kills aunt, ends life as kin object to his illicit relation

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Facing the ire of his family members over his affair with his own 38-year-old aunt, a 23-year-old youth allegedly killed the woman before committing suicide.

The bodies of the woman and her nephew were recovered from a vacant plot in Bhavnagar area of Meerut district early Saturday morning.

The local residents suspected that both were murdered for family 'honour' but the police after preliminary investigation said that the youth killed his aunt and then ended his own life.

Reports said that some villagers found the bodies of a woman and a youth lying in a secluded place in Lalpur hamlet of Bhavnagar in Meerut early on Saturday morning.

While the woman was

shot in the chest, the young man had a bullet injury on his head.

The villagers informed the police and the cops rushed to the spot and within a few minutes, they identified both the victims with the help of local residents.

The deceased woman was identified as Gulshan, wife of Yashmeen, and the youth as Alisher's son Khushnud alias Guddu and nephew of Gulshan, all residents of Lalpur village in Thana Bhawanpur.

Police said both of them were shot at around 05:30 hours and the bodies were found in the vacant plot of one Dharamveer.

The cops also claimed to have recovered a suicide note from the pocket of the deceased and that a pistol used in the killing was found lying by the youth's side.

According to police,

Guddu was having a love affair with his aunt Gulshan living in his neighborhood. When the families of both came to know about this, they started opposing it. At times Guddu was caught red-handed with Gulshan.

Reports said that SP (Rural) Keshav Mishra, circle officer Sadar Dehat Poonam Sirohi and police station in-charge arrived at the scene along with a forensic team to collect evidence.

According to the SP (Rural), a voice message sent to the mobile of the deceased to his brother's mobile at five in the morning was also found. In the message, Guddu spoke about suicide.

The police sent both the bodies for post-mortem. Police said the entire case was being investigated on the basis of facts and appropriate action would be taken.

Prof AK Shukla takes charge is KMCLU VC

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Prof Anil Kumar Shukla took charge as the vice-chancellor of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Language University on Saturday. AKTU VC Prof Vinay Kumar Pathak was holding the additional charge of the language university prior to this appointment.

Addressing the teachers after assuming charge, Prof Shukla said that the language university needs to establish a new identity and for that, it must promote itself as a brand and increase social acceptance. He said new measures of promotion and publicity would be adopted to boost admissions.

Referring to the New Education Policy, he said all the departments must prepare short-term job-oriented courses. In order to connect with more and more students in this digital era, all teachers should also prepare 10 credit-based short online MOOC courses, he

added. He pointed out that many small educational institutions are gaining national and international fame due to their specialised courses and language university can also make its own identity by preparing specific courses in different languages. "Culture, language and communication are related to every subject and it is necessary to include all these in promotion of languages," he added.

"The university needs to work mainly on preservation through which information and work related to history and culture of different languages can be preserved. It also has to focus on creation through which new job-oriented language courses can be created while research, collaboration and projects in the field of languages can be promoted. The university must also work on extension through which knowledge related to languages can be made available to more and more students," he elaborated.

IISR moots intercropping for sugarcane farmers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

IISR is trying to reach out to larger cane areas with a profitable crop diversification model in close collaboration with the sugar industry and other stakeholders. Principal scientist (IISR) AK Sah said sugarcane is the only profitable cash crop for the farmers of Uttar Pradesh.

"Sugarcane is a long duration crop and it takes about 12 months to mature. It is only after that farmers can harvest the crop and supply it to the sugar mill to earn money. During this period of one year, a lot of inputs and inter-cultural operations need to be done in the field for proper crop management and growth. During this period, farmers have to invest large amounts in one hectare of the cane crop. For a small and marginal farmer, it is very difficult to manage such a big amount and he does not get any return before one year," he said.

He pointed out that under this situation, growing of any suitable short-duration intercrop may give intermittent income to the farmers for better management of cane crop without depending on outside source for investments.

"This need of marginal small farmers gave enough food for thought to the scientists working in sugarcane for developing such integrated farming system models which should allow farmers to grow short-duration additional crops in the wide spaces available between two rows of sugarcane, generally 3 to 4 feet. Scientists tried so many options in this regard and they came out with a solution of intercropping with sugarcane for higher system yield and additional income to the farmers from the same piece of land and time. Intercropping of cereals, vegetables, pulses, oilseeds, spices, flowers, fruits etc was tried and tested for their operational feasibility, econom-

ic viability and social acceptability. Under the existing farming system in Uttar Pradesh, the most suitable options of intercropping with autumn sugarcane were found to be potato, cabbage, cauliflower, french beans, lentils, pea, garlic, lady-finger and chilly," he said.

He said they discussed the strategy with sugar mills, Cane Development department and farmers, and finally came out with a blue print for implementing the programmes in Sitapur, Lakhimpur, Hardoi, Pilibhit and Basti districts.

"The farmers who grow only cane earn about Rs 1.5 lakh per ha, that too only post harvest after one year of planting. Their earnings are highly regulated by the payment schedule of sugar mills. The farmers covered under the programme earned net income of Rs 2.5 lakh to Rs 5 lakh rupees per hectare depending upon the kind of intercropping and their market rates," he added.

कार्यालय नगर निगम हल्द्वानी - काठगोदाम

पत्रांक: 63 / P.W.L. ई-निविदा सूचना दिनांक 09.04.2021

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

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

(डा. जोगेन्द्र सिंह रोतेला) महापौर नगर निगम हल्द्वानी

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

राजस्थान राज्य पथ परिवहन निगम मुख्यालय जयपुर

पथविहन विभाग, जयपुर-302001 टेलीफोन नं: 0141-2374652 ईमेल: pro.rsrc@rajasthan.gov.in

क्रमांक: विज्ञापन संख्या 05/2021-22 दिनांक: 08.04.2021

ई-बोली सूचना

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

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

राज. संख्या/सी/2021-22/404 कार्यकारी निदेशक (प्रशासन)

JAIPUR DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Indira Circle, Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg, Jaipur-302004

No.: JDA/EE&TA to Dir.Engg.-I/2021-22/D-35 Date: 09.04.2021

NOTICE INVITING BID

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

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

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

Details are available at Procurement Portal website www.sppp.rajasthan.gov.in, www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in and www.jda.urban.rajasthan.gov.in

Executive Engineer & TA to Dir. Engg.-I

ALL PARTY-MEETING ON COVID-19

Maha CM hints at more restrictions in State

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Stopping short of announcing a full-fledged lockdown in worst Covid-19-hit Maharashtra, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said here on Saturday that the State Government would have no alternative but to resort to stern restrictions to break the chain of transmission of the virus in the state.

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

"We may continue our war against Covid-19, but the immediate task is to arrest the rapid spread of the pandemic. During last year's lockdown,

people were confined to their homes and it was easy for us to trace the patients and their contacts. Now when everything is open and we are facing practical difficulties, a fact that the Union government should take note of," the chief minister said.

Uddhav said that the Covid-19 situation was worsening every day. "We are acting according to the advice we are receiving from the task force appointed for the purpose. On one hand, we have to consider the sentiments of the people (about deciding on lockdown), while on the other Corona crisis is becoming more and more severe day by day. Under the circumstances, we will have to fight the virus for some more time, before we win the war"

Uddhav said that while imposing stern restrictions, the state government would take all precautions that its restrictions would not affect the livelihood of poor and working classes. "All the same time, we are looking at ways to stop the rapid spread of Covid-19 in the state... If we do not take a decision on imposing lockdown today, then we will get to see a situation where lockdown becomes inevitable," he said.

Stressing on the need for administering vaccines to youngsters, Uddhav said: "There is a need to intensify the vaccination campaign. For instance, the United Kingdom imposed strict lockdown for

two months. During that period, the UK went in for a massive vaccination programme and made their people safe. There is a dire need for vaccinating the younger generation. Pfizer has planned for vaccination of teenagers in the age group of 12 to 15 years."

Alluding to the suggestions made by leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly Devendra Fadnavis of the BJP, Uddhav said: "The Leader of the Opposition has made good suggestions. We will take serious cognisance of his suggestions like increased availability of Remdesivir injections, giving instructions to laboratories for expeditious release of Covid-19 test reports and streamlining of the system to make available Oxygen cylinders to hospitals"

Apart from the chief minister and Fadnavis, the prominent others who were present at the joint party meeting were: deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar, senior MVA ministers Ashok Chavan, Balasaheb Thorat, Dilip Walse Patil, Eknath Shinde, Jayant Patil, Rajesh Tope, Amit Deshmukh, State Congress President Nana Patole, leader of the Opposition in the State Council Pravin Darekar and State BJP president Chandrakant Patil. The chief minister appealed to the Opposition leaders to extend their co-operation to the state government for the stern decisions that it intends to take in the coming days.

CM: Arrange adequate beds in Covid hospitals

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed the officials concerned to ensure availability of adequate beds in Level-2 and Level-3 Covid hospitals in all the districts of Gorakhpur division. He said that training should also be imparted to medical personnel by arranging adequate manpower in these hospitals.

He said that 50 per cent of the 108 ambulances available in hospitals should be reserved for COVID-19 patients and stressed the need for stepping up vigilance to protect people from the dreaded virus.

The chief minister was reviewing the progress of measures, treatment and vaccination to contain the spread of COVID-19 in Gorakhpur division at Baba Raghav Das (BRD) Medical College in Gorakhpur. He said that rapid antigen test and RT-PCR test were free in all government hospitals and warned of strict action if any complaint was received in this regard.

He said Covid test rates should be fixed for private hospitals and if any private hospital charged more than the prescribed fee, strict action be taken against it.

The chief minister said in view of the surge in coronavirus positive cases in states like Maharashtra, Punjab, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka, people coming from there should be tested for

the infection at railway stations and airport. He added that monitoring committees should also be made functional in every gram panchayat and ward and connected to the Integrated Command and Control Centre. He said continuous dialogue should be established with the monitoring committees and senior officers of the Health Department and administration should be posted in Integrated Command and Control Centre.

The chief minister said contact tracing should be done as much as possible. "At least 30 people who have come in contact with any infected person should undergo Covid test. Increase the percentage of RT-CPR testing," he said, adding that there should be dedicated hospitals in all the districts.

He said CCTV cameras should be installed in all Covid hospitals so that activities and arrangements could be monitored and there should be no shortage of oxygen in hospitals.

Yogi asked the officials to ensure the mandatory use of masks by and prevent crowds at public places. He said public address systems should be used more effectively to make people aware of the need to take precautions against COVID-19.

The chief minister said that if a function was held in an open space, then not more than 200 people should be allowed there and not more than 100 people in closed places and all people there must use

masks and maintain social distance. He added that wedding functions should be restricted to 10 pm.

He also said that the entire village should be sanitised if a single COVID-19 case was found and curfew should be imposed in the districts that had more than 500 active coronavirus cases.

The chief minister said that a special 'Tika Utsav' would be organised in the state from April 11 to 14 and all arrangements for it should be ensured in time.

He said that the maximum number of people in the targeted age group should be vaccinated and wastage of the vaccine should be checked at all cost. He asked officials to ensure availability of sanitiser, infrared thermometer, pulse oximeter etc. in all government and private offices and industrial institutions by setting up a Covid help desk.

The chief minister said that along with the efforts being made to contain COVID-19, preparations should also be made to control Japanese encephalitis and acute encephalitis syndrome by making all the ETCs functional.

He added that officers of the Interdepartmental Coordination Committee constituted for the control of encephalitis should discharge their duties diligently and special attention should be paid to cleanliness because dirt was the mother of these diseases.

Varanasi records big spike, 1,176 test Covid positive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The district has recorded yet another biggest spike as the total number of cases has crossed 28K-mark on Friday evening. As many as 1,176 more have tested positive, increasing the total number to 28,221. The day also saw one more death, increasing the toll to 398. During the last 24 hours, 157 patients have been recovered and all of them in home isolation. The total number of patients cured in the district is 22,401 including 19,393 in home isolation and 3,008 in Covid hospitals. The number of active cases has jumped up to 5,422 crossing the 5K mark. Meanwhile, the administration Kashi Vishwanath Mandir has decided not to allow the devotees to enter the sanctum sanctorum and also stopped the sale of tickets for the Mangala Aarti. While, the Varanasi Municipal Corporation (VMC) has decided to provide two machines to each ward for the sanitisation.

In the first report of the day, 452 positive patients were found out of 2,775 reports received and this figure increased to 1,176 as per report provided by the Health department in the evening increasing the active cases to 5,422.

The long queues were



Long queue at Government Women Hospital in Kabirchaura to get vaccinated

Pioneer

seen at the hospitals to get vaccination amidst the report that only those who had earlier got the first shot of vaccination, will be administered the second dose because the new arrival of vaccines is to be reached. The Health department has made all the preparations to observe Tika Utsav from April 11 to 14 on the call given by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Earlier, in view of finding hundreds of new positive cases, the number of active hotspots has increased to 338 with 18

green zones having been converted to red zones by a day ago. Out of total 2,813 hotspots, 2,475 are green zones.

In the meantime, the administration of Kashi Vishwanath Mandir has decided not to allow the devotees in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple and the devotees could offer either holy water or milk through pipes from outside it. The temple administration has also decided to top the sale of tickets for the Mangala Aarti till the further order in view of the

big spike in the cases of corona.

Meanwhile, the administration of VMC has made an arrangement of 120 new machines to sanitise the areas under its jurisdiction including the villages recently included in its jurisdiction.

Two machines have been given to each ward for the sanitisation which work is to be executed after the closure of markets so that the people could not face any inconvenience during this process.

17,53,588 voters to cast their votes in second phase of Panchayat polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A total of 17,53,588 voters will cast their votes in the district which will go for the polling under second phase of three-tier Panchayat polls on April 19. The District Electoral Officer Kaushal Raj Sharma has declared public holiday on the polling day. The counting of votes is scheduled to be held on May 2.

The district election office has published the final revised list of voters of the district and as per the revised list, a total of 17,53,588 voters will exercise their franchises in the district including the maximum 2,90,650 voters in Aarajiline Development Block and the minimum 1,65,187 voters in Harahua Block. Besides, 250,170, 2,19,550, 2,12,963, 2,08,750, 2,07,482 and 1,98,650 electorate will cast their votes in Pindra, Cholarpur, Badagaon, Sevapuri and Aarajiline respec-

tively. For the 8,978 members of gram panchayat including 1,010, 1,139, 894, 1,304, 959, 1,026, 1,113 and 1,533, a total of 6,314 candidates submitted nomination papers including 599, 814, 787, 864, 871, 760, 762 and 857 in Chiraigaon, Cholarpur, Kashi Vidyapeeth, Pindra, Harahua, Badagaon, Sevapuri and Aarajiline respectively.

Similarly, a total of 4,959 candidates including 615, 550, 556, 614, 496, 669, 597 and 862 filed nomination papers for the total 1,007 members of kshetra panchayat including 115, 119, 119, 138, 100, 116, 119 and 181 in Chiraigaon, Cholarpur, Kashi Vidyapeeth, Pindra, Harahua, Badagaon, Sevapuri and Aarajiline respectively. The nomination papers were submitted at block head offices for the gram pradhan and members of gram pan-

chayat and kshetra panchayat, while the same for the members of zila panchayat was submitted at LT College in Orderly Bazar.

In the meantime, the district administration has directed the Transport department to acquire 5,700 heavy and 153 light vehicles to ferry the polling employees to polling centres. The Transport department is issuing notice to vehicle owners for the purpose. The acquired vehicles are to be parked at three places in Choti Cutting Memorial Ground, Police Line and Uday Pratap College from where the polling parties will move for the polling centres.

Meanwhile, the District Magistrate and Electoral Officer Kaushal Raj Sharma informed that there will be public holiday on the polling day on April 19. The counting is scheduled to be held on May 2.

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SSU students' union polls today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

All the preparations have been completed to conduct smooth and free & fair election for the students' union of Sampurnanand Sanskrit University (SSU) which will go for the polling on Sunday. An elaborate security will be made to ensure the peaceful election. A total of 1,732 students will exercise their franchises.

Five polling booths have been made to ensure the smooth polling and the police force of five police stations under the leadership of an Assistant Commissioner, would be deployed to ensure peaceful election. A total of 1,732 students will exercise their franchises to elect the candidates for the various posts and representatives of faculties.

Though, the candidates faced problems in establishing personal contact to the maximum students as the students are not coming to university because of the continuously increase in the positive cases of COVID-19 in the district but despite this, they left no stone unturned to woo the voters by visiting their homes.

It is mentioned that a total of 66 candidates had filed nomination papers and the candidatures of as many as 48 candidates had been found valid but 10, 12, 11 and 7 candidates withdrew their name on the post of president, vice-president, general secretary and library secretary respectively. Thus, the eight candidates are in election fray on these four important posts of students union, while the eight

candidates are testing their luck for the representative of various faculties though the election of two candidates as unopposed is certain as only one each candidate had submitted nomination paper for the representative of Sahitya Sanskriti Faculty and Philosophy Faculty.

Only the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), student wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and National Students Union of India (NSUI), student wing of All India Congress Party (AICC) had fielded their candidates on the important four posts. Hence, there is direct fight between the candidates of ABVP and NSUI on all important four posts.

On the prestigious post of president, the ABVP candidate

Ajay Dubey and NSUI candidate Mohan Shukla are face to face and the ABVP candidate Chandramauli Tiwari is to take on the NSUI candidate Ajit Mohan Shukla, while there is direct contest between the ABVP candidate Gauri Shankar Gangele and NSUI candidate Shivam Chaubey on the other prestigious post of general secretary. The ABVP candidate Vivekanand Pandey and the NSUI candidate Ashutosh Mishra are face to face for the post of library secretary.

According to the election officer Prof Sudhakar Mishra, the election is scheduled to be conducted on Sunday from 9 am to 2 pm, while the counting will take place from 3 pm onwards and the results will be announced the same day.

BLW launches vaccination drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In view of the continuously increasing cases of COVID-19, the Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) has also launched vaccination drive in its central hospital and the first dose of vaccination has so far been administered on a total of 8,663 persons.

The BLW administration has launched vaccination drive under the leadership of its Principal Chief Medical Officer Dr Sujit Mallik and since now, a total of 8,663 persons has been administered the first dose including 5,488 railway employees and their family



members. The number of non-railway employees is 3,180. Subsequently, the second dose has been administered on a total of 1,468 persons including 631 railway employees and

their family members, while the number of non-railway employees is 837.

The vaccination process is done by following the COVID-19 protocol and the persons are

being kept for a certain period after the vaccination under the supervision of the team of Additional Chief Medical Superintendent Dr Devesh Kumar. The BLW administration is also launching awareness campaign under the direction of General Manager Anjali Goyal about COVID-19 to stop the infection of coronavirus to spread, according to its PRO Rajesh Kumar.

The Safety department has also launched awareness programme for the safety of railway employees through distributing posters and holding workshops in view of the increase in cases of corona.

1,419 fresh +ve cases found in Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Prayagraj district reported a single day highest spike of 1,419 fresh cases of COVID-19 in the last 24 hours on Friday. The death toll is also dangerous. Six people suffering from Corona lost their lives in 24 hours. So far, the number of new infected has crossed 1,000 for three days, now this figure is on the verge of touching 1,500 level.

For those who still do not feel fear by corona and are coming out of their homes without work, the number of new infected on Friday is a big lesson for them. Things are getting worse instead of improving in the city from corona. The run-off of all the senior officers of the Health department, work on new action plans with the district administration and treatment measures in Covid hospitals are proving dwarf.

People are trembling thinking that corona will create havoc in this way. According to the CMO office, 290 patients are admitted to L-3 Covid Hospital, while the entire capacity of this hospital is 320 beds at present. That is, if 30 more infected come, then no other infected will get a place after that in the hospital. 133 people have been admitted to Beli Covid Hospital. United



Medicity has 68 infected admitted here.

About 58 corona-infected people were discharged once they became healthy. In this, 22 people were discharged from Swaroop Rani Nehru Covid Hospital, 28 after home isolation and eight people were recovered from United Medicity Hospital.

Testing has been extended in an attempt to stop the progression of corona infection. Samples of 9,578 people were taken on Friday. This is by far the most accurate sample taken in a day.

Dr Prabhakar Rai, CMO said that the second wave of corona is more dangerous than the first. Collective efforts are needed to ensure that the infection does not spread to more

people. The Health department is doing its job responsibly, people are expected to follow the guidelines set by the government to avoid corona. If work is not necessary then people should stay in homes, take care of children and the elderly as well.

PEOPLE NOT WEARING MASK: The outbreak of coronavirus infection has increased once again in Prayagraj. In such a situation, the negligence of the people can put them in a great danger. Huge crowd of passengers can be witnessed at the platform before the train arrives at Prayagraj Junction. Most of them do not wear a mask. Besides, the physical distance is also not being followed there. A large number of people

are returning from trains coming from Mumbai and Delhi. Not wearing a mask and not following physical distancing can make the situation frightening. Covid test and screening of passengers is being done at Prayagraj Junction. Frequent announcements are also being made for passengers to use masks and follow physical distancing. Still it is seen that as soon as people stop on the platform of the train, people are moving from here to there.

Railway passengers also hesitate in the name of conducting a Covid testing whereas for breaking the transition chain, the entry from the city side and the clearance from the civil lines side is in force. For this, continuous proclamation is also being done. The district Health department team is conducting RTP-CR and antigen tests in two shifts. However, this system is also proving insufficient. The outbreak of the second wave of infection is increasing rapidly. In such a situation, people may have to bear the brunt of negligence.

RPF and GRP personnel are constantly appealing to comply with the Covid protocol. However, the negligence of the passengers is at its peak. Entry is not being allowed inside the platform without a mask.

Sale of masks, sanitisers increase

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Sales of its injections, masks, sanitisers, pulse oximeters and vitamin C drugs have increased exponentially amidst the breaking records of corona infection. Within a week, companies are not able to provide corona pandemic prevention equipment and medicines, due to the high demand. Because of this, corona injections and pulse oximeters have disap-

peared from the market. For this, pharmaceutical companies are asking for a month's time.

Sales of use and throw masks have registered an increase of nearly a hundred times in the market.

The demand for sanitiser has also increased manifold. Due to their high demand, shopkeepers have also increased rates. The 10 rupee mask has started selling for 20 rupees.

Moreover, the highly

effective Remedivir injection and pulse oximeter (both) in the treatment of corona has disappeared from the market. Pharmaceutical companies are not able to supply it. At the same time, the demand for azithromycin, vitamin C, paracetamol, ivermectin drugs has also increased by about 200 per cent. However, there is no lack of drugs.

Anil Dubey, president of the Allahabad Chemist and Druggist Association, said

pharmaceutical companies are seeking a month's time for corona injection and supply of pulse oximeters. These things are completely out of the market.

If these things are not made available in the market soon, then the administration will have a lot of trouble in controlling the disease. However, they claimed that there is no alternative to this injection for the treatment of corona.

Allahabad University closed till April 21

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

At Allahabad Central A University, 40 employees, including teachers, were found to be corona infected. Apart from this, two people died due to corona. In this context, the constituent colleges, including AU were closed till April 21. This important decision was taken by the Vice-Chancellor Professor Saangeeta Srivastava on Friday evening in an emergency meeting with the Registrar Prof NK Shukla, Controller of Examinations Prof Ramendra Kumar Singh, Dean of College and

Development and all faculties.

Public Relations Officer of AU, Dr Jaya Kapoor said that many other important decisions were also taken in the meeting. After April 21, the situation will be decided again. The new date of all online examinations will be released soon by the Controller of Examinations. It will be reported from media other than the official website of AU. All teachers will take online classes from home during this period.

All the students residing in the hostels have been told to vacate the hostel and go home soon. If anyone stays in the

hostel, then there will be no responsibility for the AU administration.

The personnel are requested to send the vaccine certificate via e-mail to the registrar after getting the vaccine administered. The PRO stated that the new date of the Faculty Board meeting of the Faculty of Arts proposed on April 12 will be released after the university opens.

Indian National Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) will also be closed as a precautionary till April 18 due to corona. During this period, teaching and administrative work will be in online mode.

On the instructions of the institute's Director Prof P Nagabhusan, the notice issued on the part of the acting Registrar, Prof Vijayashree Tiwari, has explicitly asked the students to vacate the hostels and go home.

Prof Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhaiya) State University is currently waiting for the direction of the government. Vice-Chancellor Dr Akhilesh Kumar Singh said that no instructions have been received from the government. As such no decision has been taken. All are being called to the university in compliance with the COVID-19 guideline.

Shyama Charan Gupta passes away

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Former Mayor of Allahabad (now Prayagraj) and MP Shyama Charan Gupta is no more. He breathed his last at a private hospital in Delhi owing to corona infection. Following the corona guidelines his cremation took place in Delhi itself. His wife Jamunotri Devi and son are also undergoing corona treatment in Delhi.

Owner of a big industrial syndicate 'Shyam Group of Industries' who later became a politician, Shyama Charan Gupta was known as 'Bidi Baron' because he initiated with Bidi manufacturing and captured a huge market.

Gupta, his wife and son were rushed to a private hospital in Delhi where he had been kept on ventilator. It was around 8 pm on Friday when a news of Gupta's death spread



Shyama Charan Gupta File photo

in the city, but within minutes it was clear that he was alive, though in critical condition. His end came on Friday/Saturday mid night.

Shyama Charan Gupta started his political career as an independent candidate from Banda seat, but he had to face

defeat in 1984. He later became the Mayor of Allahabad and served in this capacity from 1989 to 1993. He later joined the BJP and contested Parliamentary election with a defeat. Then influenced by Mulayam Singh Yadav, Gupta joined the Samajwadi Party and was appointed the national secretary of the party. He contested Parliamentary election on SP ticket against Dr MM Joshi in 1996, but had to face a defeat. He then tried his luck unsuccessfully from Banda on SP ticket in 1999. He contested Assembly election against Keshri Nath Tripathi from Allahabad City South in 2002. He contested the Parliamentary election on SP ticket from Banda successfully in 2004. He contested Parliamentary election from Phulpur in 2009, but could not make it against the BSP candi-

date Kapil Muni Karvaria. He later switched his loyalty from the SP to the BJP and won the Allahabad Parliamentary seat in 2014.

Son of Tirath Prasad Gupta, Shyama Charan was born on February 9, 1945 in Banda. He graduated from Ewing Christian College Allahabad and then procured law degree from Lucknow University.

He had to face Dadua a good number of times owing to Tendu leaf purchase from Banda-Chitrakut, Shankargarh region for his Bidi trade, and once his father had been kidnapped by the dreaded dacoit.

His death came as a shock for the local residents of Prayagraj where several condolence meetings were organised to mourn the demise of the Bidi Baron.

NCR GM reviews stn redevelopment plan

ALLAHABAD (PNS): General Manager Vinay Kumar Tripathi reviewed station redevelopment plan of Prayagraj Jn. and Kanpur Central Stations through video conferencing with IRSDC officials, PHODs of NCR, DRM Prayagraj Mohit Chandra and team of officers from Prayagraj division and HQ office. Indian Railway Station Development Corporation (IRSDC), a JV of Railway owned PSUs is redeveloping all major stations of Indian Railways which includes Prayagraj Jn., Kanpur Central,

Agra Cantt and Gwalior stations of North Central Railway. Team of IRSDC officials led by Sanjeev Kumar Lohia MD & CEO IRSDC made detailed presentation on redevelopment of both most important NSG-2 stations of North Central Railway. Under the proposed redevelopment through PPP mode, both stations shall be developed and maintained w.r.t. user facilities by selected concessionaire through process of competitive bidding.

The development work proposed for stations is based

on concept of 7Cs which include 1. Creation of city Centre, 2 Congestion free station i.e. separate arrival and departures, 3. Convenience like lifts, escalators, passenger conveniences, 4 Conservation of existing natural and built environment, 5 Cleanliness, 6 Communication facilities and 7 Convergence with other modes of transport while preparation and finalisation of plans, development in and around station and that in city like connectivity with metro etc is also being incorporated to

provide passenger a delightful journey experience.

Under the proposed plan for Prayagraj Jn. special care is being taken for smooth handling of pilgrim traffic during Magh, Kumbh and Mahakumbh Mela periods. The redevelopment of station is being planned in such a way that provided facilities are able to serve upto 60 years period for which all possible aspects are being considered and various alternatives are being evaluated using modern techniques by experts in this fields.

COVID-19 second wave may peak by mid-April: Scientists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K) have assessed the current situation of COVID-19 cases in the country with the help of a mathematical model.

As per the analysis of this mathematical model, it is expected that COVID-19 cases would peak in India between April 15 and April 20 before taking a downward trajectory. Further, it has also been inferred that the second wave would witness a significant decline by May end.

According to the study conducted by the scientists, the cases would reach the 10-lakh mark, as seen in September 2020.

In the past, a mathematical approach called SUTRA had examined the first wave of accelerated infections and concluded that the cases would peak in September and drop in February 2021. This model has been used by scientists, including Prof Manindra

Agrawal from the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, who are anticipating the highest daily spikes in mid-April.

An academican from IIT-K's computer science and engineering department, Prof Agarwal, was a part of the national 'supermodel' scheme. He said that a daily count of 80,000-90,000 cases could be expected during the peak time. "We will cross the peak (during April 15-20) and then there will be very a sharp drop over the next 15-20 days".

Prof Agarwal suggests two probable reasons for the unrestrained spike in COVID-19 numbers. While re-opening of public places like schools, colleges and offices and carefree behaviour surely make for strong causes, one cannot neglect the fact that certain mutations of the novel coronavirus are spreading faster.

In addition to this, the growth rate of cases will also be affected by guidelines and measures rolled out by the government and the level of adherence to them, he says.

Deploying measures like the rate of spread or the contact rate, the model tries to determine the number of people that stand with dangers of infection given one positive person.

The professor said that three variables of Beta, 'Reach' and 'Epsilon' take the centre stage in the study. While the first is contact rate, the other two represent the measure of citizens' exposure and the ratio of detected and undetected cases.

"The contact rate had doubled in March and that may be contributing to the very steep rise," Prof Agarwal said.

The professor added that the peak rate was sensitive to the daily count of detections and if the daily count showed slight alterations, the peak count would be changed by thousands.

"The reason we had to introduce 'Reach' is that unlike earlier pandemics which start at a location and suddenly spread fast across a place, in COVID-19, the spread of the

pandemic has been slower due to the many protective measures in place," Prof Agrawal explained, and added, "Similarly, the epsilon factor takes care of asymptomatic infections."

As per records, the national 'supermodel' concluded that the grip of coronavirus will be loosened by early 2021 with "minimal active symptomatic infections" in February.

Additionally, it also contained a warning which remains to be applicable. The warning read: "However, this number will start rising again if proper practices of masking, disinfecting, tracing, and quarantine are not followed. The downward trend will continue only if we continue with above practices."

While the current times are definitely enveloped amid tough circumstances, it is important that we follow all precautions necessary to prevent a further surge in infections. Subsequently, all individuals who can get vaccinated should avail of its benefits as soon as possible.

Judiciary officers, staff to leave court premises after their work is over

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

District Judge RP Singh has issued directives to all judicial officers and employees to leave the court premises immediately after their work is over.

This order has been issued in the wake of the guidelines released by the Allahabad High Court a few days back.

In its guidelines, the Allahabad High Court has directed that judicial officers are required to ensure that at a time, only a minimum number of lawyers and litigants are present in the courtroom during the proceedings and physical distance is maintained.

The judicial officers should not unnecessarily prevent the appearance of litigants unless or until the parties suffer from illness or are unable to appear in person on some other pretext. But they have the power to restrict entry of people in the courtroom or at the place where lawyers argue their cases.

The High Court has also directed that before the start of the court, the district judge and other senior judicial officers should ensure that proper sanitisation has been carried out there in accordance with the Covid protocol. A list of helpline landline/mobile numbers should also be displayed in the district court's website to facilitate lawyers/litigants.

During the hearing, judicial officers are exempted from wearing coats and gowns. Similarly, the dress code during the court proceedings for male counsel will be white shirt and light colour trouser and sober attire for female counsel, High Court directives added.

NER GM's appeal to passengers

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

The railway administration has made extensive arrangements at the railway stations for the convenience of passengers and for creating awareness about prevention from Covid infection.

This information was given by General Manager of North Eastern Railway (NER) Vinay Kumar Tripathi while addressing a press conference organised on Friday. The GM said that in total mail/express trains running on NER the average occupancy is around 98 per cent while in passenger trains being run as unreserved express trains it is around 65 per cent. On NER the number of daily originating passengers is around 1,15,000, out of which 93,000 passengers are of reserved category and 22,000 of unreserved category and a total of 64 pairs of



mail/express trains are being run so far, Tripathi added. A total of 85 passenger trains are to be run on NER out of which 36 passenger trains are being run as unreserved express trains the GM said. On NER out of an average of 200 mail/express trains running on normal days at present on an average 176 trains are running daily. All mail/express trains

are being run with reserved class coaches keeping the Covid protocol in mind, the GM added.

Through the media the GM appealed to passengers that for protection from the Covid-19 they should wear the mask properly, keep their hands clean by washing them frequently and follow physical distancing. Besides they should completely follow Covid protocol issued by the government, he added.

In Lalit Narayan Mishra Railway Hospital, Gorakhpur, those more than 45 years of age are being administered Covid-19 vaccine, he said. So far, more than 15,000 people have been vaccinated, the GM said. Besides, through public awareness system at stations passengers are constantly being made aware on protection from Covid-19 infection, he added.

CSMT-Gkp spl to run on Apr 13

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

The railway administration for the convenience of passengers will run the 01129/01130 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) - Gorakhpur - Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus additional special train from CSMT on April 13 (Tuesday) and from Gorakhpur on April 15 (Thursday). All coaches in this train will be of reserved category and passengers travelling in them will have to follow the Covid-19 prevention guidelines, CPRO PK Singh said.

CSMT-GKP SPL: The 01129 CSMT-Gorakhpur special train will depart from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus on April 13 at 23.30 hrs, from Dadar at 23.40 hrs, from Kalyan on the second day at 00.35 hrs, from Nashik Road at 03.10 hrs, from Manmad at 04.10 hrs, from Bhusaval at 06.55 hrs, from Khandwa at 09.25 hrs, from Itarsi at 12.50 hrs, from

Bhopal at 15.20 hrs, from Bina at 17.55 hrs, from Jhansi at 20.30 hrs, from Kanpur Central at 04.25 hrs, from Lucknow at 06.20 hrs, from Gonda at 08.50 hrs, Basti at 10.10 hrs and reach Gorakhpur at 11.40 hrs.

GKP-CSMT SPL: The 01130 Gorakhpur-Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus special train will run on April 15 depart from Gorakhpur at 17.40 hrs, from Basti at 18.50 hrs, from Gonda at 20.15 hrs, from Lucknow at 23.05 hrs, from Kanpur Central on second day at 00.50 hrs, from Jhansi at 04.40 hrs, from Bina at 07.20 hrs, from Bhopal at 09.25 hrs, from Itarsi at 11.25 hrs, from Khandwa at 14.25 hrs, from Bhusaval at 16.40 hrs, from Jalgaon at 17.10 hrs, from Manmad at 19.20 hrs, from Nashik Road at 20.20 hrs, from Kalyan at 22.50 hrs and from Dadar at 23.40 hrs will on the third day reach Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus at 00.05 hrs. A total of 22 coaches, including sleeper class — 9, general second

class — 2, general second class chair car — 3, air-conditioned third — 5, air-conditioned second class — 1 and SLRD — 2 will be attached in this special train.

FREQUENCY OF TRAIN: The railway administration for the convenience of passengers while increasing the frequency of 01093/01094 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus-Gorakhpur-CSMT triweekly special train will in place of three days a week run for six days a week, CPRO PK Singh said. As a result, 01093 CSMT - Gorakhpur special train will be run on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday (six days a week) on April 10, 11, 15, 17 and April 18 from CSMT in additional trips. Similarly, in the return journey 01094 Gorakhpur-CSMT special train will be run on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday (six days a week) on April 12, 13, 17, 19 and 20 from Gorakhpur in additional trips.

Pvt hosps asked to make arrangements for treatment of COVID-19 patients



District Magistrate Alok Tewari holds a meeting with the representatives of five private hospitals.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

In view of the spike in novel coronavirus positive cases in the city, District Magistrate Alok Tewari has asked private hospitals to again make all arrangements for the treatment of COVID-19 patients as done earlier by them last year.

In a meeting with the representatives of private hospitals at his camp office on Friday, the

district magistrate directed them to ensure that all the facilities provided for the treatment of COVID-19 patients were as per the standards and guidelines of the Central and state governments and there was no complaint of over-billing.

Representatives of 7 Air Force Hospital, Regency, SPM, GTV and SIS hospitals were present in the meeting.

All the private hospitals have been asked to carry out

fire audits and properly display the chargeable fee.

Besides, they have been asked to keep their portal updated regularly and ensure the presence of specialist doctors round-the-clock.

Special attention is to be made to ensure that the CCTV cameras of the ICU and other departments are always functional and the attendants are regularly apprised of the condition of their patients admitted in the hospital.

The district magistrate said with these arrangements, 307 additional beds would be available in five hospitals in the district — 25 beds in 7 Air Force Hospital, 75 in Regency, 77 in SPM, 60 in GTV and 70 in SIS hospitals.

Chief Development Officer Mahendra Kumar Singh, Chief Medical Officer Dr Anil Kumar Mishra and ADM (City) also attended the meeting.

Homeopathy Day observed

KANPUR (PNS): On the occasion of 266th World Homeopathy Day observed on the birth anniversary of its founder Samuel Hahnemann, a function was organised at Arogya Dham in Gwaltoli on Saturday.

IG Range Mohit Agarwal, who was the chief guest, inaugurated the event by lighting the ceremonial lamp and cutting the cake. He said that Dr Hemant Mohan and Dr Arti Mohan of Arogya Dham had regularly distributed free homeopathic medicines to COVID-19 patients, including policemen, when the pandemic was at its peak last year.

He said with the spike in COVID-19 cases, people need to take precautionary measures from the start. He said to prevent this disease, people were required to strengthen their immunity system, and could be done with the help of homeopathic medicines also.

He said during the pandemic last year, Dr Hemant Mohan had not only distributed free medicines to COVID-19 patients in the city but in the entire country. He said now, as the number of COVID-19 cases had again started rising, people should prefer homeopathic medicines along with other modes of treatment to ensure early recovery. He also appealed to people to strictly follow the Covid guidelines to combat the disease.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Hemant Mohan and his wife Dr Arti Mohan said this time, the COVID-19 patients visiting their clinic had symptoms of dengue and typhoid. He said these patients were taking medicines without consulting a doctor which was resulting in further complications. They advised treatment under the guidance of expert doctors and said the homeopathic medicines were fully able to control the disease by strengthening the immune system to fight the virus.

ALLOTTEES: After waiting for around eight months, the dreams of 1,677 allottees to get their house under the PM Awas Scheme became true with the Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) issuing allotment letters to them on Friday.

It may be recalled that in August last year, the KDA had allotted 1,677 houses through lottery under its Sakrapur, Janhvi-Bhagirathi housing schemes. Due to delay in feeding of data on the portal of PM Awas Yojana, the allotment letters could not be issued to these allottees so far.

Cops told to intensify patrolling

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

Regarding the panchayat elections a chaupal Rwas held jointly by District Magistrate Praveen Kumar Laxkar and Superintendent of Police (SP) Ajay Kumar Singh in a school at Narrolya market under Jigna police station on



Friday. Addressing the meeting of the public along with prospective candidates the DM made it clear that violation of model code of conduct was not allowed at all. He said candidates are expected to follow the norms with the spirit of cooperating to hold the elections free and fair. He directed to the officials concerned to ensure that no vehicle with a loudspeaker should move in the area without permission. The DM warned clearly that action would be taken not only against the candidates but against the vehicle owner too.

SP Ajay Kumar Singh directed the Jigna Station House Officer (SHO) to ensure the deposit of each weapon and taking preventive action against possible nuisance creators. He said any type of misconduct with the staff involved in the election process would not be tolerated at all and if anyone was found in involved in such activity stringent action will be taken against them. He directed the cops to intensify patrolling in the area and keep themselves updated with the activities there. The meeting was attended by prospective candidates, political leaders as well as reputed persons of police station area along with SHO Pranay Prasoos Srivastava and 'chaukidars'.

PANCHAYAT POLL: ARTO (A) Ravi Kant Shukla has informed that as per the direction of Transport Commissioner of the state all school vans had to be used in the elections. He said that total 578 vehicles were registered in the district as school vans and all the owners were expected to hand them over to the district administration on the date it was required. According to the ARTO it was the responsibility of the vehicle owners to send the vehicles along with drivers in good condition and if it was required, get them repaired. As per the ARTO a meeting of school managers/vehicle owners was scheduled to be held on April 12 in the meeting hall of the DM which was to be attended by BSA and DIOS too.

Kanpur Metro trial run by Nov

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The UP Metro Rail Corporation Limited has set a target of November 2021 for initiating the trial run of Kanpur Metro.

Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation Limited Managing Director Keshav Kumar said on Saturday that the Kanpur Metro project would get the first coaches in September this year. He also said that seven advanced machines of depot machinery and plant system would be deployed for a faster execution of the operational launch.

The seven machines in the proposals include a fully mechanised CNC under floor pit wheel lathe machine (for rotating the rail wheel), a fully automated synchronised pit jack machine (for raising and lowering coaches for upkeeping), a fully automatic synchronised mobile jack (for transferring coaches from one place to another), bogie turntable (for shifting bogies from one track to other track) and automatic train washing plant (for automatic washing of Metro coaches). In addition to this, other equipment would also be installed.



Rainwater harvesting system being installed by UPMRC in the city.

It is expected that construction for the underground section of the Kanpur Metro will start this month. For this, specialised tunnel digging machines are being brought from Lucknow, Gujarat and Mumbai. The underground section is being established with the help of a Turkish company, Sam Gulermak.

As per the statements given by officials, Kanpur Metro is one of the fastest metro projects in the country. Given the recent progress, the project is gradually shifting from the 'civil' to

'system' phase. The UPMRC aims to execute the trials of Kanpur Metro by November 30 after all the required machines for the operation are installed.

KANPUR METRO TO HAVE RAINWATER HARVESTING SYSTEMS

Apart from overcoming the problems of traffic jams and pollution, the UP Metro Rail Corporation Limited is all set to improve the declining groundwater level in the city. After completing the installation of rainwater harvesting

systems, around 15 lakh litres of rainwater will help in bringing up the groundwater level every year. Under the first under-construction Metro corridor from IIT to Motijheel, the UPMRC has planned to conserve 8 lakh litres of water every year. For this, rainwater harvesting systems are being installed at 180 spots at every second pillar. The system would be made functional prior to the start of Metro trains in the city. It may be recalled that the construction of the Metro track was started in November 2019. With the completion of the project, the UPMRC planned to conserve rainwater and started to install rainwater harvesting systems under the elevated track. Under the system, the rainwater collected from the U-girder will directly be sent underground through a pipe. The system will be made functional from October next. According to UPMRC officers, rainwater harvesting systems were also being installed in Metro depot and casting yard and stations. They said pits were being constructed at Metro stations and depots in rectangular shape while under the elevated route, these would be of round shape.

Centre created Covid job shortage: Sonia



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Allegation to incite voters against Central forces unfounded: Didi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

BJP releases Kishor's video claiming 'Modi's popularity'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Kishor's rejected the interpretation with 'selective quotes' and accused the BJP of "distorted use of parts of the conversation", and asked the party to release the "full conversation".

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

The ECI order said,

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

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

Tomar urges agitating farmers to call off strike amid Covid surge

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

In these meetings, the gov-

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

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

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

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

Covid recovered patients not coming forward to donate plasma: Experts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

"I have not lost hope, yet," he said.

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

He echoed the views of Dr

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

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

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

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

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

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

CRPF staff's special children to get school bus facility

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

It said that a person, who is compelled to beg due to certain circumstances, cannot be faulted for his actions.

The plea has claimed that "The Abolition of Begging and Rehabilitation of Beggars Bill 2018" was introduced in Lok Sabha but "till date, this bill is not passed and is wedged in length parliamentary procedures, that has resulted in thousands of poor facing more hardships because of present arbitrary statutes".

The petition has sought directions to declare as "illegal and void" all provisions, except some sections, of the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959, Punjab Prevention of Beggary Act, 1971, Haryana Prevention of Begging Act, 1971 and Bihar Prevention of Begging Act 1951.

It has also sought to declare all other similar Acts prevailing in any part of the country as illegal.

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

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

"Technology-enabled innovations like secure digital

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

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

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

Petrol, diesel prices remain unchanged

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Thereafter, fuel prices have remained unchanged.

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

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

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

PTI ■ JAIPUR

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

Around 7,000 petrol pumps remained closed in the state due to the strike. However, fuel pumps that are company owned and company operated were open for the public.

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

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

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

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

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

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

"We expect the broad-based rally of 2020 to continue well into 2021 (already visible in Q12021) as we believe a strong earnings revival across the board is on the cards. A lower interest rate environment and higher fiscal spending will continue to support the equity markets," Axis Securities said.

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

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

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

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

The report said that top 10 stocks domination is dwin-



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



FIANS ■ CHENNAI

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

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

According to IFC, the total solar power project cost is estimated at \$200 million. The solar power project is sponsored by Enel Green Power India, one of the step-down subsidiaries of Enel Green Power S.p.A., an existing IFC client.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ BEIJING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

run CGTN TV reported.

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

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

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

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

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

HAWALA TRANSACTION

Kerala Speaker questioned by Customs for four hours

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Kerala experienced the indignity of watching a high level team of Customs interrogating P Sreeramakrishnan, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in connection with hawala transaction.

A team of Customs officials led by a superintendent called on Sreeramakrishnan at his official bungalow in Thiruvananthapuram late Friday evening and grilled him for four hours about his involvement in the hawala transaction. The currency notes in US dollars were transported to West Asia with the blessings of the then UAE Consul General in Thiruvananthapuram.

The Consul General left the country the moment the gold from UAE smuggled through the diplomatic channel in the airport at the capital city was seized by the Customs officials much against the pressure exerted by the Chief Minister's Office.

The interrogation of Sreeramakrishnan was based on the statement given by Swapna Suresh, one of the king-

pins of the gold smuggling racket, who had worked as the liaison officer at the UAE Consulate. Swapna and Sarith, her close accomplice, had told the Customs that Sreeramakrishnan had handed over a bag printed with initials SRK printed on it and bundles of currency notes to be handed over to the Consulate General officials.

Swapna in her statement to the Customs reportedly told that she had intimate relations with Sreeramakrishnan who is known in party circles as dandy. She had quoted Sreeramakrishnan as telling that he would not do anything "free of cost" and would extract the price from Swapna herself. According to Swapna, the Speaker had held meetings with the ruler of Sharjah during the latter's royal visit to Kerala and it was she who arranged the one-to-one meeting between the two.

Sreeramakrishnan had invested heavily in some of the West Asian countries in education sector and had plans to open a network of international public schools and colleges in

the oil rich Gulf kingdoms. Adding insult to injury was Swapna's charge that the Speaker had invited her for a "personal meeting" to an apartment which he claimed as his personal hide-out in the capital city.

Speaker tests +ve for Covid-19 after Vijayan, Chandy

Thiruvananthapuram: Assembly Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan on Saturday tested positive for Covid-19. In a Facebook post, Sreeramakrishnan said he has tested positive for the infection and was under observation at his official residence here.

He also requested all those who had come in contact with him in recent days to quarantine themselves. Customs officials recorded the statement of the speaker in the dollar smuggling case on Friday. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and senior Congress leader Oommen Chandy have also tested positive for the virus and have been hospitalised. **PTI**

MUSLIM LEAGUE WORKER MURDER

One of the suspects found dead in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The murder of Manzoor, the Muslim League activist allegedly by CPI(M) workers last Tuesday took a curious turn as Rathesh (38) one of the suspects was found dead in Kozhikode late Friday evening.

The Police was after Rathesh, who was one of the suspects in the murder of Manzoor. He was found hanging in an empty compound in Valayam area of the district. The police on Saturday too into custody two CPI(M) workers allegedly involved in the murder.

But K Sudhakaran, MP, told media that the death of Rathesh. "It has to be ascertained whether Rathesh was killed and then hanged by the perpetrators to make it look like a suicide," said Sudhakaran.

Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala said the police have lost credibility in the backdrop of the case. "We want an IPS level officer to supervise the investigation. Till date we have seen the police working overtime to cover up all evidences to save the CPI(M) activists who were involved in the case," said Chennithala.

P K Kunhalikutty, leader of Muslim League said the investigation should be carried out by a central agency as the police in Kerala have been a failure in this case.

Shinoz, a Marxist worker have been arrested by the police in connection with the murder. According to a member of the investigating team, the police have come across many crucial evidence after examining the phone calls made and received by Shinoz.

Centre discriminated against Maha in supplying PPE kits, N95 masks: Cong's Chavan 'Modi Govt politically biased in supply of jobs to Maha as well'

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A mid a fierce controversy between Maharashtra and the Centre over the discrimination in making available Covid-19 vaccine to it, former Chief Minister and senior Congress leader Prithviraj Chavan on Saturday alleged that the Narendra Modi Government was "lop-sided" and "politically biased" towards the State even in the supply of critical medical equipment like PPE kits, N95 masks and ventilators.

"Maharashtra has the highest COVID-19 caseload, but as the state Health Minister says we are facing step-motherly treatment from the Govt of India in the supply of vaccines, according to the State Health Minister. This is not only limited to the distribution of vaccines but also quantities of the critical medical equipment supplied to the state," Chavan said.

Quoting a reply by the Government of India to a question in the Lok Sabha on the quantities of critical medical equipment supplied to each state as of February 10, 2021, Chavan said: "Gujarat got 9623 numbers of N95 masks per thousand Covid-19 patients as compared to

Maharashtra, which got 1560 masks per thousand patients. Even UP got 3916 N95 masks, more than twice that of Maharashtra."

"As far as PPE kits are concerned, Gujarat got 4951 kits per thousand, UP got 2446 kits while Maharashtra got just 223 kits," Chavan said.

As far as ventilators are concerned, Gujarat was given 13 ventilators per 1000 patients, UP got 7 while Maharashtra got only 2 ventilators per thousand Covid-19 patients. Kerala got even less than Maharashtra on a per thousand patient basis," he said.

"As per the Lok Sabha reply, in all the categories, Gujarat was given the lion's share of the supply of medical equipment which is disproportionate to the caseload," Chavan said.

Slamming Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the discrimination shown towards the non-BJP ruled states in the distribution of vaccines and critical medical equipment, Chavan said: "What is this if not discrimination based on politics? The Prime Minister seems to be forgetting that he is the PM of the entire country and not just Gujarat, UP and other BJP ruled states".

CPM backs Jaleel, rules out his resignation

KOCHI: The ruling CPI(M) buried all inner party rivalries and came out unanimously in support of K T Jaleel, Kerala's Higher Education Minister, whom the Lok Ayukta declared on Friday of committing improperly.

Cyriac Joseph, Lok Ayukta and Harun-ul- Rasheed, his deputy ruled on Friday that Jaleel was guilty of nepotism and abuse of power in the appointment of K T Adeb (a close relation of the minister) as general manager of Kerala State Minorities development Finance Corporation Ltd.

The Lok Ayukta also ruled that Jaleel's continuation as minister is untenable and asked the chief minister to remove him from office. "Jaleel violated the oath of office and showed favouritism by tweaking the qualifications to favour his relative."

It was in November 2018, the Muslim Youth League, disclosed details about the "illegal" appointment of Adeb as general manager of the public sector enterprises. Within days Adeb quit the post but the matter was raised before the Lok Ayukta through a public interest litigation.

Myanmar junta attacks again

AP ■ YANGON

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Violence by security forces was also reported Friday in sev-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Iran tests advanced nuclear centrifuges

AP ■ TEHRAN

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Two Christian nurses booked under blasphemy charges in Pak

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

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

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

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

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

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

Harry expected to fly in for funeral of grandfather

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

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

Gun salutes honour Prince Philip

UK enters 8 day mourning

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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

"The tradition of Gun Salutes being fired throughout



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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM PAGE 1

VIOLENCE MARS BENGAL POLLS

Quoting reports filed by observers Pratap M and Sharad Laxman to the ECI, local police officers said a quick response team of the Central Forces that was escorting a group of 50-60 voters — who had been stopped from voting by alleged TMC men — to the booth chased away an armed crowd that had assembled around the way. In the melee a child fell down and received some injuries.

Soon as rumours spread about CISF firing a large armed crowd of 300-400 people raided the booth. "Even women with hand-made weapons used by them at home were seen attacking the booth," the local SP said. As bombs were hurled the central forces resorted to blank fire to disperse the crowd.

As they would not relent they "opened fire," leading to the deaths.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was addressing a rally in Siliguri during the same time, said he was "deeply hurt" by the incident. "I will urge the Election Commission to take strict action against the accused. I extend my condolences to the bereaved families," Modi added.

However the TMC held the BJP responsible for the incident saying "when TMC workers went to enquire why people were not being allowed to vote, BJP miscreants launched an attack creating an atmosphere of chaos, following which CRPF open fired leading to five TMC workers losing their lives." Condemning Home Minister for the Saturday's incident and demanding his resignation Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee called for a state-wide protest by her party men. She said she would visit the spot on Sunday "as I cannot go there today because of model code of conduct."

She said "I will go to Cooch Behar tomorrow and then on Monday the TMC workers would organize protests throughout the State where the polls have taken place and also where they are yet to be conducted."

The Chief Minister ordered a CID investigation into the case while CPI(M) politburo member condemning the deaths demanded judicial inquiry into the firing.

Elsewhere there were reports of skirmishes with BJP leaders Babul Supriyo being heckled at Tollygunge in South Kolkata when he went to inquire about false votes being polled by the TMC men. At Chinsurah in Hooghly BJP MP and candidate Lockett

Chatterjee was heckled and her car damaged when she went to challenge people casting false votes. At Kasba BJP candidate Indranil Khan was heckled by the TMC men whereas at Jadavpur a red chilli powder was poured in the eyes of a CPI(M) polling agent. In the evening the vehicles of the dummy candidate of BJP nominee Vaishali Dalmiya was shattered, sources said.

71 COMPANIES OF CENTRAL ARMY FORCES TO BE DEPLOYED IN WB

The break-up of the entire deployment of 1,071 companies of the Central Forces includes 253 companies of the CRPF, 217 companies of the BSF, 149 companies of CISF, 171 companies of SSB, 110 companies of ITBP and 55 Companies of the Railway Protection Force (RPF).

In addition to this, the component of the SAPs/IR Battalion includes 30 companies from Uttar Pradesh, 20 companies from Madhya Pradesh, eight companies from Arunachal Pradesh, five companies from Sikkim, 10 companies from Manipur, 12 companies from Jharkhand, 14 companies from Nagaland, five companies from Mizoram and 12 companies from Bihar. These forces will also be detailed for counting duties and guarding EVMs. "The State government is requested to work out the detailed deployment plan, in consultation with the respective CAPFs and Chief Force Coordinator. The movement and deployment of CAPFs shall be coordinated by CRPF," said the letter.

Inspector General of South Bengal Frontier Headquarter Ashwini Kumar Singh has been re-nominated as Force Coordinator/ State Nodal Officer for deployment of forces during Assembly Election-2021 in West Bengal, it further said.

In view of the Covid-19 situation, the Union Home Ministry also directed the State government to organise necessary transportation, logistics and accommodation as also other arrangements as per the government guidelines on the issue.

STICK TO COVID BEHAVIOUR OR FACE CAMPAIGN BAN: EC

They must push all their supporters in the beginning of a rally, meeting, or a campaign to wear masks and use

sanitisers, and put in place crowd-control measures as per social distancing norms, according to the letter.

"Political parties, leaders, campaigners, candidates, existing or aspiring policymakers are expected to be torch-bearers for the campaign against COVID and hence, are expected to not only set an example by maintaining social distancing, wearing masks and following prescribed protocols but also by exhorting all the local formations who attend programmes to follow COVID protocols," the letter read.

On Thursday, the Delhi High Court had sought responses from the commission and the central government on the use of masks during poll campaigns.

As per Covid guidelines issued in view of Bihar polls last year, EC had asked parties and candidates concerned to ensure that all Covid-related requirements like face masks, sanitizers, thermal scanning etc. are fulfilled. It had then added that non-compliance of instructions during the period of public interface would attract action under the Disaster Management Act and Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code.

DAILY COVID CASES CROSS 1.5L MARK, AND COUNTING

As the cases are on the upward mode, demand for ramping up vaccination drive is also being felt to protect the people from being infected.

However, in view of shortage of vaccines as has been reported by various States in the country, experts have suggested the Government to not depend on the two manufacturers — Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech which have been providing Covishield and Covaxin respectively.

Sputnik V has demonstrated an efficacy rate of 91.6 per cent in the interim analysis of the phase 3 clinical trials, which included data on 19,866 volunteers in Russia, who received both the first and second dose of the vaccine.

"Sputnik V vaccine has already been approved by several countries across North and South America, the Middle East, Europe, Asia and Africa, Mexico and Egypt. There is no harm in giving it approval here and meet the shortage amid the third wave," said Dr Rahul Bhargava, hematologist from Fortis Hospital in Gurugram, Haryana.

Similarly, US company Pfizer too had sought approval from the top drug regulator in the country, but its case was not considered with the government

stating that it needs deep freezers for vaccines which is not available in India.

However experts feel that Pfizer vaccine can be made available in the urban areas where hospitals have such facilities and those who want it can pay and at least get themselves vaccinated.

Experts said that the total production capacity of the manufacturers of Covishield and Covaxin, is roughly 24 lakh vaccines a day. The current demand is 37 lakh vaccines a day. The daily shortage is already huge and is probably getting concealed by some past inventory stocks of Covishield. The gap will become more acute in the weeks ahead because production capacity increase will take time, even if it is already underway. SII has already sought around Rs 3000 crore for ramping up the production.

INDIA, CHINA AGREE TO DEFUSE LAC STAND-OFF EXPEDITIOUSLY

The entire process was completed in about ten days and the two Corps Commanders held the 10th round of talks on February 21.

In the latest round of parleys, India reiterated its position that disengagement from Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang valley should be completed as soon as possible to restore peace, sources said here on Saturday. However, there was no joint statement this time unlike the last three talks. The Indian delegation was led by Lt based 14 Corps chief Lt General P G K Menon while Major General Liu Lin headed the Chinese team.

Taking stock of the current situation at the LAC where the troops are now in face off position at places like Hot Springs and Gogra, the two commanders discussed ways to go about disengaging from these two spots besides Depsang. The final plan was likely to be firming up in the next round of talks to be held shortly, sources said.

Incidentally, the face-offs at the LAC started on May 5 from the Pangong Tso when the Indian and Chinese patrols exchanged blows leading some soldiers from both sides injured. This confrontation snowballed into stand-offs at multiple points.

At present, more than one lakh troops from both the sides are facing each other at the LAC in Ladakh. Moreover, both the armies have brought forward their heavy weaponry after the violent brawl on June 15 last year in the Galwan valley. Twenty Indian soldiers including the com-

manding officer were killed in the fight. More than 40 Chinese also died but China is yet to officially make the casualty figures public.

Late last month, Army chief General MM Naravane said the threat to India has only "abated" following the disengagement in the Pangong lake area, but it has not gone away altogether.

PATRIOTIC FERVOUR AT KUMBH SPL YAJNA

"I got the idea of a special Yagya for the martyrs after the martyrdom of Major Ajay Singh Jasrothia. The pain of his family motivated me to do something for the martyrs," he said.

"If these young men can offer their lives for the country why cannot we offer oblation of rice, ghee and things in the Yagya for them," he added.

The ascetic who has many Ashrams in the country and commands a considerable following worldwide said that initially it was difficult for him to convince the families of the martyrs for the Yagya. "I personally visited the martyrs' families in all parts of the country and persuaded them. Gradually they accepted the idea and started attending the Yagya. During the Yagya the family members share their grief. In some cases the families have entered into matrimonial associations also," he said.

The Havan Kunds have been prepared on the bank of the Ganga and with a massive 60 feet entrance gate of the site where Yagya would be offered by more than 500 priests and the relatives of the martyrs. At the apex of the whole makeshift structure a large pole with tricolour is placed. The pictures and portraits of the martyrs including the freedom fighters would be placed everywhere in the Shaheed Nagar before the start of the Yagya. Arrangements for the comfortable stay of the family members of the martyrs have also been made. Das' Ashram even pays for the travel expenses of the families of the martyrs for the Yagya.

IT RELIEVES PAIN: KARGIL WAR WIDOW

I attended the Yagya and found that I am not the only one who is in misery.

The Yagya gives a sense of inner peace to me," she said. The ascetic even encouraged Sharda Bhau to join politics after seeing her inclination. In the last year's BDC elections Sharda won with a record margin in Akhnoor.

Setback for BJP in Tripura tribal council elections

New Delhi: Tripura's ruling BJP and its ally IPFT (Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura) received a major setback in the Tribal Council Polls at the hands of Pradyot Deb Burman led newly-floated TIPRA (The Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance).

The new political outfit swept the Tripura Autonomous District Council polls by securing 18 out of 28 seats. The BJP and its ally managed to win only nine seats. An independent candidate won one seat.

The Left front which won the last tribal body election failed to win any seats and so did the Indian National Congress.

The 30-member Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council governs two-thirds of the state's territory.

Elections to 28 of the 30 seats were held on April 6 and the remaining two seats will be nominated by the governor as per the state government's advice.

A total of 157 candidates are in the fray in the elections held in 1,244 polling stations, in which 85.14 per cent of the 8.65 lakh voters exercised their franchise amid stray incidents of violence.

The tribal council election was scheduled to be held on May 17 last year, but was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. *PNS*

50 allowed at weddings in Delhi; restaurants, metro occupancy halved

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a surge in the fourth wave of the Covid-19 cases in the national Capital, the Delhi Government on Saturday announced stricter curbs, allowing Delhi Metro and DTC buses to operate only at 50 per cent capacity and limiting the number of guests at weddings at 50, officials said. The city Government also prohibited all social, political, sports, entertainment, cultural and religious gatherings in view of the rise in Covid-19 cases. Negative RT-PCR report will be required for travellers arriving in the national Capital from Maharashtra by air, the DDMA said, adding those without a report will have to undergo 14-day quarantine. The Delhi Disaster Management Authority said restaurants, bars can operate at 50 per cent occupancy. Delhi Metro, DTC and cluster buses will run at 50 per cent occupancy in view of the rising coronavirus cases, it said.

It said colleges and coaching institutions will remain closed in Delhi. Not more than 20 people are allowed in funeral gatherings and up to 50 in weddings, it said. Swimming pools will also remain closed except for training of sports persons participating in national and international events.

HOMETHEATRE

BEAR HUG OF FICTIONALISING A TRUE STORY

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where was the comedy?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stay away from this one. — Shalini Saksena

Slice of resilient life

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



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

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

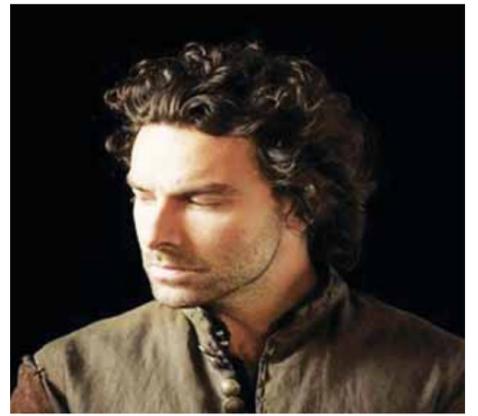
A family of Korean immigrants moves from California to the rural pocket of Arkansas to "live once again", as the main protagonist puts it. The couple Jacob and Monica and their son and his maternal grandmother move to a makeshift house in a trawler to get used to a new life full of firsts and struggles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

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

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

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

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



The genius is on show

LEONARDO
SonyLiv Drama Series
Episodes 8
Rated: 7/10

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

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

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

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

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

TELLY TALE



74TH BAFTA AWARDS ON SONYLIV

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

MIKA PROPOSES BHOOMI

While the competition will heat up during the upcoming episode of Zee TV's *Indian Pro Music League* with all the teams putting their best foot forward, it seems like Punjab Lions captain Mika Singh will steal the show. Last time around, young comedian Divyansh Trivedi had suggested that Mika Singh get married to Gujarat Rockers' captain Bhoomi Trivedi. While they both had laughed it off, this time around, Mika actually proposed Bhoomi for marriage!

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

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

While Mika, Bhoomi and everyone were obviously playing around, viewers will surely like watching the chemistry of these rival captains. You also cannot miss the musical battle between Gujarat Rockers, Bengal Tigers, Delhi Jammers, Mumbai Warriors, UP Dabgangs and Punjab Lions as they go all out to win the fourth super match.

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

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

MANASI LEARNS A NEW CRAFT

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

Manasi has portrayed various shades of a woman from being a straightforward girl in *Mujhse Fraandship Karoge*, to a tomboy for student of the year, to a

fearless hacker for *24 Season 2* and then a lesbian girl who musters courage to come out of the closet for *Its Not That Simple Season 2*. She performs each character with passion and tries to give it her best. She never shies away from honing her talent and learning new things for the character; be it learning to cycle and swim for *SOTY* or learning to sew for *Hindmata*.

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

She adds: "Also, for the part where I



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

CEZANNE KHAN TO PLAY HARMAN

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

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

'The script left me in tears'

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

■ What does Justice Reloaded have on offer?

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

■ What made you come on board the project?

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

■ What difference do you aim to make?

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



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

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

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

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

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

JUST PLAY

Augmented Reality toys are the new entrants in the market justifying extra play time on ground of contributing to child learning. MUSBA HASHMI speaks with experts to tell you more

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, only a few would have believed in it. However, the current education world has turned more into a playground for the kids, where they frolic with toys while learning on the way. The latest entrant to enhance the learning process is the much-talked about AR technology, which is revolutionising the way education is perceived.

Dolls and guns are slowly being relegated to the kids' cupboards. Gone are the days when kids used to run away at the mere mention of study time. Now, parents are engaging children with meaningful play hours where they get educated without them even realising it. Educational toys is the biggest category in the toy industry and is also the fastest growing among all other categories. Here comes the new kid on the block — AR toys. With the arrival of smart AR-toys, the world has become your child's oyster. They can make playtime productive, learn through stories, and travel the world without actually leaving home. With the increasing number of kids, parents, and educators alike who use AR-toys regularly, one thing's clear. AR-powered learning toys are the next big thing in education, and by the looks of it, they're here to stay.

The pandemic has also led the majority of parents (62%) to see that devices and technology can be used as educational tools, as per the Morning Consult, a market research company. "The reasons for the rise of AR toys are manifold. Children in their formative years are bubbling with energy and enthusiasm. Sadly, their short attention span is no secret. They lose interest in games as quickly as they gain it. While traditional games might be exciting for a few days, they might not be able to hold the children's attention for long," says Vivek Goyal, Co-Founder & CEO PlayShifu. It is no mean feat that PlayShifu toys are currently bringing joy to children across 35 countries.

When engaging the kids at home, it's essential to introduce them to toys that yield a different experience each time. Predictable games often lose their sheen quickly, leaving the children disinterested. Going gaga over the latest fad, and the fact that these toys have helped in enhancing her daughter's concentration, Gurugram's Kusum, mother of four-year-old Nia, says, "The normal toys got boring after a while as most of them needed my assistance too and some of them were closed-end toys. Most striking change has been in her concentration span since these toys are interactive, interesting, and lead to questions and exploration."

A lot more parents are picking up educational toys, now more than ever. They are investing in products that offer learning opportunities for their children. But, these investments are fruitful only when the children themselves find the toy exciting enough. "Our primary focus is to achieve that balance and create phygital experiences that are both fun and educational. Our games thrive on creative storytelling, animated characters and innovative interactions that make learning a delight. There's no greater joy than to see a child learning while playing — and not being able to tell the difference," adds Goyal.

HOW THESE TOYS WORK

The link between the real (or physical) and the digital (or virtual) world, augmented reality is an interactive experience that blends both worlds. In gaming, AR bridges the gap between the physical toy and the smartphone or tablet. For instance, some games need you to use your smartphone to scan a real-world object to move ahead in the story. If the real-world object is a flashcard of a tiger, the smartphone presents interactive image, video or a 3D figure of the animal on the screen. In some games, the goal might be to find hidden objects by scanning your actual surroundings with your smartphone.

"The prospect of bringing an object to life is fascinating and exciting. If the topic at hand is how animals live in their natural habitat, AR can teach it through 3D models. Younger children can listen to the sounds the animal makes and understand its eating habits, all through stories and simple games. Meanwhile, older children can learn about the food chain and complex ecosystems, through interactive and informative games."



UNLIKE VIDEO GAMES AND APPS, AR TOYS HELP MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT WITH TACTILE PLAY. HOWEVER, OVER DEPENDENCE CAN AFFECT THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS IN CHILDREN. PROLONGED EXPOSURE TO A SCREEN MAY IMPACT THEIR CONCENTRATION LEVELS AND MAKE THEM WITHDRAW

— PRAKRITI PODDAR, GLOBAL HEAD FOR MENTAL HEALTH, ROUND GLASS

informs Goyal.

AR makes it possible to explore multiple avenues of learning and present various pieces of information in a visual, easy-to-understand manner. Where a regular map tells you about countries and capitals, an AR-powered globe takes learning to a whole new level. It not only teaches geography, but also introduces you to various cultures, cuisines, monuments, and animals—all at the touch of a button. By marrying tactical play and digital storytelling, AR toys bring together the best of both worlds. Various digital elements like audio, video, images, and 3D content, merge with physical components of the toy, thereby making learning a unique and inclusive process. The AR technology also helps the child interact with the world around them and creates two-way interactivity, where the child feels like they have control over what they're learning.

Moreover, AR creates a system of instant feedback that motivates the child to learn more and be more accurate. Most AR toys provide a progress report or graph, which is a personalised evaluation of your child's learning curve and

progress. This report can be monitored and tracked from time-to-time.

A GROWING INDUSTRY

Tech-enabled toys are on the rise worldwide. In the US alone, tech-enabled toy segment grew by 36 per cent when the overall toy industry was almost stagnant. This segment in India is growing even more. In the coming years, we see this growth trend continuing.

There are a handful of companies working in this industry. "Consumers in this segment do not buy the tech for the wow factor, but for the lasting impact and use case. Sooner or later, every company in this industry will create meaningful experiences that have a more significant objective, built on a base of AR/VR technology," says Goyal.

BANE OR BOON

Since kids are fond of play-based learning and augmented reality toys help to enhance life-skills in children. These AR toys and games help improve their digital aptitude as well as their cognitive skills. They have been at the forefront of combining education and entertainment

for kids. Various research also says that creative thinking in the brain develops majorly during the early ages of the kids' lives. Kids draw, tell stories, sing, dance, and write without any specific training because a child's brain is free to learn and imagine things rather than being logical about it.

"It's still not the same as that of self learning but is probably the next best thing and definitely better than passively watching TV screens and tablets and mobiles. Augmented reality toys improve the child's imagination power as they get to draw, paint, write and tell stories the way they want. Moreover, these toys are kid-friendly and safe to operate as they don't have any live wires or sharp ends," says Dr Rohit Arora, Head of Neonatology & Pediatric, Miracles MediClinic, Gurugram. He says that for an early age tech-savvy kids, AR toys provide something extra to boost their brain development. "Interactive AR toys can help them understand information at their comfort level and retain it for long. These toys are engaging, experimental and immersive from a child's perspective," adds Dr Arora.

However, experts warn that AR games can have a harmful impact on kids' eyesight. There is a threat of drifting away from reality as they might not get in-person interaction as much. These toys can be addictive for kids, and they can create confusion in young minds.

"Unlike video games and apps, AR toys aid in motor skill development with tactile play. However, being too dependent on AR toys can affect the development of social skills in young children. Disproportionate exposure to screens can affect their concentration levels and can make them withdrawn," says Prakriti Poddar, Global Head for Mental Health at Round Glass, Managing Trustee Poddar Foundation.

Assessing the impact of screen time on the emotional health of children, the World Health Organisation recommends no screen time for babies under two and no more than one hour of screen time a day for those aged two to four. "Excessive screen time can reduce the child's capability to rely on themselves, especially in times of crisis or strain, and reduce concentration, focus, and the feeling of empathy," she adds.

WONDER KITS FOR YOUR TINY TOTS

From teaching art to coding, brands are ready to walk an extra mile and teach children in the most engaging way possible. The AR toys are set to become a game changer in the industry, if not more. Here are a few options that one can choose from:

KANO

Appropriate for kids aged six and older, the Kano PC kit is no less than a personal laptop for kids. The DIY tablet is the ideal destination

for learning art, science along with coding. Consisting of hardware components, the kid needs to fit the parts to create a functional Windows 10 tablet that comes with a MicroSD card slot and detachable keyboard. Once completed, the kid can share their projects with the Kano community on Kano World online.

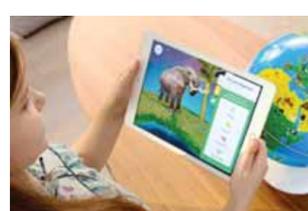
LITTLEBITS

It provides you the experience of an e-

classroom. Its coding kit is its signature product and is ideal for kids from Class III to Class VIII who wish to step into the coding arena at an early age. The Steam+ kit extends curriculum-aligned material while engaging the kids in an analytical thinking process. It offers activities, innovations for maker spaces, libraries, camps, clubs, etc.

WONDER WORKSHOP

The platform aims to build future innovators



and is an innovative product for kids aged six and above. The platform showcases the in-app puzzle library, standard-based lessons along with robotic challenges. Their application, Wonder for Dash & Dot Robots extends learning about robotics in a fun way. It is a coding tool that enables the kid to play and explore robotics all by themselves and offers 300 plus challenges that teach kids about robotics programming and building. With the help of this kids can create their own

machinery, feed in their desired mechanisms and play the challenges.

OSMO

The brand offers electronic toys that are compatible with iPad or Amazon Fire tablets. The kit consists of numbers, shapes, coding instructions, puzzles, drawing, business aptitude and likewise learning features that allows the kid to explore various fields and learn independently.

Dhawan, Shaw power DC to big win

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Openers Shikhar Dhawan and Prithvi Shaw pummelled Chennai Super Kings into submission with their explosive batting as Delhi Capitals romped to a seven-wicket victory in their Indian Premier League opener here on Saturday.

Dhawan smashed 85 off 54 balls and Shaw amassed 72 in just 38 deliveries as DC chased down a target of 189 comfortably with 1.2 overs to spare.

New skipper Rishabh Pant hit the winning runs.

With Shaw and Dhawan in rollicking form, Delhi Capitals started on a rousing note and were sitting pretty at 65 for no loss at the end of the six Powerplay overs. The two openers went for their big shots with impunity, and on all sides of the Wankhede Stadium, as Delhi Capitals raced past 100 in quick time.

Needing 90 runs in the last 10 overs and with all wickets in hand, DC could afford to dictate terms and put pressure on CSK. That Shardul Thakur and Sam Curran were sent for a leather hunt put CSK completely out of contest.

For Shaw, the innings was an extension of his Vijay Hazare Trophy form and the slight tweak in his technique and a straight backlift is working wonders for Shaw.

The fours and sixes continued to rain as DC inched closer to the target with consummate ease.

While the CSK bowling attack had no answer to the strokes played by the DC openers, what added to their misery were two dropped catches of Shaw on 38 and 47, with Moeen Ali being the unfortunate bowler on both occasions.

Making full use of the reprieves, Shaw raced to half cen-



ture in just 27 balls while his senior partner Dhawan goes to the landmark in 35 deliveries.

Shaw hit nine fours and three sixes, while Dhawan struck 10 boundaries and two maximums before getting out to miss out on a hundred.

Earlier, Suresh Raina announced his IPL comeback

with a blazing 36-ball 54 and powered Chennai Super Kings to a solid 188 for seven.

Sam Curran smashed away to 34 off only 15 balls to prop up the CSK innings towards the end. Curran hit four fours and two sixes.

The last five overs yielded 52 runs for CSK, thanks to Curran's

power-packed innings.

Asked to bat first by Rishabh Pant, Ruturaj Gaikwad got off the mark with a pleasing drive through the off side between point and cover, two deliveries after being beaten all ends up by a Chris Woakes outswinger.

Last season's runners-up

DC didn't have to wait long for their first breakthrough as Avesh Khan (2/23 in 4 overs) had Faf du Plessis trapped in front of the wicket in the second over.

In the first ball of the third over, Woakes had Gaikwad caught in the slip cordon as CSK slipped to seven for two.

The English pacer drew Gaikwad into a push with a ball that moved a slightly on pitching.

In came Raina — he had missed the last IPL owing to personal reasons — and in the company of Moeen Ali, the seasoned campaigner revived CSK's innings and looked to put up a challenging total against a strong DC batting line-up at the Wankhede Stadium.

During his 24-ball 36, Moeen struck four boundaries and two sixes, playing a fine helping hand to Raina.

Experienced off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin cut short Moeen's innings when the all-rounder got himself into an uncomfortable position while going for a reverse sweep, the ensuing top-edge ending in a good catch by Shikhar Dhawan, who ran backwards from short third man to hold on to the ball.

Ambati Rayudu came in and straightaway got into the act, hitting a couple of sixes and a four to race away to 23 off 16 balls before Tom Curran ended his stay in the middle.

Meanwhile Raina went about his task in a manner that did not give the impression that he was coming back to top-flight after a long hiatus.

Raina got himself going with a four off Woakes and then worked Ashwin for two successive boundaries, not afraid to dance down the wicket against the wily spinner's flight.

Using his feet well, the veteran southpaw hoicked leg-spinner Amit Mishra for two and also got a maximum against Ashwin.

It was no different with Marcus Stoinis as Raina pulled the Australian medium pacer for another six before being run-out following a mix-up with Ravindra Jadeja (26).

PLAYER	RUNS
1. Shikhar Dhawan (DC)	85
2. Prithvi Shaw (DC)	72
3. Suresh Raina (CSK)	54

PLAYER	WKTS
1. Harshal Patel (RCB)	5
2. Avesh Khan (DC)	2
3. Chris Woakes (DC)	2

MOST SIXES	COUNT
1. Suresh Raina (CSK)	4
2. Chris Lynn (MI)	3
3. Prithvi Shaw (DC)	3

SUMMER SLAM



WERE A TEAM: Delhi Capitals players and support staff pose for group photo at the end of final training session ahead of IPL 14 first game against Chennai Super Kings @DelhiCapitals



HE'S BACK: Rajasthan Royals pacer Mustafizur Rahman poses for photo after he joins Royals bio-bubble @RajasthanRoyals



Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma wore shoes highlighting the great one-horned rhinoceros during the IPL opener against Royal Challengers Bangalore on Friday to help build awareness about conserving the endangered species @ImRo45

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

Consistent Sunrisers meet flashy KKR

Knew my role in RCB since I was traded: Harshal

KEY PLAYERS

- RASHID KHAN**
Afghanistan premier spinner's four over spell will decide result of the game
- ANDRE RUSSELL**
After disappointing season last year, the West Indian will be eager to leave his impression

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Former champions Kolkata Knight Riders will look to strike a perfect balance under the astute leadership of Eoin Morgan when they open their IPL campaign against a consistent Sunrisers Hyderabad at Chepauk on Sunday.

In his first stint as full time captain, all eyes would be on the ODI World Cup-winning English skipper who will look to transform the misfiring army of cricketers and bring back the glorious days of two-time IPL champions.

In Shubman Gill, they have a fantastic young top-order batsman who can easily shift gears, while the likes of Rahul Tripathi, Nitish Rana and veteran Karthik, who's free from the captaincy burden, can form the core of their Indian batting.

Then there is the skipper Morgan who will look to bat through the overs while hoping that 2019 MVP Andre Russell gets back his explosive touch after a quiet season in 2020.

Russell had the worst season by his standards averaging 13 in nine innings without a single match-winning performance as the over-dependency on the Jamaican cost KKR dear last season.

Another West Indian who flopped big time in the UAE was Sunil Narine.

It's time that they think beyond the Trinidadian and try out Shakib Al Hasan, their buy in this year's auction.

They also have a mystery spinner in Varun Chakravarthy who struck it rich in absence of Narine last year but his fitness remains a concern.

One the other end, SRH will be bolstered by the return of Bhuvneshwar Kumar who played just four games in last year due to a hip injury.

Fresh from his fine form during the white-ball leg of the England series at home, Bhuvneshwar will spearhead their attack with yorker specialist T Natarajan by his side.

Add Afghan star spinner Rashid Khan to the bowling line-up and the Orange Army looks

VENUE: CHIDAMBARAM STADIUM, CHENNAI

HEAD TO HEAD	
Matches	19
Sunrisers Hyderabad	07
Kolkata Knight Riders	12

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

- Kolkata Knight Rider defeated Sunrisers Hyderabad by 7 wickets at Abu Dhabi
- Kolkata Knight Rider beat SRH in Super Over after match ended in a tie at Abu Dhabi

912

Sunrisers Hyderabad opening batsman and captain David Warner who scored 912 runs at an average of 45.60 in 23 innings of as many matches for Delhi Daredevils and Sunrisers Hyderabad is the second highest run-getter against Kolkata Knight Riders in IPL history

1459

Andre Russell who made 1459 runs at an average of 31.04 in 57 innings of 67 matches, needs 41 runs to become the fourth batsman to score over 1500 runs for Kolkata Knight Riders in IPL

Faisal Features

pretty balanced in their attack. But the real strength of SRH will be their destructive top-order with the duo of David Warner and in-form Jonny Bairstow. They also have Kane Williamson and Manish Pandey, forming a solid top four.

But it remains to be seen who will play the role of the finisher for the SRH as they seem to lack muscle power teams badly need in the last five overs.

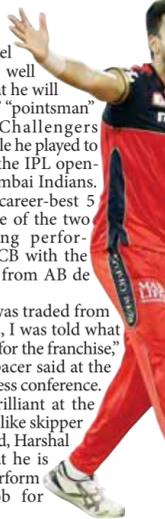
PTI ■ CHENNAI

Harshal Patel was told well in advance that he will be death over "pointsman" for Royal Challengers Bangalore, a role he played to perfection in the IPL opener against Mumbai Indians.

Harshal's career-best 5 for 27 was one of the two match-winning performances for RCB with the other coming from AB de Villiers.

"When I was traded from Delhi Capitals, I was told what role I will play for the franchise," the Haryana pacer said at the post-match press conference.

He was brilliant at the death and just like skipper Virat Kohli said, Harshal also knew that he is expected to perform the tough job for



which he had planned meticulously. "There were clear instructions that I will be bowling in the last two overs (he bowled 18th and 20th). That gave me a lot of clarity. It helped me prepare certain plans against batters and kept my preparations concise."

Harshal said that change of pace and the slow yorkers have been his biggest strength. "The ball started reversing at one stage. It was important to bowl the yorkers and slower balls," he said.

According to Harshal, he has been bowling those slower yorkers that got rid of Ishan Kishan and Marco Jansen, for almost two seasons now.

"Just that when you don't get wickets of slow yorkers, people don't tend to see that. I

always had the yorker but earlier couldn't take it into the game.

He did a lot of simulation of bowling yorkers during training session to get it right during the match.

"In the past 15-20 days, I was trying to put myself into situations."

'OUR DEATH BOWLER'

Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Virat Kohli was all praise for Harshal Patel's match-winning bowling performance, terming him their designated death bowler in this edition of the IPL.

"We brought Harshal in a trade from Delhi. He is relishing the responsibility and is clear with his plans. He was the difference today (Friday). He is going to be our death bowler. As a captain you want players with clarity, and he has that," Kohli said at the post-match press conference.

MI favourites to lift trophy: Anjum

HARSHIT BISHT ■ NEW DELHI

Former skipper of India's national women's cricket team and commentator Anjum Chopra backs Mumbai Indians to make a hat-trick of the IPL titles after winning back-to-back tournaments in the UAE last year.

The side, led by Rohit Sharma, defeated Delhi Capitals in the 2020 final in Dubai on November 10 and, in five months, is back on the field to take part in the 2021 edition.

Speaking to *The Pioneer* ahead of the 2021 season, Chopra said: "Mumbai Indians will start as the favourites because there are no loopholes in that line-up. Just six (five) months back, they won the last championship. And they haven't changed many players from that squad. At least the playing eleven remains the same. The majority of their players are in good form and you can never discount them from the competition because of their consistency."

In March, Mumbai Indians middle-order batsman Suryakumar Yadav and Ishan Kishan made their India debut, with both scoring 50s in their maiden International innings against England in the recently-concluded T20 International series.

Also in the One Day Internationals,

Krunal Pandya hit 50 in his first match.

Ahead of the auction in Chennai this year, Mumbai — who have lifted the trophy on five occasions — retained the core group, apart from adding the likes of experienced Piyush Chawla, Kiwi all-rounder Jimmy Neesham and pacer Adam Milne, besides a few rookies including Arjun Tendulkar.

In fact, the 20-year-old, 6'8" South African left-arm pacer Marco Jansen made his debut against Royal Challengers Bangalore in the season's opener on Friday and took 2-28 in his four-over spell. And if that was not enough, the return of Hardik Pandya as a bowler is a welcome boost for the side. Hardik didn't bowl in the last season but, with his remodelled action, picked up the ball against England in the T20I series. However, whether he will bowl during the tournament is still

unclear.

Talking about other teams, Anjum, who is part of the *Star Sports* commentary team for this IPL, said the form of Virat Kohli and Ab de Villiers will be crucial for Royal Challengers Bangalore's chances despite the team having the likes of T20 specialist Glenn Maxwell.

"Like every year, there are high expectations from RCB. Last time, they came close (finished third after losing Qualifier 2 against Delhi Capitals). But again the onus lies on two players — Virat Kohli and Ab de Villiers. It's good to have Glenn Maxwell but Virat and Ab's form will be decisive," she said.

After the final T20I against England on March 20, Virat announced that he will open the innings in IPL as well. Anjum believes that it is a well-planned move by the Indian skipper to get into the groove ahead of the T20 World Cup in India later this year. "It (Virat as opener) just broadens the options. If he wants to open, no one will stop him and, I think,

before he decides to open, he definitely would have worked out the combination of the Indian line-up as well. The IPL matches are just going to give him that greater exposure to open and structure the innings because we (India) are leading into the World Cup.

"And if Virat and Rohit Sharma open in the World Cup and lay a strong foundation, it will be easy for players like Suryakumar and Hardik to follow," she added.

One thing that makes this edition different from yesteryears is that there are no home games for any team. It is going to play a key role in the tournament, according to the former India captain.

"The neutral venue concept will affect a lot in this tournament because teams make strategies according to home conditions. When it was announced that the tournament would be held in India, it meant seven home games for every team. So everyone picked the players according to that but now when it is not there, it will have an impact," Anjum opined.

On the "one player to watch out for" in the tournament, she put her weight behind Hardik Pandya. "He will have a fantastic tournament. He had one in Dubai too and, this time, he will do even better," she concluded.

Dallas double Leeds win

Bielsa pips Guardiola as 10-man Leeds shock Man City

AFP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester City suffered just a fourth Premier League defeat of the season as 10-man Leeds shocked the runaway leaders thanks to Stuart Dallas's double in a 2-1 win at the Etihad on Saturday.

Dallas opened the scoring three minutes before half-time, but hope of a famous win for Marcelo Bielsa's men seemed to have disappeared when captain Liam Cooper was shown a straight red card in first-half stoppage time.

The visitors withstood a City bombardment until Ferran Torres equalised 14 minutes from time.

But Leeds still summoned the energy to pose a threat on the counter-attack and gained their reward when Dallas slotted below Ederson.

Bielsa's first win in five meetings against Pep Guardiola propels Leeds to ninth in their first season back in the English top flight for 16 years.

Guardiola paid for heavily rotating his side with Wednesday's Champions League quarter-final, second leg, against Borussia Dortmund clearly his priority.

City still enjoy a 14-point lead at the top of the Premier League and need just 11 points from their remaining six matches to guarantee a third title in four years.

But Manchester United could close the gap to eight points should the Red Devils win their two games in hand, the first of which is away to Tottenham on Sunday.

NO DE BRUYNE
City noticeably missed Kevin De Bruyne, Ilkay Gundogan, Riyad Mahrez, Phil Foden and Ruben Dias, who



Leeds United's Stuart Dallas, right, reacts after scoring his team's second goal against Manchester City at Etihad Stadium. AP

were among the stars left on the bench by Guardiola.

Raheem Sterling's presence in what was largely a second string side is a reflection of how the England international has fallen down the pecking order in the past few weeks.

Sterling did not even get on as a substitute in the first leg against Dortmund and did little to further his case for selection in midweek by slicing a great chance wide from Fernandinho's cut-back.

Leeds had wasted a number of promising attacks with their final ball, but found the finishing touch on 43 minutes.

Patrick Bamford teed up Dallas to strike low in off the inside the post.

The visitors' joy was short-lived. Just four minutes later they were a man down.

Cooper played the ball first before crashing into Gabriel Jesus, but referee Andre Marriner upgraded a yellow card shown to the Leeds' captain to a red after reviewing the incident on the pitch-side screen.

Bamford was immediately sacrificed for more defensive cover in Pascal Struijk as Leeds battened down the hatches.

City were camped inside the Leeds half for almost the entire second-half, but were largely reduced to long-range efforts as Illan Meslier saved from Oleksandr Zinchenko, Fernandinho and Joao Cancelo.

Gundogan and Foden were introduced to bring more spark to City's attack, but De Bruyne was surprisingly left in reserve for the full 90 minutes.

Torres finally made City's dominance pay with a first-time finish after Fernandinho picked out Silva inside the area.

Yet, Leeds still went in search of a winner.

Raphinha outpaced Fernandinho, but was denied by a brilliant tackle by Brazilian compatriot Ederson.

Leeds' approach was rewarded in stoppage time when Dallas galloped clear down the middle of a vacant City defence to slot home.



PSG's Kylian Mbappe, second, right, celebrates with teammate Pablo Sarabia, second left, after he scores goal against Strasbourg. AP

Parisians keep pressure on Lille

AFP ■ STRASBOURG

Kylian Mbappe's goal set Paris Saint-Germain on their way to a 4-1 win at Strasbourg on Saturday as Mauricio Pochettino's side moved back to within three points of leaders Lille in the Ligue 1 title race.

Pablo Sarabia and Moise Kean also scored in the first half while Leandro Paredes netted the fourth from a free-kick as PSG made short work of a trip to Alsace that fell in between the two legs of their Champions League quarter-final tie against Bayern Munich.

Youngster Moise Sahi pulled a goal back for Strasbourg but the defending champions bounced back from losing at home to Lille last weekend and closed the gap on the leaders after they triumphed 2-0 at Metz on Friday.

Mbappe opened the scoring in the 16th minute, collecting a Paredes pass and cutting

into the box from the left before placing his shot through the legs of goalkeeper Matz Sels from a tight angle.

It was Mbappe's 21st Ligue 1 goal of the season and his 33rd in all competitions in 39 games.

Sarabia was handed a rare start and the Spaniard took advantage to make it 2-0 before the half-hour mark, controlling a Danilo Pereira pass on the edge of the box and slotting low into the corner.

Italian striker Kean added another on the stroke of half-time, firing home first-time from Mbappe's pass for his 18th goal since signing on loan from Everton.

Malian youngster Sahi pulled one back for Strasbourg within moments of coming on for just his second Ligue 1 appearance shortly after the hour mark, but Argentina midfielder Paredes secured PSG's victory from a 79th-minute free-kick given for a foul on Mbappe.

Liverpool end Anfield losing streak

AFP ■ LIVERPOOL

Trent Alexander-Arnold's injury time winner ended Liverpool's record run of home defeats to beat Aston Villa 2-1 and move up to fourth in the Premier League on Saturday.

The English champions had lost their previous six games at Anfield and fell behind again when Alisson Becker failed to keep out Ollie Watkins's first-half strike.

Liverpool were then controversially denied an equaliser as a dubious VAR review ruled out Roberto Firmino's reply.

But Mohamed Salah levelled just



before the hour mark before Alexander-Arnold responded in style to the criticism he has received of late.

The right-back was dropped from England manager Gareth Southgate's squad last month and was at fault for Real Madrid's second goal as Liverpool lost the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final against the Spanish giants 3-1 on Tuesday.

Alexander-Arnold's attacking output has been a prominent part of Liverpool's success in the last three seasons under Jurgen Klopp and the 22-year-old showed what he can do with a brilliant finish to curl the ball into the far corner.

Anshu, Sonam qualify for Tokyo

PTI ■ ALMATY

India's young wrestlers Anshu Malik and Sonam Malik produced impressive performances in the Asian Olympic Qualifiers here on Saturday to qualify for the Tokyo Games.

Anshu, 19, and Sonam, 18, making a steady transition from the junior to the senior circuit, joined senior pro Vinesh Phogat (53kg) in making the Olympics cut. India now have three women wrestlers, who will now fight for glory at the Summer Games. Vinesh had qualified through the 2019 World Championship.

Overall, India now have seven wrestlers who have qualified for the upcoming Games. Among men, Bajrang Punia (65kg), Ravi Dahiya (57kg) and Deepak Punia (86kg) have qualified in the men's free style event. While Anshu was dominant in 57kg competition, Sonam's resilience eventually helped her secure the quota and shut the door on Rio Olympic medalist Sakshi Malik.

Sonam announced her arrival by defeating Sakshi four times in recent trials, making the 62kg category her own.

Bayern worries grow before CL

AFP ■ MUNICH

Depleted Bayern Munich were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Union Berlin in the Bundesliga on Saturday, three days before their crunch Champions League return leg at Paris Saint-Germain.

Teenager Jamal Musiala beat three defenders to give injury-hit Bayern the lead midway through the first half at the Allianz Arena only for Marcus Ingvartsen to equalise for Union four minutes from time.

"That is very annoying," Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer told Sky after the late equaliser. "We played well over long stretches and would have deserved the victory."

In Paris on Tuesday, European champions Bayern need to overturn a 3-2 first-leg defeat and started reserve team players Tiago Dantas, on a season-long loan from Benfica, as well as Josip Stanisic against Union.

The club world champions have



nine players sidelined, including injured top-scorer Robert Lewandowski and winger Serge Gnabry, who is quarantined after testing positive for Covid-19. Musiala showed great footwork to pick his way through the Union defence for the opening goal midway through the second-half, only for Ingvartsen to

The home draw trims Bayern's lead at the top of the Bundesliga table to five points ahead of second-placed RB Leipzig, who romped to a 4-1 win at Werder Bremen.

Leipzig dominated throughout and raced into a 3-0 lead as Dani Olmo gave them the lead before Alexander Soerloth netted twice.

Although Milot Rashica pulled a goal back for Bremen, Marcel Sabitzer finished a move for the visitors to make it 4-1 midway through the second-half.

The sides meet again in Bremen on April 30 in the German Cup semi-finals.

Eintracht Frankfurt took another key step towards reaching the Champions League for the first time with a thrilling 4-3 win at home to Wolfsburg.

Borussia Moenchengladbach earned a 2-2 draw at Hertha Berlin despite playing 77 minutes a man down after goalkeeper Yann Sommer was shown an early red card for fouling Jhon Cordoba.

Pakistan take early lead

AFP ■ JOHANNESBURG

Mohammad Rizwan took inspiration from teammate Fakhar Zaman and steered Pakistan to their highest winning run chase as they beat South Africa by four wickets in the first T20 International at the Wanderers Stadium on Saturday.

Rizwan made an unbeaten 74 as Pakistan chased down a target of 189 with one ball to spare. Their previous highest T20 chase was 188 against Australia in Harare in 2018. Rizwan said the pitch was tricky

at the start of the chase but he and captain Babar Azam got the side off to a quick start before Babar was out with the total on 41 in the fifth over.

He was then joined by Fakhar, who scored an astonishing 193 not out in the second ODI on the same ground six days earlier. Fakhar made 27 off 19 balls before he was caught on the boundary off left-arm spinner Tabraiz Shamsi, who took two for 29.

But Rizwan said he modelled his innings on the way Fakhar played in the One-Day game.

"Fakhar's innings was on my

mind today, the way he played on this surface," said Rizwan. "I was taking my time knowing I could score later on." With a succession of power hitters in the side, Rizwan said he got a message from his team's dug-out that he must keep batting until the end.

Rizwan, who scored only 42 runs in three innings in Pakistan's 2-1 One-Day series win, was back in the form which earned him man of the series awards in both Test and T20 series against South Africa in Pakistan earlier in the year. He hit nine fours and two sixes.

Badosa ousts No.1 Barty

AFP ■ MIAMI

World number one Ashleigh Barty crashed out of the Charleston WTA quarter-finals on Friday, beaten in straight sets by 71st-ranked Spaniard Paula Badosa.

Badosa fired seven aces — three more than Barty — and saved 12 of 14 break points she faced on the way to a 6-4, 6-3 victory.

It's the biggest win of Badosa's career, the Spaniard having notched her first top-20 victory when she beat fifth-seeded Belinda Bencic in the 2nd round.

"I'm still a little bit shocked," Badosa admitted in a post-match TV interview, adding that when Barty's final forehand reeled out of court "I was like, 'What just hap-

pened?"

"But I'm quite happy with my match, the way that I managed my nerves. It was quite important because sometimes these matches are tough to close."

In the semi-finals Badosa will face Russia's Veronika Kudermetova, the 15th seed, for a spot in the championship final.

Badosa, a former French Open junior champion, is the lowest-ranked player to beat Barty since September 2019.

In other matches, Tunisia's Ons Jabeur defeated American Coco Gauff 6-2, 7-6 (7/2) to book a semifinal meeting with Danka Kovinic of Montenegro, a 6-7 (2/7), 7-5, 6-1 winner over Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva.

LOCAL EVENTS



SOUND IMAGES LIFT TROPHY

Sound Images defeated UP Timber by 50 runs to lift the 16th Timber Trophy at Ekana Stadium on Saturday. Batting first, Sound Images piled up 261 runs for the loss of nine wickets in the allotted 40 overs with Almas Shaikat (66) being the top scorer. Abhishek Singh claimed three wickets. In reply, UP Timber were bundled out for 211 runs. Ali Murtaza was the pick of the bowler with four wickets to his name.

BRIEF SCORES:

SI: 261 (Almas Shaikat 66, Mrityunjay 39, Adreel 28; Abhishek 46/3, Priyanshu 32/2) UPT: 211 (Sahab Yuvraj 61, Vishwajeet 34, Karan 32; Ali Murtaza 29/4, Anubhav 41/2)

INDIAN BANK BEAT UNION BANK

Indian Bank beat Union Bank by six wickets in a league match of RC Sanwal Inter-Bank Cricket Tournament at Ras Behari Tiwari Stadium on Saturday. In another matches, Magnum Bankers defeated Lucknow Metro Bank by six wickets while Uco Bank beat Canara Bank by 21 runs.

BRIEF SCORES:

Union Bank: 109 (Apurva Dhawan 29, Navyug Patel 23, Arvind Sharma 10; Avnish Pandey 2/18, Shubham Verma 1/21)

Indian Bank: 111 (Areesh 28, Abhishek Pandey 20, Anubhav 15; Shahhi Rawat 1/17)

Lucknow Metro Bank: 120 (Aman Yadav 30, Paras Nath 25, Deepak 23, Gaurav Mishra 20; Vivek Chaudhary 2/13, Piyush Ranjan 2/25) Magnum Bankers: 121 (Vaibhav P Singh 30, Umakant Dixit 23, Manish Verma 16, Piyush Ranjan 14; Padam 1/17, Pawan 1/19)

Uco Bank: 162 (Shashank 61, Varun Marwari 32, Gaurav Thakur 23, Rishabh 12; Pankaj 2/19) Canara Bank: 141 (Manish Rai 42, Deepak Kumar 18, Shashwat Raj 17, Pushpendra Singh 15; Abhishek Shukla 2/10, Shashank 2/10, Gaurav Thakur 2/32)

EASY VICTORY FOR MEGA STARS

Mega Stars registered an easy 58-run victory over MJ Group in a league match of the 2nd B&N Rama Corporate Cricket tournament at NDBG ground on Saturday.

BRIEF SCORES:

Mega Stars: 154 (Devang Shukla 35, Paras Jain 34, Karan Tandoori 20, Deepanshu Saxena 17; Anand Sahay 3/42) MJ GROUP: 96 (Diptesh Sachan 31, Vishal Kashyap 14, Mohd Wasi Ansari 12; Devang Shukla 2/7, Robin Gupta 2/8, Saurabh 2/16).

SINGLES

WATFORD CLOSER TO PL RETURN

LONDON: Ismaila Sarr scored twice as Watford defeated Reading 2-0 on Friday to edge closer to a return to the Premier League. Watford, relegated from the top flight last season, stay second, five points behind leaders Norwich. Crucially, they have an imposing 12-point lead over third-place Brentford. Reading remains in the final play-off spot in sixth place but are in danger of being overtaken by Bournemouth, who now have two games in hand.

IKEE MISSES OLYMPIC SPOT

TOKYO: Leukaemia survivor Rikako Ikee completed a clean sweep of four wins at Japan's Olympic swimming trials on Saturday — but missed out on an individual place at the Tokyo Games. Ikee, who only resumed training in March last year after being diagnosed with cancer in February 2019, won both the 50m butterfly and 50m freestyle to add to the two victories she claimed earlier this week. But her time of 24.84 sec in the 50m freestyle was not enough to earn her an individual berth at the Games.

RIJUJU INAUGURATES KISCE FOR ROWING

SRINAGAR: Sports Minister Kiren Rijju on Saturday inaugurated the Khelo India State Centre of Excellence (KISCE) for rowing at the Jammu and Kashmir Sports Council Water Sports Academy here. At present, the KISCE will focus on rowing and will be provided a first-time grant of ₹145.16 lakh and an annual recurring grant of ₹96.17 lakh.

ATK SIGN COLACO FROM HYDERABAD FC

HYDERABAD: Indian Super League side ATK Mohun Bagan has signed forward Liston Colaco from Hyderabad FC for the highest-ever transfer fee for an Indian player. Hyderabad FC and ATK Mohun Bagan agreed to the transfer for an undisclosed fee, the club said on Saturday. The 22-year-old will join the Mariners with effect from June 1.

ROMA KHANNA RESIGNS

NEW DELHI: Roma Khanna on Saturday stepped down as the Tournament Director of the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup and AFC Women's Asian Cup, to be held in India in 2022, citing personal reasons. Khanna had spearheaded the bid for the U-17 World Cup back in 2019, and was later appointed as the Tournament Director for the Local Organising Committee. She also successfully led the bid for AFC Women's Asian Cup, which India is set to host next year in January.

HANS WOMEN FC WIN DELHI FOOTBALL LEAGUE

NEW DELHI: Hans Women FC emerged as the champions of the Football Delhi league after defeating Hops FC by a solitary goal here on Saturday. In the closely contested final match held at Dr Ambedkar Stadium, Anushka Samuel scored the winning goal. Hero of the match in the final game was Deepika Venkatesh while Aveka Singh was declared the Golden Boot winner with 27 goals scored in eight matches.

2021 ASPIRE YOUNG ACHIEVERS ANNOUNCED

MILAN: Celebrating the spirit of awe-inspiring achievements by the young, in art, culture and sportsmanship, Aspire Circle on Thursday announced the 2021 Aspire Young Achiever Awards for three young trailblazers, Harshita Tater (National Gold medalist para athlete and an aspiring doctor), Suhana Narjinary (National champion TT player) and Tanshu (paralympic speed skater) for their outstanding feats in their respective domains. The young achievers identified by Aspire Circle this year, include trailblazers and national heroes from humble backgrounds, often before their peak performance. The awards will be presented online to the three young achievers during the annual ARC 2021 on Sunday.

'I like the darker side of people'



■ What is Bisaat about?
Bisaat is a chessboard of relationships, betrayal, deceit, lies and most importantly murder. While a murder mystery is generally devoid of deep relationships, Bisaat also has some fabulous take on the relationships that are on the darker side. This is what interested me even more to direct this series.

■ Can you talk me through the shooting process?

The shoot was to get over in 35 days and I took 50 days to shoot it. I think my company was conspiring to throw me out as a director. But, we ended up doing a fabulous job. I had a great cast to start with, Omkar, Sandeepa, Leena Jumani, Jia Mustafa and Coral Bhamra, all are good actors. But, I had some characters in my mind and I wanted the actors to be those people. It took a bit to bring that about. But, once we achieved that, we had a lot of fun playing with the characters and the story.

■ Why the delay?

I am slower than most directors. It takes me longer. You can't blame me. I am a film director. I am used to shooting 125 minutes and you ask me to shoot 400 minutes in 35 days. I can't be a Xerox machine. Also, I wanted the show to be nothing short of sparkling and I am proud to say that it is.

■ Did the response you got for the delay bother you?

I don't get bothered when I am making a movie. You need to make it properly, not that you have to throw caution to the wind, but you need time.

■ What kind of stories attract you?

People think I like horror, murder or thriller. But there is something deeper in that. I like the darker side of the people. All of us are two people, there's one person that we show to the world and the other that we keep private. I like to tell stories about this private person. That's where my interest lies. As storytellers you can decide whether you want to tell stories of these kinds of people or those kinds. That's what attracted me to Bisaat, it's about the dark side of the people — dark motives. There's a line: You are what you hide. You are what you Google also, but the first one is true too.

■ Does that mean thriller as a genre doesn't attract you?

Yes, not at all. I have done comedy like *Awaarapan* also, but that is for a laugh once in a while. But where ever there's a dark side of the human nature, it attracts me more.

■ Does it not bother you?

The dark side of the person is the honest side of the person, why get bothered about it. The dark side is also the spiritual side, by the way. Why? It's a different discussion.

■ What has been your most challenging project?

No one would trust me, if I say this.

But, it is Bisaat. A director syncs the entire story. When one takes a shot, for everybody on the set it's a scene, but I have to keep a watch on from where the characters are coming, where they will move and everything else. And when I started making the series, I thought it is so long and how will I maintain the emotional connect of the characters and how will I be able to send chills down the spine. So, I made a notepad on just the emotional moves of the characters and before every scene I had to go through it. And for a filmmaker who shoots two hours, it is easy to keep notes, but for this, I had maintain the combinations of relationships. That is what the biggest challenge I had faced — to make a comprehensive and cohesive piece of writing and directing of 400 minutes is a tough task.

■ What is that one thing you can't compromise on while being on the sets?

Coffee. My cappuccino machine has to be there.

■ What next?

A huge pipeline for MX player actually. We are in the process of doing *Anamika* with Sunny Leone, I am directing it. There's *Maya 4*, which my daughter is directing and *Twisted 4*. I want to have four hits with this platform, that's the ultimate aim.

Talktime

VIKRAM BHATT

The director known for his slick thrillers and murder mysteries is back with yet another whodunnit. Bhatt speaks with Musba Hashmi about Bisaat, all set to release on MX Player on April 15, explaining why he got interested in making the series, how he took 50 days to shoot and one thing he can't compromise on the sets

I AM SLOWER THAN MOST DIRECTORS. HENCE, THE DELAY. YOU CAN'T BLAME ME. I AM A FILM DIRECTOR. I AM USED TO SHOOTING 125 MINUTES AND YOU ASK ME TO SHOOT 400 MINUTES IN 35 DAYS. I CAN'T BE A XEROX MACHINE. ALSO, I WANTED THE SERIES TO BE NOTHING SHORT OF SPARKLING

MUSBA HASHMI catches up with HYDROMAN aka JAYDEEP GOHIL, India's first underwater dancer, who is setting the stage on water with his dance moves and is all set to feature in &flix's music video *Awesome In Disguise*



Hydroman aka Jaydeep Gohil

NO TIME TO BREATHE

Superheroes are, at all times, expected to have super powers that can help them go on a rescue trail and protect the world from the eye of the evil. However, not all superheroes are born with magical powers, some develop it over time.

The latest edition to your list of favourite superheroes can be Hydroman. Who is he, you ask? A Marvel or a Bollywood character? None of these. Jaydeep Gohil, a 26-year-old Rajkot-based mechanical engineer, has taken the Internet by storm through his underwater stunts and dance moves. To cut it short, he rules water. Hence, the name.

For Gohil, it started with a passion for swimming. At five, he was introduced to bathing at river banks. Since then, water became his friend. However, the passion took a backseat when dance came on his cards.

It was only one fine day, when his father, on a lighter vein, asked him to couple his dance with water. No matter how vague an idea it was, it got Gohil thinking.

"That's when I thought why not dance underwater. I began researching on the art

form. I wanted to seek inspiration from some international artists as well. However, to my surprise, I realised that there was no one who was doing it," Gohil tells you.

This left Gohil with no option but to take to trial and error. He decided to reach out to a local swimming pool and implement his thoughts.

"Initially, it was difficult to understand where to begin from. Gradually, I started choreographing songs and practice them underwater. I continued doing it until I realised the need of a mirror to keep a watch on my moves," he says.

Without having to guess, what happened next — Gohil had his practice tank set-up in his home. This gave him more time to practice while also helping him to see his moves.

The another problem in the pipeline was that it was only him who knew what he was doing down the water. The task was to showcase the art to the world.

"I decided to buy a camera.

I take breaks to breathe, but they can't be obvious. We can't let the audience know that I am going up the tank to breathe. This will make them lose attention. I modify the steps to make it look natural and in sync

The next thing that I needed was a tripod. To not put too much of financial pressure on my family, I decided to make one myself and my father's workshop," Gohil explains.

However, even the camera didn't help much, because Gohil was unable to shoot himself properly — sometimes he went out of frame, while the other he was cropped.

The next thing that Gohil could think of was a glass tank. As easy it may sound to have one, Gohil had to take no for an answer from his architects, until one, finally, agreed.

"Many people told us that it wasn't possible and that it will break into pieces if I went there. But I didn't stop trying. Finally, my father's friend said that he can help. With instructions from designer's in Dubai we were finally able to have one. Made from 24 mm glass, it was like a dream for me," he says.

Now, the glass tank travels everywhere with Gohil. It needs a crane for its placements.

While this was all about Gohil's journey, what one may

be excited to read about is how he manages to pull it off. There is no rocket science behind it.

"I am one of the few people who, at ease, can pull this off. My forelimbs are larger than my body. It helps me to maintain my balance while swimming. Not to mention, water is my comfort zone. When people find it impossible, I often think to myself 'why do they feel like that? It's easy,' he tells you.

Most of Gohil's performances are five-minute long. He can manage to stay in water for three-and-a-half minutes without much motion. But during his performance, he makes sure to take frequent breaks for oxygen. "These breaks can't be obvious. We can't let the audience know that I am going up the tank to breathe. This will make them lose attention. I modify the steps to make it look natural. Take for example, if I am taking a flip, I will go up breathe and then come down. This is all in sync," he explains.

Gohil's art was sufficient to

take him to India's Got Talent, while also giving him a chance to share his watery stage with Akshay Kumar on the show. This followed by all the name and fame. However, it was short lived.

"There was a time when I had no work for six months. People started forgetting me. It made me question my survival in the field. I was disheartened and asked my father if I could join him at his workshop. He told me to focus on my craft," he says.

This did affect Gohil, but not for long. He utilised the time to amp up his craft and come up with better concepts.

If you think this is the end of the twists and turns in his life. There is more.

"In 2016, I was called for an show in Chennai for the India's first and largest walk-through aquarium. It may sound beautiful to you. But, here's a catch. I had to perform with 10 sharks in the aquarium. This, at first, sounded unreal. But then, they explained that I have to wear a wet suit, the one that their staff wears when they go to feed them and it will go well," Gohil tells you.

During the practice sessions in that aquarium with 10 not-so-friendly companions, Gohil had a narrow escape.

"The basic thing that we should know is to not touch the sharks at all. If you did, it will, for sure, bite you and it it got to taste your blood, you should be prepared to say goodbye. I didn't realise, and while dancing, my hand was about to touch a shark. My cameraperson who was shooting this from outside the aquarium had a mini heartattack. He immediately signalled me to stop and come out. When I did, he showed me the footage of the blunder that I was about to do," Gohil recalls.

That definitely left Gohil with a strong urge to leave the show and go back, but he knew it wasn't a professional thing to do. "I completed it and gradually my fear too went away. I did four 15-minute shows in a day, for six days," Gohil, who is featuring in &flix's music video *Awesome In Disguise* in collaboration with the leading multilingual pop-folk band 'When Chai Met Toast', tells you.

Gohil is nothing but happy and excited to be a part of the video and to see his work getting more recognition.



'Composing for Big B and AB has been an amazing experience'

Composer GOURAV DASGUPTA, speaks with SHALINI SAKSENA about this latest single, composing for Big B and Abhishek Bachchan, and working with Emraan Hashmi

■ What is Saiyyonee about and what was the best compliment you received?

The single is the beginning and revival of many things personal and professional at my end. After nearly five years of Gourov-Roshin, this is my first solo venture. I had the same anxiety I had when I did my first film *Dus Kahaaniyaan* with Sanjay Gupta. The single is my first release with Sony Music. Sameerji's (Anjaan) poetry is one of the strongest pillars of this song. The video feat with Asim Riaz and Shivaleeka Oberoi and directed by Kookie Gulati has done wonders. The best compliment I've got is that people feel they are finally getting to hear the real Gourov.

■ Tell us about your tracks in movies Chehre.

The movie has a larger-than-life track, *Rangdariya*. It's the only song in the film and was an honour to be amidst legends like (Amitabh) Bacchan *saab* and Emraan (Hashmi). There was a lot of pressure as the music and Emraan went hand in hand and we needed a song that could hit the ball out of the park for him and me.

■ What is your favourite song from The Big Bull?

It is *Ishq Namaaza* followed by *Hawaan ke sheher mein*. Kookie Gulati the director fought against a lot of odds to have these songs in his film as he personally believed that these songs had the potential to be iconic and when Ajay Devgn sir heard them, he immediately gave a go ahead. Though the film is an OTT release, I am keeping my fingers crossed and hope that the music reaches out to all the audiences.

■ And what about the music in Hello Charlie?

Gypsy guitar is a quirky and beautiful love song. This was everyone's most favourite song, I am told. However, the song has been chopped from the film and is now promoted only as a promotional track. This movie too is an OTT release. In fact, they forgot to put Shellee (lyricist) and my name in the credits. Extremely disappointed and heartbroken as Excel is supposed to be a production house which respects musicians. But such is the life of an artist.

■ You have composed the tracks for Big B (For Chehre) and Abhishek Bachchan (For Big Bull). Any anecdotes you would like to share?

It was an honour and a thrill when Emraan told me that Bacchan *saab* heard *Rangdariya* and said that it's one of the best songs he's heard in the decade. I jumped with joy like a kid. It made my day. Working with Abhishek B was amazing as well. He is so funny, down to earth and has an immense knowledge about music. In between shoots, Kookie, AB and I used to sit, jam and ideate on many new things. That's how *Hawaan ke sheher*, my second track in *The Big Bull* was conceived. I'm extremely proud of the work I've done for them.

■ Emraan Hashmi movies are known for superhit soundtracks. What was his reaction after listening to the track?

He is a musician who isn't a musician. You can't fool him with a mediocre melody. Luckily we were already working on some music for another film and he was familiar with my soundscape. It's no mean feat to score for him. This was a dream come true. I'm hoping there's more to come.

■ How did it feel to have three films releasing on the same date — April 9, 2021?

Chehre, for now has been postponed. It's surreal especially since my last release *Jawaani Jaaneman* seems ages ago due to the lockdown. It's the same feeling I had when I arrived in this city a decade back with pennies in my pocket and dreams in my eyes. I pray the audience accepts and loves Gourov Dasgupta as they had done in the past.

■ What are your future projects?

There are quite a few in the pipeline. But don't want to jinx them by talking about them. Once they are ready for release people will get to know about them.

Story of American dreams. Struggle & sacrifice

DANISH RENZU, a Kashmiri director and screenwriter, tells MUSBA HASHMI about the inspiration behind *The Illegal*, which is playing on Amazon Prime Video, as also his journey to becoming an independent filmmaker

Every film starts with a mere thought which turns into a story. But behind this single thought, there is a lot of inspiration that one needs. For *The Illegal*, director Danish Renzu's inspiration was from his own experiences of working in the US.

By living the American dream — from being a student to working a couple of jobs — he has seen it all. But it's not what people think it is, there's much more. A lot of struggle and sacrifice by immigrants.

"While being in the US, I have met a lot of fellow immigrants and the one thing that was common was that they all made sacrifices in order to take care of their families back home. So, *The Illegal* is the story of these individuals who might have not been able to make it big, but had the courage to not give up. My experience coupled with the experiences of people I met there, is weaved into this film," Renzu explains. The process of documenting the experiences in a movie wasn't tough for Renzu, because he had bril-

liant actors who were able to justify their roles.

"Suraj (Sharma) did a great job. He connected with the character, Hassan, since he is also an immigrant, is from Delhi and has lived in the US. Even his age matched with that of the character. There were so many factors that contributed in bringing that authenticity to the character. Hence, it wasn't that difficult to bring it all together since I had good talent on board," he says. Not to mention, Suraj was Renzu's first and obvious choice.

While we all know how hard it is for actors to make a place for themselves in the industry, but it is rare that we talk about how equally challenging, if not more, it is for the filmmakers as well.

Renzu, who started back in 2015, says it was a career switch for him from engineering to filmmaking. "It was a territory that I didn't know much about before I signed for it. My films have been independently produced by me. It's been a learning experience for



Danish Renzu, director-screenwriter

me to make a film from the scratch," he says. The good side is that there was no pressure on him from anyone. He was independent to tell the kind of sto-

ries he wanted to. "However, the tough part is to put it all together.

The post-production work, the release, it takes time because you have to go through a lot of film festival journeys. There's travel involved, you have to wait for things," Renzu explains.

The film was originally slated to release last year but because of the pandemic it got postponed. But for Renzu, even the waiting time was something to remember. "It was difficult, but worth it," he says.

What, of course, did trouble Renzu was the fact that he was leaving a stable job to charter unknown waters.

"I did feel like quitting every second time. But then, remembering my nine to five job, I realised that I wasn't meant for it. Besides, filmmaking is such a beautiful job. There's so much you can do when you are making a film. Even though there are times when you feel like things are not working for you, but then the experience itself gives you the motivation to keep on working," he says.

the pioneer agenda

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



FROM THE INSIDE

A rare Jugalbandi

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

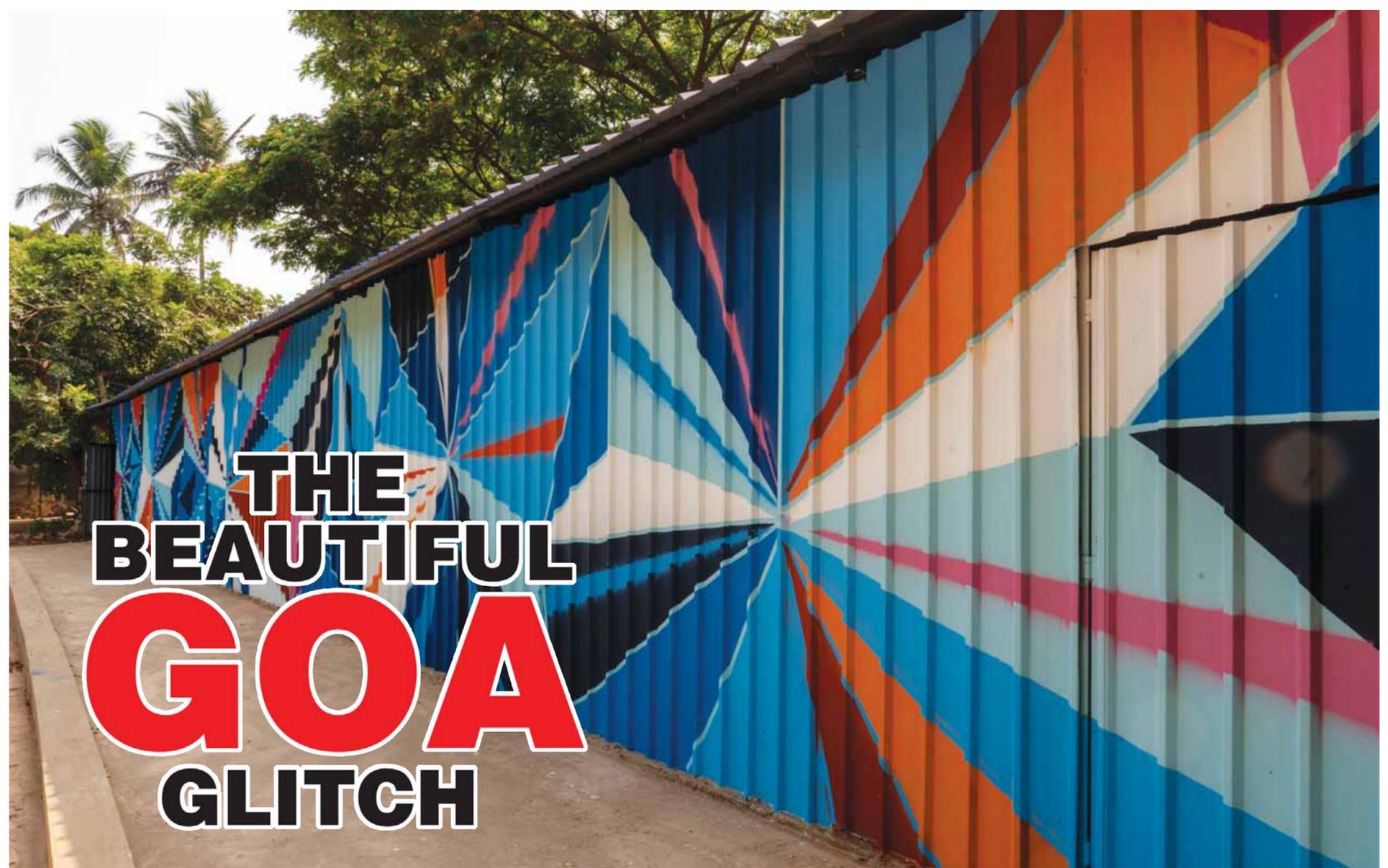
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Controlling monkey mind

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



THE BEAUTIFUL GOA GLITCH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

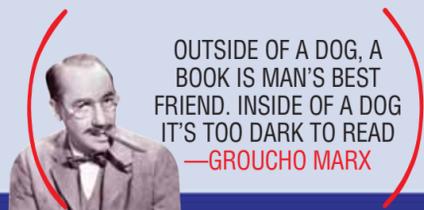
This is also not the first time that Kureshi has lent his creativity to a cause. Kureshi has recently partnered with Art For Change, a virtual art challenge and exhibition, as one of the jury members. The initiative aims to change the narrative by turning the focus away from the victim and putting the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

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

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

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

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



The book not only provides the political account of Vajpayee and Advani, it also delicately steers through all the major events of the Indian politics, mainly right-wing, writes MOHAMMAD IRSHAD

A rare Jugalbanti

The book, *Jugalbandi: The BJP before Modi* by Vinay Sitapati presents a fascinating account to trace the journey of the two tallest and major drivers of the 'India Right-wing' as they remained at the helm and navigated through the testing times beginning from Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to managing and executing the affairs of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh (1951) and Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). Book offers a larger ambit to study the rise of LK Advani and AB Vajpayee and analytical chronology of all the organisations cemented on the idea to unite Hindus that is Hindu Mahasabha, RSS (1925), Bhartiya Jan Sangh (1951), VHP (1964), BJP (1980) and Bajrang Dal (1984) and Sawdeshi Jagran Manch (1991).

Sitapati, an academic's shadow falls over the book. He is aptly thoughtful in metaphorically chosen title; *Jugalbandi* — demonstrates the relationship between Vajpayee and Advani — means the melody of the ragas in Indian classical music concerts by two musicians playing different instruments, however perfectly in tune with the other. Neither of the artistes does survive under the shadow of the other, instead mutually compliment to mesmerise through that music recital. Sitapati had pitchfully utilised all the available resources, to tease out the argument to his book and left a mark of solid scholarship. It took him three straight years to complete book.

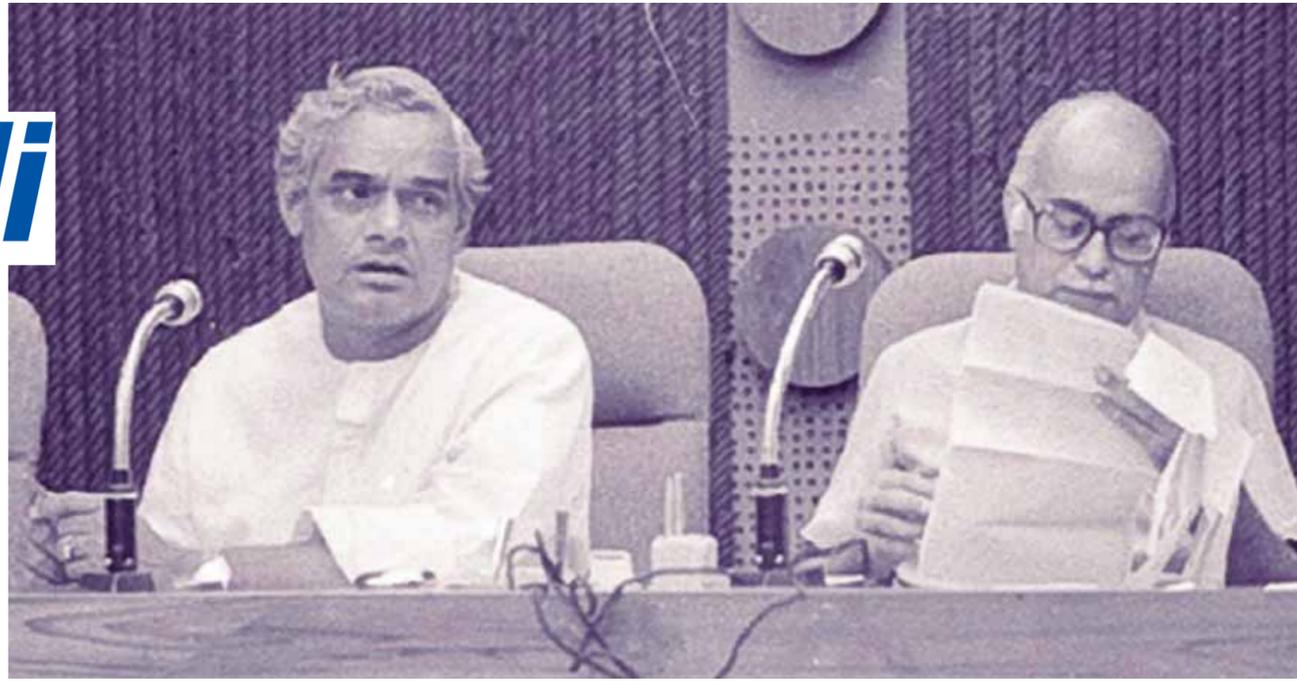
Book not only provides the political account of Vajpayee and Advani, it also delicately steers through all the major gleaming events of the India politics mainly right-wing, who have marked a substantial presence on the political map of this country. Markedly, ranging from their struggle — to register mass acceptability, electorally — prevailing in the early years of the post-independent India to the rise of *bahujan* politics, Khalistan movement in Punjab globalisation and Babri Masjid demolition movement. Conspicuous shift had taken place in 1980, the author says: "After decades in which Advani was subordinate to Vajpayee, by 1980 their relationship had become more equal. While Advani had always needed Vajpayee, he was now needed. They were now a classical *jugalbandi*." (p 108-109) Before 1980,

Vajpayee with support of Advani was busy crafting a space for himself by political burying leaders like Balraj Madhok — founded ABVP in 1948 — ML Sodhi, Nanaji Deshmukh, and others.

First chapter of the book puts light on events that caused the emergence of RSS (1925) and Hindu Mahasabha and prepares a background which helped Advani and Vajpayee joined politics with a resolve to unite the Hindus of all sects. Sitapati, theoretically spurns a widely believed argument followed after the murder of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, that Godse was a direct beneficiary/borrower of RSS' religious-political ideas — on the contrary, he argues far from supporting political violence, RSS had wanted nothing to do with politics during this period (p. 33). He maintained considering Godse's differences with RSS, Godse went on to repeatedly criticise him throughout the mid-1940s. Book detests the fact that RSS was remotely involved in the murder of the Mahatma Gandhi. This could be a matter of great further academic dispute.

Through the journey of both the leaders — nurtured by the RSS — during the formative years of the modern Indian state, book exposes the hypocrisy and inconsistency in their ideology to accomplish political goals, whether it was their shift from adopting 'Gandhian Socialism' to drift towards capitalism as a core economic principle and approach towards the minorities especially Muslims and Christians. Jinnah grandson, Nusli Wadia, was the first one wealthiest business person to fund the party; Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS) and BJP find no hesitation in accepting the donation from him. Advani perhaps paved his debt back to Nusli's grandfather, Jinnah, — founder of Pakistan — during his visit to Pakistan and hailing him as 'secular', 'Great Man' and Apostle of 'Hindu-Muslim Unity'. In my reading, this 'political *jugalbandi*' was to deceptively trick non-Hindus to garner the political acceptability to further marginalise them masking their much admired fascist ambition under the garb of so called secularism followed by Vajpayee to spear the right-wing.

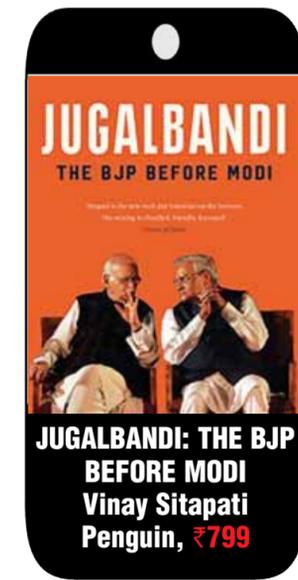
Jugalbandi of the Advani and Vajpayee took shape on the foundation of organisational Hindu unity and theocratic principles, meanwhile if we take to



first decade of post-independent India, *Jugalbandi* of Nehru and Patel build on democratic-secular values, which thrive on adequate scope to diverse viewpoints, still remains as a major glue to unite the country.

In Sitapati's argument there is a fundamental flaw, he only takes into account Vajpayee's verbal conflict with RSS on various subjects but it largely ignores his assessment on the basis of the power and positions including prime ministership, happily cherishing on the RSS' support in his political life, more than benefit taken by Advani, therefore Sitapati's argument fails on merit, as Vajpayee markedly compromised on his principles in public life to peddle the idea, Right wing fundamentally stands for.

Book suggests Vajpayee's politics was formulated during the Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru's golden era perhaps that amplified his never ending discontent with the RSS in contrast his public political actions largely contradict Nehruvian vision except on countable occasions. For instance, after the Babri Masjid demolition, Vajpayee is famously known to be quite disturbed; however, he followed the party route and surprisingly demonstrated himself as secular leader to later siege the power in Delhi. This morally does not carry any weight as Vajpayee never distanced himself officially to fight back the unjust, inhuman and degrading ideas. It, however, will remain a perennial irony that the person who drove the rath



to Ayodya to mobilise mass support in favour of the Ram Mandir, could not secure the seat of prime minister and finished in his self-nurtured party with humiliation and forced to live life in political seclusion of never fading quarters of the Lutyens Delhi.

When the right-wing could not obtain desired outcome, they tacitly decided to follow the essence of *Brahman* — described as absolute knowledge in *Advaita vedantic* philosophy — known to us as *neti neti* (not this, not this), similarly, without projecting a clear vision of its hierarchical and communal philosophy to gather support from all non-Hindus to establish and politically empower RSS and BJP. *Neti neti*, basically, here means it advocates nothing but accepts everything as long as it suits them to expand organisation, to secure the throne of Delhi, which Indian right-wing always imagined ever since its inception, to declare India as '*Hindu Rashtra*'. Had Deendayal Upadhyay and Balraj Madhok survived strategies employed against them, we would have read their *Jugalbandi*.

Book seems lost in its argument as it attempts to strike a balance when two contentious historical subjects require the definite response of the author. It could be an intentional move, since the book is devoid of mere subjective convictions and prejudices as the author approaches them purely, while using considerable references.

Despite other things, it is the Hindu nationalism and call for the organisational unity that kept them together. They were devout to their ideology. At the end book, attempts to see through the new developing *jugalbandi* between Modi-Shah.

Book points out their similarities and dissimilarities; as new on-going *jugalbandi* is more hostile towards the opposition though adhere to age old conviction of public display of internal unity (p 299). New *jugalbandi*'s expanded social base from upper castes, to tribals, middle castes and even dalits (p 300), mastered the strategy to hide their failures by directly channelising the Hindu anger towards the Muslims on all the matters, to conveniently safeguard the ideology and galvanising the support for the larger good of Hindutva. It aims at Hindutvisation of Dalits, Advanis and OBC, this trait is a unique and distinct attribute of the Modi-Shah *jugalbandi*. It is authoritative, less democratic in its functioning as only the few are allowed to speak the truth to power. The Vajpayee-Advani relationship was more ideological than the Modi-Shah's relationship. But still to conclude their relationship, could be a little unfair as long as the artistes of new *jugalbandi* (Modi-Shah) have not gone off stage after the delivering performance.

This book engages the reader and is written sedately. Sitapati has interwoven all the major events and figures essentially required to make it an intriguing read to students of right-wing politics and post-colonial Indian Politics in general.

The reviewer is Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Indraprastha College for Women, DU

NEW ARRIVALS

WRITTEN ON THE WIND
Anuradha Kumar-Jain
Rupa, ₹295

Set in pre-Partition Lahore, from the turn of the century to the time of Independence, this is the story of two women, both strong and willing to challenge the limits of the acceptable, but in their own way and under very different circumstances. Harjeet, belonging to a landlord family of Punjab, is married to Gautam, from an equally prominent Khatri family of Lahore. Deeply dissatisfied with her life, harjeet enters into a passionate affair with Haider, a Muslim. The book explores their relationship against the backdrop of the growing Hindu-Muslim divide, and the politically turbulent times they are living in. Author Anuradha Kumar Jain offers a powerful accounts of desire, love, society and politics, and takes a probing look at the struggles and aspiration of a nation and its people.

#ME TOO
Karan Puri
Invincible Publisher, ₹199

The book is a miniature of human life as it comprises real-life sentiments. Readers can feel this book close to their life as they continue floating between emotions like dreams, passion, love, betrayal etc. just like in real life. The book talks about speaking up for oneself irrespective of their age, gender, profession, and financial background, etc. *#MeToo* comes as an eye-opener for the people who think it is okay to be hurt when it is not. In India, where individuals and institutions give tremendous amounts of significance to respect and social image, living with hampered self-esteem is incorrect. The book highlights that every human is eligible for personal space. Anybody violating the pre-defined boundary is dis-respecting and harming that individual space of yours which is nothing but a serious crime.

Dear partner, this is for you. Menopause can be a big deal, and maybe your partner is having a hard-enough time to have given you this book. This is unlikely to be easy. Sorry. This is not a slight blip in the road; you are effectively on a journey together that will take some time to get to the end — estimates range from 4 to 14 years. There will be challenges and setbacks but, at the end of it, you and your partner have the potential to be astounding. But you will both need to work together and have a clear understanding of what you want from this second phase of your lives together.

The fact that she has given you this book is an indication that she loves you and wants your support. She is also saying that she is in need of some words to successfully communicate with you what this is like.

THE ICEBERG EFFECT

Menopause is like an iceberg, in that the majority of what is going on is beneath the surface. You might think you are getting the rough end of the deal. While I sympathize with you, I can assure you, you are not.

Your partner's hormones are slowly but surely receding to their steady post-Menopausal state. They play such a pivotal role in her sense of who she is, and how she is in the world that as they diminish, they cause havoc with her sense of self and her day-to-day behaviour. Their increasing absence delivers a whole host of symptoms as well.

You are likely at the sharp end of her symptoms, vicariously experiencing them with her. Most women require reassurance that their partners are still committed to them and the relationship. It's easy to believe that you're all right and that this is her problem. To some degree it is, but it would be unfair of you to believe that this was com-

FOR YOUR PARTNER

Your Second Phase: Reclaiming Work & Relationships During & After Menopause by Kate Usher is a survival guide for women to cope with menopause at work, home and play. An edited excerpt:



pletely the case.

You are a team of two that no doubt has had to face adversity before. How did you manage it? What was the dynamic between you? Is this the same or different? If it's the same, due to its unpredictability or that one of you needs additional consideration and support, you already have a model of how to work together. If it's different, what kind of different is it? If it's different because it was you who needed support and now it's her, then there is an element of quid pro quo. How did she manage it, what did she do that was so effective and also, what was ineffective and why? These are all

things you both can learn from. Discuss between you what worked and what didn't and identify what you can use here.

WHAT IS THIS THING THAT'S HAPPENING TO HER ... AND ME?

Earlier in this book, you will find a section on symptoms where we discuss the variability in women's experience of Menopause by duration, type and their severity. Please read through it, as awareness is a considerable part of successfully supporting your partner.

First, Menopause is not a sprint, which is essentially what the monthly period experience was, or even an 800m run,

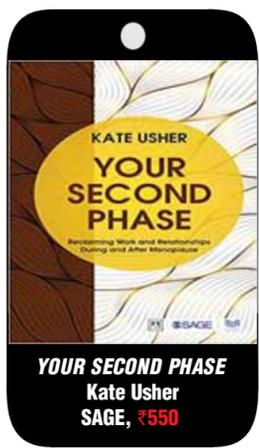
which was pregnancy. No, Menopause is an endurance race, and it goes on for years. With this in mind, it's important to make yourself aware of what your partner might be experiencing and think about what support she might need.

Please note, this does not give her a licence to be revolting to you without any form of comeback. If her behaviour makes her more difficult to handle than a bag of poisonous snakes, you have a right to say so. This is about creating a psychologically safe place for both of you to air your grievances without a shouting match or sulky silences. This space should

be non-judgmental, with no fear of consequences. You are adults and now is the time to behave like it.

FIRESIDE CHAT

Where do the two of you get uninterrupted time to chat face-to-face? Whether over breakfast, dinner or some other time, whenever it is, choose a day when you know neither of you will be preoccupied or focused on something else. Be clear that this is a conversation about understanding what is happening and what it feels like for her. Make sure you are actively listening - a method of intently listening to



what the other person is saying whilst giving them your full attention.

Once you have actively listened, ask questions and share how you feel about it. Please note, this about listening, sharing and reconnecting, not about point scoring or arguing. If you find that you are descending into this, you may need to walk away and come back later. You are both adults and equal partners — you are not a winner or a loser, a leader or a follower, in charge or subservient. You are a team of two equal parts.

Excerpted with permission from *Your Second Phase: Reclaiming Work and Relationships During and After Menopause* by Kate Usher, published by SAGE Publications India.

CHINA'S GAME ON NORTH KOREA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Communist neighbour.

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

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

Beijing has played the role of a powerbroker during all

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(The writer an expert on international affairs)

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



MAKHAN SAIKIA

PERSPECTIVE

No Olympic participation: Kim's message for Biden

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

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

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

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

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



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

reverse its Olympics decision. North Korea has shown "a coronavirus-related neurosis since it declared an emergency anti-virus system in January last year," said Park Won Gon, a professor of North Korea studies at Seoul's Ewha

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

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



month-long closure of its international borders and the departure of foreign nationals. North Korea still officially claims to be coronavirus free, an assertion many foreign experts dispute.

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

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

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

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

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

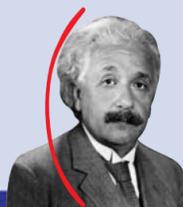
There's been little progress in nuclear talks the past two years. North Korea recently fired two ballistic missiles into the sea in the first such weapons tests in a year. Kim Yo Jong has warned Washington not to "cause a stink" and called South Korea's president "a parrot raised by America."

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

Analyst Seo said North Korea likely wasn't sure about the benefits of attending the Tokyo Games because Biden has made it clear that he won't engage in made-for-TV summits with Kim Jong Un like his predecessor Donald Trump did. "They knew that they would return home empty-handed from Tokyo," Seo said.

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

(With inputs from AP)



NO PROBLEM CAN BE SOLVED FROM THE SAME LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS THAT CREATED IT —ALBERT EINSTEIN



YOUR WEEK AHEAD

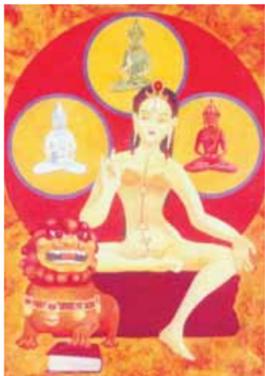
MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

Those seeking fitness must follow a proper workout regimen. Negativity around and within is disappearing. Your presence of mind and wisdom is unmatched. You feel strong both physically and mentally. Professionally, you will be working hard but results are awaited. You find it difficult to earn accolades for a job well done. Be careful on the financial front. Reschedule your investments. Restrict your expenditure as this will help you to maintain balance. On the relationship front, a fresh start is indicated. You are not ready for a commitment yet, even though others might be pressing you for one. Now is the time to make it. This is a positive period for your love life.

Lucky number 20
Lucky colour Mauve
Lucky day Monday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

This week you need to be strict and draw a line in certain matters. No compromise should be made on the health front. Direct or indirect spiritual influence is needed to bring balance in life. Your casual attitude in health may result in seasonal ailments. Be cautious of cold, cough, constipation, bowel syndrome and weight related problems. On the professional front, the situation is getting better and stronger for you. You are ready to take any type of challenge. You are creative and very enterprising. If you have applied for a job, you may get an interview call this week. Shifting or change of office or home is likely. In love relations, a better understanding between you and your partner is indicated. Allow your partner to have his/her space.

Lucky number 18
Lucky colour Silver
Lucky day Wednesday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

In terms of health, you need to be practical. Listen to the body, and not the heart. You have to change your food habits or craving for sweet food. You will have to make some efforts to improve your health situation. You need more exercise, nutritional education to improve your health. At work, something planned meticulously is likely to take off smoothly if you go with the flow. Be cautious in your verbal communication. Face the challenges with a cool mind. Your ability to logic and reasoning are giving you full benefits in this week. On the personal front, feel free to express your feelings. If you have some loving words to say, say them now before it is too late. Attending a family function is likely.

Lucky number 8
Lucky colour Magenta
Lucky day Friday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

You need to think about improving your health. Your health and feelings of well-being should be a priority. This is a great time to take some time off and just go for an improved lifestyle, nutrition and balancing your work. A need for balance in body, mind and soul is required. You need to have patience at the workplace. Make strategies to get more outputs and productive results but try to keep it to yourself. You may need some assistance to find a better approach to work and don't hesitate to ask. If you're looking for work, you may need to look in a different way or a different field than the one you've been pursuing. On the relationship front, warmth, care and concern for each other at home and in a loving relationship is indicated.

Lucky number 17
Lucky colour Green
Lucky day Saturday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

Value your health and make it a priority. Count your blessings. Your health may not be all that good as you would like it to be, but it is better than that of many other people. Be grateful for what you have. Career-wise, you must not impose restrictions on yourself. Be careful in your communication. If you are bent upon thrusting your suggestions down somebody's throat, don't get surprised if she or he rebels. Arguments and conflicts are on the cards which will go against you. On the personal front, make peace with someone, who seems to be against you. There is a need for liberating the mind and reconnecting with the heart. You need to reintroduce trust and find a way of freeing yourself from suspicion, mistrust and jealousy.

Lucky number 6
Lucky colour Purple
Lucky day Friday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

A good message in terms of your health is on the cards. Those who are waiting for test results need to know that nothing so serious is indicated. You need a small course of medication to free yourself from the health problem you are suffering from. Increase intake of liquids, juices and fibrous food in your diet. On the work front, new opportunities will be on the horizons making you hopeful about the future. Money inflow looks good this week. A prestigious assignment is yours if you play your cards right. On the relationship front, something may be troubling. Serious differences with spouse may take place. You can be stubborn when the circumstances demand but make an exception when your near and dear ones are involved. Don't be in too much of a hurry.

Lucky number 13
Lucky colour Brown
Lucky day Saturday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

This week you will manage balancing challenges and blessings with ease. This will improve your health and bring great hope. You will be full of life this week. The negativity in the past is dissolved. You are hopeful and playful now. Spending money on medical tests, for better living is on the cards. On the career front, you have some plans in your mind. It could be a change of job, or starting a new venture or any other thing that enhances your liability. Even if things have been lousy at work for the last few months, there is cause for hope and positive anticipation. In terms of love, you are ready to start something new. If you are in a committed relationship, there's something positive on the cards.

Lucky number 3
Lucky colour Pink
Lucky day Sunday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

This week you need a break. Take time out of your monotonous schedule. Those waiting for test results are likely to get favourable news. You may take spirituality as a stress buster and lead a healthy life. This is the right time to get involved in Yoga, Pranayam and meditation. Good news awaits this week on the career front. At work, someone's advice will come in handy in tackling a complicated issue. You may be tempted to take on more duties and responsibilities. Regularise your work. On the personal front, you might be having some doubts about the issues regarding the ancestral property. Discuss them with someone you trust in the family. Worry on accord of children's future, their study, marriage and expenses is indicated.

Lucky number 15
Lucky colour Sky Blue
Lucky day Thursday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

This week you will feel enthusiastic and adventurous enough to take on challenges life throws at you with full spirit. You are on the right path on the health front. Your health concern is paying you rich dividends now. You feel very chirpy, vibrant, energetic and full of life. Your positive mindset and cheerfulness will add charm to your personality. Work-wise, you take life easy with a positive mindset and stay focused on your work. Your mind and thoughts are in harmony. There are chances that others might take advantage of your efforts. Use your judgment, instead of blindly following orders to remain on the right track. On the personal front, great fun is in store. Your goodwill and reputation will pay you rich dividends.

Lucky number 14
Lucky colour Green
Lucky day Thursday



CANCER June 21-July 22

This week you will feel lost due to work overload. Neglecting your health at this point is not advisable. Be alert physically and mentally. Listen to your body. Nurture it, care for it and feed it with natural food. Avoid junk and oily food. You have to give up all the bad habits. Prevention is better than cure. On the work front, you may be moving to a new position or a new set of responsibilities. Promotion, hike in salary or business profit is on the cards. You feel at ease on the financial level. Business expansion plans could materialise this week. This is a good week for students. On the personal front, something undesirable may occur on an emotional level. You may lose your cool in a strenuous relationship.

Lucky number 12
Lucky colour Peach
Lucky day Tuesday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

This week you will be filled with energy and vitality. Your body, mind and soul are in perfect harmony. You are focused and know what you want from life. You are smart enough to bring balance between professional and personal commitments. On the work front, leaving nothing pending at work will work in your favour. If you have started a new business or job recently, this may cause some worry. Things may not seem clear. Ask questions and practice active listening to make sure that you and your co-workers understand each other perfectly. Relationship-wise, expect to harmonise your bonding with someone who had offended you in the past. Love blooms and so will you. Happiness, contentment in all relations is on the cards.

Lucky number 19
Lucky colour White
Lucky day Tuesday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

This week balance is needed in all areas of life. You should know how to handle your professional and health commitments. Take care of your diet, exercise, and relaxation time. A nap between the busy hours would help you relax and refresh you to take on the challenges. On the career front, the financial part is looked after well this week. Those in media, finance, and artwork are likely to do better. Use your inner power, communication skills and wisdom. Time is favourable, crack your full potentials. New contacts in this period will prove fruitful for you. On the relationship front, stop being too formal with your partner, it may keep you away from expressing your true feelings. Your loved ones need your attention too.

Lucky number 11
Lucky colour Beige
Lucky day Sunday

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ASTROTURF
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

Controlling the monkey mind

Lord Hanuman is believed to have surrendered himself in service of his ideal, Lord Rama. Driven by his intense sense of love, he put in his heart and literally merged his identity with his ideal's consciousness. Having thus, being fully in tune with his ideal, he could avail of the wholesome powers intrinsic to the consciousness element. No wonder he could perform such extraordinary feats as would find no parallel.

In prayer mode, when you put in your whole, you acquire the virtues of what you remain focused to. So says The Bible: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all his goodness, and all that get added on to you." The paradox, however, is that Lord Hanuman ordinarily remained ignorant about immense power, he was endowed with. Evidently, under usual circumstances, he would be driven by his animalistic instincts. But when reminded, Lord Hanuman could invoke his indwelling powers if ever needed.

As the Ramayana story line runs, Lord Hanuman was entrusted with the task to locate Sita, who had been kid-

napped and was in Ravana's captivity. As per available indications Sita was somewhere in Sri Lanka. To make it to his desired destination, Hanuman had to cross over the ocean, which appeared impossible. But when reminded by Jamvant, the boar chieftain, about the powers latent in him, he realised that he could fly across ocean. So, he invoked his untapped power base and then made it to Sri Lanka.

Hanuman story is similar to human dilemma. Human beings are armed with immense power. If full human potential gets unfolded, one would know no limits. The irony, however, is that invariably human beings are not aware of their own true self. Fact remains that human beings are born with a clouded and preconditioned mind. Stuck to the limits circumscribed, human beings fail to have access to full land scape of mind. One's mind power, thus, remains limited. It is said that human beings have access to just 5 to 7 percent of their mind-power by default.

More than that is subject to our conscious efforts. If, however, even if they are able to make optimum use of



whatever they have in hand, they could successfully negotiate the usual callings of life with ease and comfort.

The irony, however, is that an ordinary mortal, caught up in the thought web of their own making, dissipate a considerable sum of their mind power over inconsequential acts — dealing with carryover effect of negative imprints picked up in the past, which in turn induces a sense of insecurity over assumed thoughts and thereby stress; over assumed dream perceptions. Consequently, they are hardly left with enough to do justice to their priority preferences, and with obvious consequences.

Human beings too carry both animalistic instincts as well as humanistic virtues. Which of the two drives a being would depend on how one's mind is oriented. The irony of the whole situation is that one's animalistic instincts keep playing their part involuntarily from the front. But one's virtues need to be identified, acknowledged, honed, and then consciously invoked to be put to use.

What stands in the way is the fact that human mind is fragile. It keeps

randomly flirting around with varied thoughts, something like a monkey randomly and unmindfully jumping from one branch of a tree to the other. It, thus, becomes incumbent upon a being to first control one's monkey-mind, for the indwelling virtues to play out unhindered. And that can be achieved following the two-stage meditation process as discussed in the previous chapter.

Pursuing *Dhyana*, with focus on Lord Hanuman, would inspire the seeker to imbibe his spirit. Accordingly, one would be tempted to explore, identify, and acknowledge, inlaid virtues, and then hone them, so that they become worth use in contemporary terms.

And because Lord Hanuman is identified with valour, reflecting on His imagery may also help get over the sense of fear and insecurity if any. Also, it may grant the will and resolve needed to take on the challenges ahead in life in all strength.

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