

OPINION 8
OF SRI LANKA AND
THE ANDAMANS**WORLD 11**
'SUSPICIOUS' BLACKOUT STRIKES
IRAN'S NATANZ NUCLEAR SITE**SPORT 14**
PUNJAB VS ROYALS
IN IPL TODAY

LUCKNOW, MONDAY APRIL 12, 2021; PAGES 14 ₹3



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SUIT UP, SMILE
UP, SHOW UP:
TAAPSEE
12 VIVACITY

5 new vaccines by year end: Govt

Record over 1.57 lakh cases in a day as Covid 2nd wave grips India



A policeman tries to ensure people wear face masks as a precaution against the coronavirus at a Sunday market in Jammu on Sunday

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India celebrated the beginning of three-day Tika utsav (vaccination festival) on Sunday amid reports of a massive shortage of vaccine in several States and indication that by the end of the third quarter of this year India will receive Covid-19 vaccines from five additional manufacturers.

Meanwhile, India recorded a new all-time high daily Covid-19 count at 1,57,028 cases with Maharashtra contributing maximum at 63,294. "India currently has 2 Covid-19 vaccines being manufactured locally: Covishield

and Covaxin, and we can expect five more vaccines by Q3 2021. These vaccines are Sputnik V vaccine (in collaboration with Dr Reddy's), Johnson & Johnson vaccine (in collaboration with Biological E), Novavax vaccine (in collaboration with Serum India), Zydus Cadila's vaccine, and Bharat Biotech's Intranasal Vaccine. Safety and efficacy are the Union Government's primary concerns while granting emergency use authorisation (EUA) to any Covid-19 vaccine in the country," news agency ANI reported, citing top Government sources.

The report said out of the

Covid-19 IN INDIA
TOTAL CASES: 1,35,12,493 (+1,57,028)
DEATHS: 1,70,066 (+761)
RECOVERED: 1,21,47,081 (+68,748)
ACTIVE: 11,89,856
MAHARASHTRA: 34,07,245
KERALA: 11,67,191
KARNATAKA: 10,65,290
TAMIL NADU: 9,33,434
DELHI: 7,25,197 (+10,774)

Cong candidate in TN succumbs

New Delhi (PTI): Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Sunday condoled the demise of P S W Madhava Rao, the party's assembly polls candidate from Srivilliputhur constituency in Tamil Nadu who died due to COVID-19 complications, and hailed his dedication and loyalty to the party. Madhava Rao was 63 years old and is survived by his daughter.

While polls were held on April 6, the counting of votes is scheduled on May 2 and in case the Congress nominee emerged victorious, Srivilliputhur segment would face a bypoll later.

available latest by June if all goes well Johnson and Johnson (Bio E) will be available by August, Cadilla Zydus will also be available by August, Novavax (Serum) by September, and Nasal Vaccine (Bharat) by October," the source said, on when the vaccines would be available for use.

The country is facing a huge shortage of vaccines and several vaccination centres have closed down in Maharashtra due to this. Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Telangana and Punjab have complained of a shortage of vaccines.

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India bans virus drug Remdesivir's export

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Anticipating increase in the demand for Remdesivir injection in the coming days in the wake of a spike in Covid-19 cases, the Centre on Sunday took a string of measures from prohibition of the export of the anti-viral drug as well as that of Remdesivir Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) with an aim to ensure sufficient availability in the domestic market.

The Centre's decision to ban the export of Remdesivir comes in the wake of reports of its shortage and hoarding resulting in inflated prices of the drug in black market. There have been reports of Remdesivir shortage in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

The Government has asked

authorities to cap the price of Remdesivir between ₹1,100 and ₹1,400 per vial and urged about a dozen pharmaceutical companies, including Mylan, Hetero Healthcare, Jubilant Life Sciences, Cipla, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Zydus Cadila and Sun Pharmaceuticals — to scale up to their maximum capacity of 31.6 lakh vials per month and lower its MRP (maximum retail price).

The Government has also advised all domestic manufacturers of Remdesivir to display details of their stockists/distributors on their website.

In order to facilitate access to the drug while the Department of Pharmaceuticals has been in contact with domestic manufacturers to ramp up the production.

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Negative report must for travelling to Himachal from seven worst-hit States

Shimla: The Himachal Pradesh Government on Sunday made it mandatory for people coming from seven States which

have witnessed a spike in coronavirus cases to show a Covid-19 negative test report on entering the State.

Opp seeks cancellation of CBSE, ICSE Board exams

X, XII exams scheduled from May 4

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Weeks ahead of the CBSE and ICSE Board examinations, political parties have expressed serious concern over the Centre's go-ahead to conduct the examinations amid the corona pandemic.

While the Congress has sought cancellation of the Board exams, saying it will be impossible to ensure safety of students at crowded exam centres, Shiv Sena appealed to the Centre to take a uniform decision on the board exams of Classes 10 and 12 across the country in the wake of different States and Boards having different opinions on the issues.

While former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said the decision to conduct the CBSE exams from May 4 should be reconsidered in view of the ris-



ing number of Covid-19 cases across the country, party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi wrote to Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank seeking cancellation of the Board exams. She also pointed out that it is our responsibility as political leaders to protect and guide the youth.

According to the revised date sheet for CBSE Board exams 2021, the Class 10 exams would be held between May 4 and June 7 and those for Class 12 would be held between May 4 and June 15. CBSE officials have said exam centres across the country have been increased by 40-50 per cent to ensure social distancing among examinees. ICSE Board examinations as well as several States have also scheduled the Board examinations during the next two months.

"In the light of the devastating corona second wave, conducting CBSE exams must be reconsidered. All stakeholders must be consulted before making sweeping decisions. On how many counts does GOI intend to play with the future of India's youth?" Rahul asked through social media platform.

In her letter to the Education Minister, Priyanka said by forcing children to sit for these exams during a raging pandemic, the Government and the CBSE board will be held responsible if any exam centre becomes a hotspot with a large numbers of children becoming infected. "The Government and the CBSE board might want to consider whether they are prepared to own the legal liability for students or others who might be severely affected by the disease in this manner," she said.

She said with over one lakh cases of Covid-19 being reported across the country, lakh of children and parents have expressed fear of getting infected with coronavirus.

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CBI grills Deshmukh's 2 aides over ₹100 cr extortion order to Vaze

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI on Sunday questioned two personal assistants of former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh in connection with allegations of corruption levelled against him by former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh.

Following the High Court directive for a CBI probe into the issue, Deshmukh had to resign from his post within hours of the order.

The agency had asked Deshmukh's personal assistants Sanjeev Palande and Kundan to appear before the CBI team in Mumbai for questioning in connection with the Preliminary Enquiry registered by it following an order of the Bombay High Court.

Sources said the duo appeared around 10.30 am at its office in Mumbai and were questioned for several hours.

In a letter addressed to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, Singh had alleged that Palande was pre-



sent when Deshmukh allegedly asked suspended Mumbai Police Assistant Inspector Sachin Vaze to extort over ₹100 crore a month from bars and restaurants of Mumbai numbering about 1,700, the sources said.

Vaze is facing an NIA probe in the case relating to the parking of an explosive-laden SUV near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's house in Mumbai.

In his statement before the CBI team, Vaze is said to have told the investigators that Kundan was present during one such conversation with the former Maharashtra Home Minister.

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Didi, Shah lock horns over election violence, deaths

Mamata terms deaths genocide, Shah raps her for asking supporters to gherao force

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ NADIA



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday termed the death of four persons in Central forces firing at Sitalkuchi a "genocide" demanding the resignation of Home Minister Amit Shah, who hit back faulting her for "playing appeasement politics even with deaths."

Talking to the media men in Siliguri, Mamata, who put on a black cloth around her as a mark of protest against what she called a "pre-planned murder of innocent people", said, "This is genocide... I have seen the pictures... that they (central forces) had simply sprayed the bullets instead of shooting at foot and thigh only goes on to prove that they were firing to kill... how is it that all the victims bore injuries to their neck or chest... It is a

genocide." The Chief Minister had decided to immediately visit Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar district — where four persons died on Saturday after Central forces fired at a crowd of 300-400 people who had attacked a polling booth. But she had to postpone her journey by three days after the Election Commission put a 72-hours-ban on all politicians from entering the district.

At Shantipur in Nadia district where the Home Minister led a massive roadshow, he hit back at the Chief Minister wondering why she referred to four deaths only though there was another death this time of a BJP supporter who was shot dead by Trinamool Congress miscreants in the same constituency.

"Every death is sad but why

is it that Mamata Didi has to play politics of appeasement with every death... in referring to the firing deaths on Saturday she forgot to mention the name of Ananda Barman a Rajbangshi boy who was a first-time voter and who was shot dead by the TMC goons in the same constituency... Is Didi not referring to him because he comes from Rajbangshi community... and does not fit into her vote bank politics," Shah said.

Holding Mamata responsible for the firing deaths, Shah said, "Her advice to the people to gherao the Central forces and then vote had instigated them which is why the villagers at Sitalkuchi tried to attack them and the forces had to open fire in self-defence."

Continued on Page 6

CAPSULE

FIRMS FEAR ANOTHER EXODUS OF MIGRANTS

Coimbatore: With the second wave of Covid-19 sweeping across various parts of Tamil Nadu, some of the industrialists in the State are apprehensive of migrant workers leaving for their hometowns considering the health conditions.

PAWAR'S GALL BLADDER SURGERY TODAY: NCP

Mumbai: NCP chief Sharad Pawar was on Sunday admitted to a hospital here for the gall bladder surgery scheduled on Monday, party leader Nawab Malik said.

SANSKRIT REMAINS POPULAR IN CHINA

Beijing: Sanskrit studies are flourishing in China, over 2,000 years after the ancient Indian language was brought to this country along with Buddhism, making a profound impact on Chinese monarchs and scholars over the centuries, according to a distinguished professor here.

Body blow to Pak ultras in J&K, 12 killed in 3 days

Eliminated Ansar chief had planned to attack Amarnath pilgrims

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Pakistan-based terrorist outfits Lashkar-e-Tayyeba, Al-Badr, and Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind have suffered the worst blow this year so far with the elimination of one dozen terrorists in four back-to-back encounters in the South Kashmir districts of Shopian, Pulwama and Anantnag in the last 72 hours.

Among those killed in the Shopian gunfight early Sunday morning was one of the youngest terrorists identified as Faisal Gulzar Ganai.

According to police records, he had joined the



Villagers gather near a car and a house damaged during a gun battle between security forces and terrorists in Bijbehara, south of Srinagar, on Sunday

rankings of a terror outfit on Tuesday itself, the day he reportedly went missing from his home. During the encounter, the security forces and his parents tried to persuade him to surrender, but the other terrorists did not allow him to do so.

Continued on Page 6

Experts fear Kumbh can be Covid super-spreader

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As tens of thousands of devotees get ready to take part in the Shahi Snan on Monday in the Ganga at Mahakumbh in Haridwar amid a raging Covid-19 pandemic, health experts fear that the mega event might turn into a super spreader, adding to the country's massive caseload which is already breaking records each passing day.

They said that a dip in the water is not the problem but usually it has been seen that in such events where a large number of people congregate, social distancing norms are mostly overlooked while there are always chances of one person infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus infecting many others.

"That person will not only infect at the gathering but also



when he comes back to his native place, he/she will be the reason for infecting his family members or with whomsoever, he/she comes in contact. More, so when the new variant of the Covid-19 is more infectious," asserted Dr Jugal Kishore, head of the department of community medicine at Safdarjung Hospital.

This year, Kumbh Mela

which started on April 1 is expected to be attended by nearly 150 million visitors.

Dr Kishor said that just like all kinds of human interactions and big gatherings, Mahakumbh in Haridwar too can become a reason for spreading the virus. "Usually, in such events people forget social norms as they chant and jostle with each other to take a dip," he added.

Dr Rahul Bhargava, a hematologist from Fortis Hospital in Gurugram in Haryana, agreed, "There have been various reports along with the snaps of the events appearing daily and one can easily see that the Covid-19 safety distancing norms are being hardly followed. A few are using masks and are not maintaining social distancing.

Continued on Page 6

2 kids die, 150 shanties gutted in fire in Noida

PTI ■ NOIDA/LUCKNOW

A major fire broke out in a village in Uttar Pradesh's Noida on Sunday, leaving two children dead and around 150 shanties destroyed, police said.

The fire broke out around 1 pm in the JJ cluster near Behlohpur village under Phase 3 police station limits, according to officials.

"Around a dozen fire tenders were deployed at the sight to control the blaze. The fire has been controlled now but due to wind there is still smoke left," Deputy Commissioner of Police, Central Noida, Harish Chander said.

"Around 150 shanties got destroyed in the fire and the bodies of two children have been recovered. The exact cause of the fire is being ascertained," he said.

Continued on Page 6

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A senior BJP leader said that the party had decided to change its candidate after the rape victim's family opposed it. The opposition parties had also questioned the wisdom of the BJP in fielding the wife of a tainted

"In view of this many leaders resigned from the party posts today," he said.

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

“The next stop for the Team Chhattisgarh will be Uttar Pradesh if things go as per plan,” a party leader said. The party had experiment-

Bhupesh Baghel

ed by sending a chief minister as a special observer to oversee the poll campaign in another state and so far the reports from the ground zero suggest that the experiment was quite successful. Parliamentary advisor Rajesh Tiwari formed the core

With the UP Assembly election due in early 2022, Baghel is likely to get a similar

responsibility in UP where Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is general secretary in-charge. The strategy to hold Priyanka's meetings in Upper Assam to woo tea tribes worked well for the party's campaign. The appointment of Rajesh Tiwari as AICC secretary for UP last week is being seen as a step in this direction.


However, the proposed hi-tech urban township project which is supposed to come up in Malesemau on Sultanpur Road has been postponed as LDA officials failed to complete legal and administrative formalities.

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

Important Notice for the Rail Passengers

It is notified for information of General Public that following Special Train will run as under:-

Notification No.: 85/2021



Train No. 09087/09088 Udhna-Chhapra-Udhna Special Train

09087 UDN-CPR		Station	09088 CPR-UDN	
Arr.	Dep.		Arr.	Dep.
--	08:35	Udhna Jn.	07:00	--
10:40	10:50	Nandurbar	03:30	03:40
13:30	13:35	Bhusaval Jn.	00:10	00:15
19:30	19:40	Itarsi Jn.	19:35	19:40
22:20	22:30	Jabalpur	15:40	15:45
23:40	23:45	Katni	14:25	14:30
01:00	01:05	Satna	13:10	13:15
04:05	04:07	Prayagraj Cheoki	10:00	10:02
05:03	05:05	Mirzapur	08:45	08:47
07:40	07:45	Varanasi Jn.	06:00	06:05
08:25	08:30	Jaunpur Jn.	05:15	05:20
11:52	11:57	Ballia	01:43	01:45
13:20	--	Chhapra	--	00:15

Rake Composition:- AC Second-01, General Second Class-06, Sleeper-12, SLRD-02 = Total 21 Coaches.

Please Note:- (1) These train will run with full reserved accommodation. (2) It is Mandatory for the passengers to follow the guidelines issued for prevention and safety from Covid-19.

Chief Pass. Trans. Manager, Gorakhpur

About any passenger amenity complaint SMS on Mob. No.: 09794845955

Never travel on roof and foot boards.

PNS ■ LUCKNOW



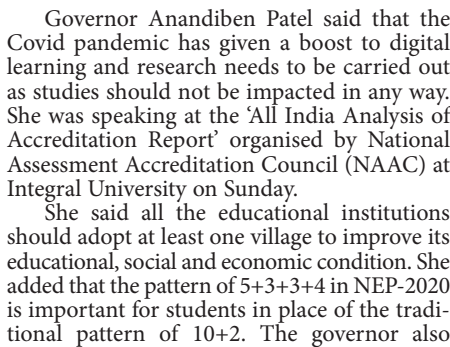
RLD Vice-President Jayant Chaudhary said the party's social media campaign to commemorate Babasaheb's birth anniversary

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

To disperse them, the police resorted to mild can-charge which made the situation uglier. The villagers pelted the cops with stones. However, the police brought the situation under control. A police spokesman claimed no one was injured in the clash. The police registered a case against over 200 people, 20 of

In due course of time, its price skyrocketed and Rahul and his family members started torturing my daughter to force her to sell the land. As I did not want her to sell the land, they killed my daughter," he told the police. Pravesh named Rahul, sister-in-law Pinki, mother-in-law Sona Devi and brother-in-law Rohit.

PANDEMIC HAS GIVEN BOOST TO DIGITAL LEARNING: GUV



Students from various noted schools of Lucknow participated in the contest and showcased their artistic skills and creativity but Yashasvi and Aadya impressed the judges with their creativity and innovative thinking.



PNS ■ **LUCKNOW**

He said he came in contact with a bird smuggler, Zaid of Chowk, and was asked to bring the parakeets from Pilibhit. He said the smuggled birds were supposed to be sent to West Bengal. A case was registered in this connection.

PNS ■ **LUCKNOW**

The accused was identified as Sunil Prajapati of Khanpur police station area of Ghazipur district. He owned up his crime.

His arrest came after the investigation of a case in which a woman filed a complaint with the Azamgarh police alleging that someone posted her a mor-

PUBLIC NOTICE

We, Smt. Mamata Singh W/o Veer Bahadur Singh R/o H.No. 298 MIG, B-block, Panki, Kanpur Nagar 2. Smt. Babita Singh W/o Mahallam Singh R/o H.No. 298 MIG, B-block, Panki, Kanpur Nagar 3. Smt. Seema Singh W/o Narendra Kumar R/o Gop Saray, Ghacha, Vikapur, Gonda are the only legal heirs of Late Ram Ranbar Singh & Late Chandramda Devi and post his death

21.04.2018 by virtue of legal heirs we are owners of property address House No. 91-A, (Admeasuring Area- 208.188 Sq.Meter) situated at Maswanpur, Kanpur Nagar and we have full right to sell this property.

If any concerns please contact-
Advocate Shiva Kant Dixit, Mob-9415403399

(Shiva Kant Dixit)
Advocate

phed obscene photo on social media. The needle of suspicion turned to Sunil and the police raided his house on Saturday and nabbed him.

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This is to inform the Public that Auction of pledged Gold Ornaments will be conducted by SBFSC Finance Pvt. Ltd. (Erstwhile Small Business Finance India Pvt. Ltd.) on **20 April 2021** or thereafter at 10 AM for Alambagh at Kundan Clinic, 1st Floor, Plot No 551 Jha/176 Kangar Plot, Alambagh Lucknow-226005 & 501 Nigri Nangar at 1st Floor, 1/9, Bhatia Complex, Virmah Khan, Gomti Nagar Lucknow-226005. The Gold Ornaments are 20-24K, 2nd Floor, Nadi Corner, 11/3121, Swaroop Nagar Kanpur-208002 and For Ayodhya branch: Laxman Das Complex, Plot no 282, Ground Floor, M.S. International School, Dev Kall Road, Ayodhya 224001, Uttar Pradesh.

The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Loan Accounts of our various Customers who have failed to pay their dues. Our officers of Auction have been duly visited to these households.

The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned below to Overdue Loan Accounts of our various Customers mentioned below with branch name.

ALAMBAGH	PD00799619	PD00857332	PD00841246	PD00807108
PD00753138	PD00806708	PD00857333	PD00858124	PD00806862
PD00770903	PD00808659	PD008591123	PD00768286	PD00810241
PD00717193	PD00808911	PD00859982	PD00779133	PD00810294
PD00740018	PD00807692	PD00806796	PD00705075	PD00813419
PD00784057	PD00806522	PD00861590	PD00813013	PD00813425
PD00780002	PD00806522	PD00861590	PD00813013	PD00813425
PD00786516	PD00811133	PD00835883	PD00822550	PD00815379
PD00789285	PD00811171	PD00835883	PD00822550	PD00815375
PD00792163	PD00811457	PD00868492	PD00787446	PD00817734
PD00792526	PD00812999	PD00865848	PD00778747	PD00816806

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Covid situation turns frightening

15,353 fresh cases in UP, 4,444 in Lucknow

67 deaths in state push toll to 9,152

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The surge in novel coronavirus infection has taken a frightening proportion as Uttar Pradesh has recorded 15,353 positive cases and 67 fatalities in the past 24 hours, forcing the state administration to enforce restrictions which include closing down of schools and penalising people not following Covid guidelines.

In the state capital, BSIP director Vandana Prasad and her husband tested positive for coronavirus. According to president of Lucknow University Teachers Association Vineet Kumar Verma, former head of Sanskrit department Prof Ashok Kalia died of Covid-19.

In more than 20 districts, the administration has strictly enforced the corona curfew from 9 pm to 6 am. Three districts of Uttar Pradesh reported infections are four digits in the last 24 hours while in 26 districts, the number of new positive cases is in three digits. Only in two districts -- Hathras



An area in Krishnanagar sealed after detection of Covid positive cases

Pioneer

and Kasganj -- the new positive cases reported in the last one day are in the single digit.

The disturbing trend for the government is that while a week ago there were around a dozen districts which reported zero COVID-19 cases, now all the districts have reported new novel coronavirus positive

cases with state capital Lucknow taking the lead with 4,444 cases in one day.

Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad said that 67 people infected with novel coronavirus died in the last 24 hours, taking the death toll in the state to 9,152 on Sunday evening.

"The number of COVID-19 patients is increasing every day. Covid tests of 2.03 lakh people were conducted in the last 24 hours. A total of 3.67 crore people have been screened so far," he said.

Prasad said there were 71,241 active coronavirus positive cases in the state, the high-

est in the last 12 months, while 6,11,622 COVID-19 patients had recovered in the state so far. During the past 24 hours, the maximum number 4,444 new novel coronavirus positive cases were found in Lucknow. The state capital now has 20,195 active cases while 31 people died of COVID-19 in Lucknow during the past 24 hours. Varanasi reported 1,740 new positive cases. There are 6,900 active cases in Varanasi while one COVID-19 death was reported there in the last 24 hours. Prayagraj reported 1,565 new positive cases with nine deaths. It has 8,263 active cases. Around 881 new positive cases were found in Kanpur Nagar, which reported eight COVID-19 deaths and has 3,809 active cases.

In the last 24 hours 390 fresh cases were reported in Gorakhpur, 291 in Jhansi, 255 in Meerut, 222 in Ballia, 221 each in Bareilly and Banda, 219 in Gautam Buddha Nagar (Noida), 214 in Chandauli, 210 each in Rae Bareli and Mirzapur, 188 in Moradabad, 162 in Jaunpur, 155 in Ghaziabad, 152 in Muzaffarnagar, 142 in Ghazipur, 140 each in Agra and Saharanpur, 138 in Mathura, 133 each in Lalitpur and Sonbhadra, 126 in Gonda, 105 in Barabanki, 103 in Bahrach and 102 in Sitapur.



Buses being sanitised at Qaiserbagh bus station on Sunday

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Guv, oppn laud Yogi's Covid management

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel on Sunday praised the performance of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in controlling the pandemic.

Presiding over an all-party meet on the pandemic, the governor favoured the punitive measures for making people follow the preventive measures like wearing the masks. She said people would comply with the Covid protocol only if the violators were punished.

The governor said ever since the outbreak of the pandemic, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had adopted a very proactive approach in tackling the pandemic and taking prompt measures for ensuring relief to all sections of society in the hour of crisis.

She said no chief minister in the country had travelled across the state during the pandemic as done by Yogi Adityanath. The governor said during the last one year the government worked in a very planned and coordinated manner and all agencies and institutions of the state worked as a cohesive team.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the state government was committed to protect both the lives and livelihood of the common people.

"We successfully handled the first wave of the coron-

avirus and we will emerge as victorious in tackling the second wave," he said.

Expressing concern over the second wave of the pandemic, chief minister appealed to people to sincerely follow the Covid protocol like using masks and washing hands with soap and using sanitisers.

"Need of the hour is to sensitise the common people about the dangers of the virus and make them sincerely follow the Covid protocol like wearing the masks and washing hands and using sanitisers. New reports suggest that the virus is now air-borne and wearing of the masks is the most essential for safety," the chief minister said.

Yogi Adityanath said the worst affected districts were Lucknow, Prayagraj, Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Ghaziabad Saharanpur and Jhansi.

"I have toured a couple of districts while Medical Education Minister Suresh Khanna and Health Minister Jai Pratap Singh have visited several districts. The cabinet will meet here on Monday and we will discuss the coronavirus issue and will decide deputing ministers to monitor and visit other affected districts," the chief minister said.

Listing the measures taken by the government, the chief minister said fresh instructions had been issued for pan-

chayat elections for preventing the gathering of more than 100 persons in a meeting and 50 persons in a room. He said the fire tenders and spray machines with the municipal bodies and sugar mills had been deployed for spraying of sanitisers in urban areas.

The leaders of the opposition parties -- Congress and Bahujan Samaj Party -- praised the measures taken by the state government in tackling the first wave and now the second wave of the pandemic. They assured the government of their full support to the measures being taken by the state government for containing the pandemic.

BSP leader in UP assembly Lalji Verma, thanked the government for convening all-party meet and also assured of all support to the government for the compliance of the Covid protocol.

Suhail Ansari, MLA, representing the Congress also praised the Yogi Adityanath government for Covid control in the first wave. He said, "We all expect the government and the officials to control the current wave with the same success as was done during the first phase."

The meeting concluded on a promising note with all the participants expressing faith in Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's strategy to contain COVID-19.

Vaccine jabs given at 163 centres

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Vaccinations were carried out at 163 centres under "Tika Utsav" in Lucknow on Sunday. The jabs were administered to people aged above 45 years at 500 booths.

State immunisation officer Dr Ajay Ghai said "Tika Utsav" is being organised under the directions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the target was to vaccinate 5 lakh people on Sunday. With cases on the record rise, the aim is to bring people to the vaccination centres, he said.

"Normally, the vaccinations are not carried out on Sundays but Tika Utsav was started on Sunday. The vaccination centres will change daily," he said. He added that the vaccination drive would also be conducted on Ambedkar Jayanti.

Dr Ghai said they will also start the vaccination drive in private and government offices from April 12 (Monday) and the CMOs are in talks with officials concerned.

"However, this drive will not be conducted at every office but only at the workplaces with adequate space and over a hundred employees," he said. He added that the aim of the "Tika Utsav" is to give a major boost to the vaccination drive.

The immunisation officer said they have already vaccinated 85 lakh people even as UP is at the third position in terms of the number of people having been vaccinated.

Meanwhile, a senior health officials said that vaccine is the last and not the first in the fight against coronavirus. "There is no holiday for Covid-appropriate behaviour. However, people

CM asks people to go for vax

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Exhorting people to go for vaccination against COVID-19, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that vaccination was a campaign through which a decisive battle could be successfully fought against this deadly disease to secure the life of every citizen.

While inspecting the Tika Utsav campaign at Shakti Bhawan here on Sunday, the chief minister said that every person above the age of 45, who had not taken the vaccine, should get registered at the vaccination centre and be a part of the vaccination campaign. Yogi said the Covid vaccine was safe and was a big tool in protecting people from the novel coronavirus and so everyone who was in the eligible category should go for vaccination.

"Caution is very important even after taking the vaccine. Treatment is an important protection against illness. Therefore, to avoid coron-



Chief Minister taking stock of vaccination under Tika Utsav at Shakti Bhawan in Lucknow on Sunday

avirus infection, everyone should follow the mantra of social distancing and mask," he said. The chief minister paid tributes to Mahatma Jyotiba Phule on his birth anniversary and said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had organised the 4-day Tika Utsav from April 11, the birth anniversary

of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, to the birth anniversary to Dr BR Ambedkar, the architect of Indian Constitution, on April 14. He said that a special vaccination campaign was being run in 6,000 centres in the state and Covid vaccine would be administered at 8,000 centres on Monday.

will create awareness about the importance of vaccination in villages and Anganwadis adopted by the university. The volunteers and programme officers will clear the doubts of rural population and provide information about the nearest vaccination centres," the official said.

It was also decided that a video containing medical information related to the vaccines would be prepared by the department of Journalism and Mass Communication with the

help of Career Medical Hospital and disseminated online through the university's website and YouTube channel.

The university will recognise the efforts of three students who encourage the maximum number of people to get vaccinated and they will get letters of appreciation and cash awards. All the teachers were urged to participate in the vaccination campaign being organised from April 11 to 14 and to motivate more and more people to get vaccinated.

Dist admn gears up to increase bed capacity by 2,000

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The district administration has geared up to increase the bed capacity in the district by 2,000. District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash took stock of the arrangements at Sahara Hospital, Balrampur Hospital and ERA's Medical College and Hospital. He said the district administration is providing 50 jumbo oxygen cylinders to Balrampur Hospital. He said there should be no laxity in treatment.

Talking to mediapersons, the DM said the bed capacity is being increased and efforts are being made to make them functional soon. The DM also issued instructions for arrangements of beds in triage areas where patients will be made to undergo antigen tests before admission.

The DM went around the hospital to check out on hygiene and sanitisation measures. He interacted with patients and directed the authorities to ensure all the



DM during an inspection of Balrampur Hospital on Sunday

Pioneer

facilities. He said the hospitals should formulate a strategy to decide on how to bring down the death rate.

The DM also inspected the work being carried out by

surveillance & rapid response teams, ambulance & hospital allocation, vaccination at the Integrated Control and Command Centre. He also took stock of the work of the

teams monitoring home isolation patients. He said 15 ambulances will be added to the fleet soon. The district administration also released some important numbers — PGRS

helpline: 0522-4523000, 0522-4523950, Hello Doctor: 0522-3515700. Principal and dean, ERA's Medical College and Hospital Dr M Faridi said they have already received the orders for converting the hospital into a complete Covid facility. "We have all the preparations in place and we are already working as a complete Covid facility. Currently, we have 430 beds and the number of ICU beds will be increased," he said. He pointed out that they were awarded for Covid management in the first wave by the Government of India and their work was also appreciated by the state government. "We are not running any non-Covid activities and for the last 15 days we only have the Covid facility. The diet being provided to patients and therapeutics ensure one of the best recovery rates at the hospital. The medicines are given in time and counselling extended to patients in home isolation," he said.

Meanwhile, testing has

been increased to almost 25,000 per day in Lucknow, according to a senior health official. He also pointed out that UP has crossed 2 lakh vaccinations per day.

Pointing out that most of the patients are in home isolation, he there are many weird treatment measures being circulated on social media platforms which should not be taken seriously.

He said patients should take Paracetamol and Azithromycin besides steam therapy, performing breathing exercises, drinking lots of luke-warm water and monitoring of respiratory rate and oxygen saturation level.

Meanwhile, at the two major vegetable markets in Lucknow, any purchases apart from wholesale were stopped to prevent overcrowding from Sunday onwards. Mandi secretary Sanjay Singh said that at both the markets (Dubagga and Sitapur Road), retail purchases were stopped so as to check the likely spread of virus

Adequate stock of vaccines in state

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With Uttar Pradesh getting an additional 20 lakh doses of Covid vaccines, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath declared that there is no paucity of vaccine in the state.

"The state now has an adequate stock of (Covid) vaccines to carry forward the vaccination drive. It is the time to save humanity and the government is committed to providing all help to the people," the chief minister said in a message here on Sunday. Sources in the government said that UP was given additional doses of Covid vaccines because of the activeness shown by the chief minister in controlling the pandemic. "He is personally keeping a check on the medical arrangements made in the state to save the lives of the people," the source said. More than 85 lakh people have got their Covid vaccine jabs so far in the state.

Motivating the state officials, the chief minister said that the best example of COVID-19 management, which was presented by all the districts of Uttar Pradesh last year, had set an example for other states as well.

"Even in the second wave, with teamwork we will definitely win the battle. Last year, because of the contribution of those involved in dealing with the pandemic, international organisations like the World Health Organisation praised the



State Bank of India organised a Covid vaccination camp for staff and their family members at the head office in Lucknow in coordination with Apollo Medics and SBILD, in coordination with Health department on Sunday

Covid cases cross 29k-mark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The district has recorded yet another biggest spike as the total number of cases has crossed 29K-mark on Sunday evening. As many as 1,520 more have tested positive, increasing the total number to 29,741. The day also saw one more death, increasing the toll to 399. During the last 24 hours, 215 patients have been recovered and all of them in home isolation. The total number of patients cured in the district is 22,617 including 19,608 in home isolation and 3,009 in COVID-19 hospitals. The number of active cases has jumped up to 6,725 crossing the 5K mark.

In the first report of the day, 782 positive patients were found out of 4,293 reports received and this figure increased to 1,520 as per report provided by the Health department in the evening increasing the active cases to 6,725. Earlier, in view of finding hundreds of new positive cases, the number of active hotspots has increased to 366 with 16 green zones having been converted to red zones by a day ago. Out of total 2,828 hotspots, 2,462 are green zones.

Meanwhile, the district administration and Health department have started Tika Utsav on the call given by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi which will continue till April 14. The vaccination drive was launched at as many as 60 cen-



Four days vaccination festival begins in Varanasi on Sunday

Pioneer

tres including all CHCs & PHCs, government hospitals, wellness centres, BHU Hospital, Government Ayurveda College, ESIC Hospital, central railway hospital and hospital in BLW and NER under the Tika Utsav.

The persons aged above 45 years reached the vaccination centres to get vaccines in large numbers and long queues of such people were seen particularly at government hospitals. The senior citizens were also seen in queues waiting for their numbers to get vaccination. Under the Tika Utsav, the private institutions could ensure the vaccination of their staff by having tie-up with their nearest vaccination centres by depositing the requisite fee. The Asha and Aanganbadi workers have been given the task to administer the vaccine to at least six eligible beneficia-

ries per day.

The district has also received fresh consignment of 60,000 doses of vaccines and the Health department has decided to provide the vaccines to the offices having more than 100 employees. Such offices need to apply with the list of employees at the office of CMO for the vaccination.

The long queues were 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.

In the meantime, the Health department has started the facility of telemedicine cen-

tre at district level from where the patients suffering from fever, cold and cough could seek medical consultancy online for 24 hours. The patients could also get information relating to COVID-19 from the COVID-19 Control Command Centre by dialing the telephone number 0542-2720005.

The patients can also contact the district surveillance officer (Mobile No-9415830461) and Covid-19 Control Centre No-1077.

In the meantime, the Health department held Arogya Health Melaa at a total of 52 urban and rural community and primary health centres in the district in which the health of a total of 2,513 persons including 1,050 male, 1,157 female and 306 children was examined by the teams of doctors, the CMO (In-Charge) Dr NP Singh informed adding, the samples of RT-PCR were also collected during the fair. The Ayushman Cards of 114 beneficiaries were also made. The hepatitis B and C of 14 persons were also tested and all were found negative. Five children with mal-nutrition were also identified in the health fair. Besides, the liver, diabetes, abdomen, anemia, hypertension, ANC, etc were also examined during the health fair. As many as 108 medical and as many as 449 paramedical staff were engaged for the health examination during the fair.

1,682 more test positive in Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Now almost the entire district has come under the grip of coronavirus infection. The situation is completely uncontrollable. Seven people died of corona on Saturday and as many as 1,682 new cases of COVID-19 were reported in the last 24 hours on Saturday night.

These numbers are by far the highest one. Covid has caused havoc from hospitals to families of thousands of infected. No new infections are getting beds in hospitals, doctors are also in a dilemma as to where to take so many people. At the same time, there is an atmosphere of panic among other people as the number of deaths increases and the corpses come out of the wards everyday.

The victims of corona infection are no longer the only people who roam around unnecessarily and get into the crowd. Rather, very big personalities who are very safe are also vulnerable to infection. It is a matter of concern that the Allahabad High Court Chief Justice, three other justices, one Justice of the District Court, City North MLA, doctor, engineer, railway and bank officials, lawyers and teachers have also been infected with corona.

The situation on corona on Saturday was frightening. The doctors treating the patients



People getting registration done before receiving a dose of covid vaccine in Prayagraj

Pioneer

were also upset to see the surge in the number of patients in the hospitals, the faces of the patients being admitted are quite tense.

Newly admitted corona patients were shaken by the corpses of people standing around Covid hospitals and being taken on stretchers from the hospitals and kept in ambulances. It may be noted that a total of 1,682 infected persons were found on Saturday, 07 people died of corona, -305 people are admitted in L-3 Covid Hospital while, L-3

Hospital has a total capacity of 320 beds, -148 Infected admitted in Beli Hospital, Beli Hospital has a capacity of 160 beds only, -87 Infected admitted in United Medicity.

United Medicity is a 100-bed Covid Hospital, -37 patients discharged from Covid hospitals, -62 patients discharged from home isolation, Samples of -10270 people have been collected for testing

Corona infection is spreading so fast and seeing the situation getting frightening, now government and private hospi-

tals are also trying to desist from their responsibility. The doctors are refusing to admit those who are not affected by the other diseases, apart from corona.

People from private hospitals are also being returned in reverse, saying that corona should be checked first. While at the corona testing centres, the number of every trailing person in the crowd of hundreds is coming after hours. In such a situation, there is no hearing of the people groaning in pain.

BHU admn restricts entry of outsiders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In view of the alarming situation of COVID-19 in the district, the administration of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) has decided to restrict the entry of outsiders in varsity central and other offices and not to open the shops after 7 pm. Barring the main entrance gate, all the gates of the university will remain closed from 9 pm to 6 am in view of night curfew imposed by the district administration.

The varsity administration has decided to reserve the rooms near toilets in hostels so as the students in case detect-

ed as COVID-19 positive, could be isolated there. In case, any student feels symptoms of corona can get tested in room number-103 of Sir Sunderlal Hospital through hostel warden and also isolated in the identifying room of hostel. In case, the testing report of any student comes positive, he or she needs to inform the respective warden and in-charge chief medical officer of the student's health centre so as the requisite medicines could be provided to him.

The sports activities could be run in the varsity premises only from 6 am to 7 pm and during this period, there should be the arrangement of thermal

scanning and sanitisers at sports grounds, as per notification issued by the varsity administration regarding this which adds, the activities such as conference, etc should be held in online mode in the departments, institutes and faculties.

The works related to postal should not be done manually and there should be use of ERP for all the official works, the varsity administration states in the notification adding, there will be restriction on the entrance of outsiders in central and other offices of the university.

The unnecessary movement of outsiders will also be

restricted on varsity campus.

The varsity administration has advised its teachers, employees and residents to get tested if they feel symptoms of COVID-19 and isolate themselves till the reports come and added, keep them in isolation, follow corona guidelines and take medicines in case the report comes positive. The employees need to inform the varsity administration and heads of their respective departments immediately to get information about being infected so as necessary steps such as sanitisation of the concerned department could be done to prevent the virus from infecting others.

169 polling officers found absent

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As many as 169 polling officers including 38 presiding officers, 50 first polling officers, 52 second polling officers and 29 third polling officers were found absent in the training held at UP College on Saturday for three-tier Panchayat election. Taking the matter seriously, Chief Development Officer

(CDO) Madhusudan Hulgi warned such polling officers that if they fail to get training in the forthcoming training programmes, action would be taken against them. He ordered to withhold the salaries of a day of these absentees. If they do not receive training in the training to be held on the scheduled date, then the first information report (FIR) will

be lodged against them under Section 12B D of Panchayati Raj Act 1947 and Section 174 of Indian Penal Code 1860.

At the time of inspection, some personnel were instructed to take training in the second shift again if the training was not taken seriously and they were found to be talking by phone. He asked the Basic Education Officer to stop

salaries of computer instructors of Rani Murar Balika Inter College for not doing the projector work properly. The CDO directed that for those who have been found absent in polling personnel training and could not receive training due to any reason, their training would start on April 13 at 9:30 am in the first session as the same venue.

Former gram pradhan shot dead

VARANASI (PNS): More than 20 hours have passed but the police are yet to reach out to criminals that shot dead the ex-pradhan of Indrapur village, under the Badagaon police station at night on Saturday. The name of one of the same village and the land dispute as a cause surfaced behind the crime.

The deceased Vijendra Yadav alias Pappu Yadav (48) had been three-times gram pradhan of above mentioned village. His wife Mamata is gram pradhan currently. This time, Pappu Yadav has filed nomination papers to contest the election of gram pradhan once again.

According to the informa-

tion, the deceased received a call at night on Saturday and thereafter, he went out by bicycle. When he reached Dhol Bajwa turn, the criminals on bike stopped him and opened indiscriminate fire in which he sustained seven bullets and fell down on the ground. After committing the crime the criminals escaped from the scene.

Hearing the gunshot, the local villagers reached the spot and informed the family members and police as well. The family members rushed home to a private nursing home in Maldahia but the doctors referred him to a trauma centre in BHU after finding the condition critical. The doctors at the trauma centre

declared him dead.

It was said that the deceased had a friend of the same village but both turned foe of each other later on. There is a piece of land of one of the friends' relatives. The friend claims ownership of his on possession on the land. But in the meantime, the deceased had got the land transferred in his name by keeping his friend in the dark and this became a cause of enmity between both.

The family members of the deceased have shown their doubt on the friend as a man behind the killing of ex-gram pradhan. The police also started their investigation on this line but failed in reaching out to him even after the lapse of

over 20 hours. The police also started investigation keeping other reasons in mind as the deceased was once again in election fray for the gram pradhan of the village.

At the same time, the killing of ex-gram Pradhan has posed a challenge before the police as it was the third murder till now this month. Earlier, a fruit vendor was stabbed to death under the Lanka police station and a property dealer was shot dead under the Rohania police station. The police claimed to have arrested the main accused of the murder of property dealer but failed in reaching out to main culprit in the killing of fruit vendor.

Shukla new president of SSU students' union

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

With capturing all the important four posts of president, vice-president, general secretary and library secretary, the National Students Union of India, student wing of All India Congress Committee (AICC) made a clean sweep in the election for students' union in Sampurnanand Sanskrit University (SSU). Earlier, out of total voters 1,732, a total of 771 (44.51 per cent) electorate cast their votes.

The NSUI candidate Krishan Mohan Shukla was elected as new president by

securing 442 votes, while his only rival of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), student wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Ajay Dubey got 306 votes. On the posts of vice-president, the NSUI candidate Ajit Kumar Chaubey secured 411 votes and he defeated his only rival of ABVP Chandramauli Tiwari who got 343 votes.

The NSUI candidate Shivam Chaubey will be new general secretary as he secured 485 votes and defeated his only rival of ABVP Gaurishankar Gangele who got 244 votes. On the post of

library secretary, the NSUI candidate Ashutosh Kumar Mishra won the election by securing 415 votes, while his only rival of the ABVP Vivekanand Pandey got 338 votes.

Since, only one each candidate has submitted nomination papers for the representative of Sahitya Sanskriti Faculty and Philosophy Faculty and they were declared as elected unopposed. None has filed nomination papers for the representative of the Faculty of Modern Knowledge-Science. Vijay Shankar Pandey was elected as the representative of Shraman

Vidya Faculty, while Raghvendra Mishra, Pankaj Dwivedi, Kush Tiwari, Shanu Kumar and Satyajit Tiwari were elected as the representatives of Ved Vedang Faculty.

Earlier, the voting began at 9 am amidst tight security arrangements and around 50 per cent voting was recorded. There were a total 1,732 voters including 1,649 male and 83 female.

A total of 771 voters (44.51 per cent) including 742 male and 29 female exercised their franchises, the election officer Prof Sudhakar Mishra informed.

ALLAHABAD (PNS): The health of the Mahant Narendra Giri, the national president of the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad, worsened due to COVID-19 on Sunday. He has been admitted to the hospital.

Narendra Giri was also suffering from stomach disease for two days. He was hurriedly admitted on feeling excessive weakness from dehydration. Doctors had also sent his Covid sample for examination in which he tested positive. Information about improvement in his condition has been

given by Baghambari Gaddi Math late night.

Akhada Parishad president Mahant Narendra Giri has been continuously participating in the Haridwar Kumbh these days, from the reception of the saints of the Akharas to the meetings and VIP programmes of the Panchayati Niranjani Akhara. At 10:30 am on Saturday, he was admitted to Anandam Hospital in Prashant Vihar Jagjitpur. According to hospital director Dr KN Gambhir, Mahant Narendra Giri was suffering from stom-

ach upset for two days. This made him weak. After conducting his check-up testing, his RTPCR sample of Covid had been sent for testing in which he tested COVID-19 positive.

Dr. Gambhir said that the Covid report was received by Sunday morning. Meladhikari Deepak Rawat arrived at the hospital to know the health condition of Srimant Narendra Giri.

During this Niranjan Peethadhishwar Swami Kailashanand Giri, Anand

Peethadheshwar Swami Balkanand, SSP Kumbh Mela Janmejaya Khanduri were also present in the hospital. On the other hand, Yoga Guru Anand Giri, the administrator of Baghbandi Gaddi Math and Bade Hanuman Temple, claimed improvement in the condition of the Akhara Parishad president. He said that the corona report had come positive, but his condition will improve. Sadhus-saints and devotees have wished for the Mahant to get well soon.

Money laundering case against Atique

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has also started clamping down on mafia don Atique Ahmed. The ED has filed a case of money laundering against him. It will now be investigated in relation to 'benami properties' created through crime. The police administration is continuously taking action against Atique Ahmed. Action has already been taken on the property of his crores of rupee located in the district. If illegally constructed buildings were demolished, property acquired through crime was attached. However, the police could not trace the properties of the mafia, which he had created through crime in the district or outside the state. The ED is now preparing to clamp down on Atique to investigate and take action on such properties.

Under this, a case of money laundering has been filed against him. The investigation of which has also been started. Sources said that Atique's illegal assets acquired in the district as well as his other state status will also be under scrutiny. Sources further said that after registering the case, the ED will now also investigate Atique's companies. Significantly, last year, the police had identified a total of 16 companies of Atique, many of which were anonymous. The name in these companies is of someone else, but indirectly, the money which was invested was of Atique. The business of most of these companies is related to real estate. It has also been reported that the transactions of these companies are in crores. Police officials said that out of the 16 companies about which information has been received, three companies are

registered in the name of Atique's wife Sahista Parveen and five relatives. There are eight companies that have not been clear who owns them. But it has definitely come to the fore that indirectly the money invested in it belonged to Atique.

NEW SIGNALING SYSTEM INSTALLED: In order to maintain punctuality and safety in rail operations, the signaling system is constantly being upgraded by the Signal and Telecom department of North Central Railway Headquarters and Prayagraj Division. In the same sequence, in the beginning of the current financial year 2021-22, the Department of Signals and Telecommunications replaced the old mechanical signaling at Khairahi station yard of Chunar-Chopan section and the installation of new electric interlocking on April 10, 2021

completed. Under this task, new IPS, datalogger, ELD, fuse alarm and DG set were installed at Khairahi station with important electronic interlocking work with 33 route combinations. In addition, an automatic fire alarm system has also been installed in EI room, IPS and battery room to prevent possible incidents of fire. In addition, with the installation of 10 point machines, a total of 14 main signals and 3 shunt signals were installed. In this sequence, 21 DTCs were installed parallel to MSDAC. 25W VHF sets and control phones have been provided for seamless connectivity. Keeping in mind the environment, EI rooms are fitted with AC with automatic changeover. With the completion of this work, the Prayagraj division went a step further in the area of providing protected rail operations.

DM seeks participation of all religious leaders in Tika Utsav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

District Magistrate Alok Tiwari, while addressing the Sunday congregation of the Christ Church College, said the prime minister and the UP chief minister had taken initiative to ensure that the people were kept safe from the novel coronavirus which had raised its head dangerously.

Tiwari appealed to the presbyter in-charge to ensure that the members of the Christian community took an active part in the Tika Utsav being observed from April 11 to April 14.

He said the objective was to ask all religious heads to make appeals to their respective communities and for this the Christians were being asked to voluntarily get themselves vaccinated during the four-day Tika Utsav. He also asked the Christian community to motivate all those people who were



District Magistrate, City, Mr Alok Tiwari, addressing congregation at the Christ Church on Sunday.

above 45 years of age to get vaccinated.

The district magistrate also visited Tapeshwari Devi mandir where he appealed to the religious heads and the people at the temple to get themselves vaccinated during the four-day festival which was being carried out for people above 45 years of age. He said to eliminate any hindrance or any problem at the vaccination centres the officials had been deployed.

He then visited the Idgah at Babupurwa where he appealed to the namazis for maximum participation in the vaccination drive. He said the vaccination was being done at all the government centres and even at private hospitals.

The officials accompanying the district magistrate included ADM Atul Kumar, Civil Defence Chief Warden Rohit Malhotra and several others.

Tika Utsav at IIT-Kanpur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Director of Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, Prof Abhay Karandikar, while inaugurating the Tika Utsav at the IIT-Kanpur premises on Sunday, said the initiative of the government was to contain the spike in novel coronavirus cases which had suddenly posed a big health challenge to the country.

He said in such an event the best was to strictly restrict movement and follow social distancing norms and ensure that the face mask was worn 24 hours be it home or outside.

He said it was a matter of great concern that a big section of people, especially the eligible youth, were ignoring the appeal of the government to take the vaccine. He said the fact was that some youth may have strong immunity but such reservoirs could be a potent threat to the senior citizens. He advised them to ensure they



Kanpur Divisional Commissioner, Dr Raj Shekhar, Director, IIT-Kanpur, Prof Abhaya Karandikar inaugrate the "Tika Utsav" at IIT-Kanpur on Sunday.

took the vaccine jab as early as possible.

Prof Karandikar said the initiative of the IIT-K was to show a way to others that if the

intelligentsia was volunteering for the vaccination then it was necessary for each person to take the vaccine shot at the earliest.

Addressing the gathering, Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Raj Shekhar said it was quite encouraging that one of the prestigious technical institutions of the world had taken initiative to lead the way for the masses.

He said it was true that one had to maintain social distancing. He said the senior citizens were at the biggest threat and in the past couple of days the increase of COVID-19 cases had become a cause of concern. He said the alternative to this upsurge was to strictly follow the Covid protocol.

The first to be vaccinated was a female senior citizen who was administered the second dose of Covid vaccine. She was congratulated by the divisional commissioner and the IIT-K director.

Others who took part in the Tika Utsav were District Magistrate Alok Tiwari, ADM (City), chief medical officer and the health officials of the city.

Tributes paid to Hahnemann

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Tributes were paid to the Father of Homoeopathy, Dr Christian Samuel Hahnemann, on the occasion of Homoeopathy Day. The entire homoeopaths of the city assembled at the Hahnemann Crossing where they paid floral tributes to the Father of Homoeopathy.

The keynote address was delivered by Dr Harsh Nigam who said homoeopathy was an alternative medical science which functioned on the principle of like negates like. He said homoeopathy focused on the entire human body and it functioned on an intrinsic belief that every part of the

body was linked to the other and curing one part involved curing the whole.

He said homoeopathy was affordable and easily accessible and it posed a huge challenge to the highly regulated and expensive allopathy market. He said it was in fact difficult to ascertain what made a homoeopathic medicine unique as there were several ways in which homoeopathic medicines could be used and they worked differently for different time periods. He said the acute diseases were short-lived and could be treated in a short span of time. He said diseases like cough, cold and flu required immediate relief and cure and homoeopathy played a role in

effectively healing the body from these diseases.

Dr VC Acharya said homoeopathy believed that a certain person reacted to a disease causing element only because (s)he was susceptible to it, and by introducing safe and trace amounts of the same disease causing elements, a person's tolerance could be increased till he stopped reacting to the agent.

He said this was a long-term cure and may go on for years at end, where a person's body was allowed to grow resistance gradually. He said the most asked question was does homoeopathy work and said there had been several scientific studies both in favour of and

against homeopathy as a medicine science.

He said in the clinical studies conducted on homoeopathic cures vs placebos for children with warts the results were similar, which was that homoeopathy performed slightly better than placebos as far as the response rate of children was considered.

He said, however, since the results only focused on counting the number of people who responded to the medicines applied, no account of the healing rate was considered.

Other prominent homoeopaths present were Dr Prachi, Dr BN Acharya, Dr GB Lal and Dr RC Agnihotri.

‘NEP to change the face of Indian education system’

KANPUR (PNS): Dr Shirley Mukherjee from Adamas University, Kolkata, while addressing a webinar on 'New Education Policy, 2020-NEP: Its impact on higher education' at JIMC, said the education policy had impacted school and college education equally. She said the most significant highlight was the proposal to set up the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), a single overarching umbrella body for higher education, excluding medical and legal education.

She said the HECI had four independent verticals — National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) for regulation, General Education Council (GEC) for standard-setting, Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) for funding, and National Accreditation Council (NAC) for accreditation. She added that in India there was always a need for uniformity in education standards, and a sin-

gle umbrella body was always a requirement.

Dr Mukherjee said multiple independent governing bodies led to many standardisation issues across institutions and along with that, any improvement plan to be implemented in this higher education domain took several years. She said if the proposed plan was implemented, uniformity and coordination in all institutions in this country would be much easier and process changes would be easily implemented and effective too.

She said another highlight of the proposal was to introduce a single university entrance exam conducted by the National Testing Agency. She said earlier, to seek admission across various universities, a student had to go through the burden of multiple examinations plus the varied difficulty level of question papers across many Central universities. She said if this plan was implemented, a student would give

one entrance exam and get spared from the burden of many and at the same time, the question paper level would be standardised, error-free as the NTA would conduct it, and the admission process would be streamlined.

Addressing the session, Dr Deepjyoti Chaudhary from Assam University, said the policy also allowed universities to set up offshore campuses and many foreign universities could now set up institutes in India. She said this would lead to competition, talent flow, and key practices from the outside to India, which would ultimately lead to a great deal of improvement in the country's education standards. She said it would also provide real exposure to children, and students would be able to afford global education in India, instead of spending lakhs in another country.

She said the focus on having multi-disciplinary colleges in every district by 2030 was a

promising idea as well and it would renew the country's focus on arts, humanities and a multi-disciplinary form of education to ensure that students were skilled well for the career ahead. She said remote learning of concepts had kept students far behind in terms of skills so far. She expressed the hope that with this policy Gross Enrollment Ratio would rise for the country as multiple entry and exit options at the undergraduate level had been proposed to be allowed. She said the academic bank of credit would help store credits, and the concept of credits would finally get more weightage in India.

Dr Chaudhary said these policies had all been proposed, and there was a long way to go before the implementation rolled out. She said the policies and the suggested changes looked great and they would change the face of the Indian education system in the years to come.

BTech student caught trying to rob ATM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

An engineering student was caught red-handed attempting to remove cash from an ATM in Sachendi police station area late Saturday night.

Prior to breaking open the ATM, the student had damaged the CCTV cameras and DVR installed in the ATM booth.

The ATM engineers are now trying to recover the backup from the damaged DVR.

There is an ATM in front of the State Bank of India's Bhaunti (Sachendi) branch. Late Saturday night, a BTech student attempted to remove cash from the ATM. After damaging the CCTV cameras and DVR installed in the booth, he attempted to break open the ATM with the help of a drill machine, hammer, pliers and a screwdriver. But before he could succeed in breaking open the cash chamber, cops on patrolling reached there.

Seeing the police, the student tried to escape but the cops chased him and nabbed him when he fell down while making a bid to cross the college boundary wall,

After giving first aid, the cops took him to the police station. The cops also recovered the drill machine, hammer, screwdriver and pliers from the spot.

Station House Officer Satish Rathaur said the kin of the student had been informed about the incident.

SBI Bhaunti Branch Manager Prashant Bajpai said the student was trying to remove around Rs 14 lakh cash in the ATM.

Two chain snatchers arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Panki police arrested two chain snatchers on Sunday and sent them to jail.

They had looted the chain of a teacher near MIG police outpost of Panki on April 5 at gunpoint. The incident was recorded in the CCTV cameras installed there.

Addressing media persons, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Abhishek Agarwal said with the help of CCTV footage, two chain snatchers were arrested. He identified them as Shubham Chaudhary and Sumit Verma of Makrikheda, Kalyanpur.

Police recovered a country-made pistol, looted chain and the valuables looted from another woman in Naubasta in the past.

Sumit Verma was found to be involved in 10 other cases of loot and Shubham in four. These cases were registered against them at different police stations in the past.

The ADCP said the both chain snatchers would also be booked under the Gangsters Act,

It may be recalled that two miscreants on a motorcycle youths had looted at gunpoint the gold chain of Deepali Bajpai, a resident of C Block, Panki and a teacher in Virendra Swarup Public School in MIG, Panki, when she was opening the door of her car near the school gate to return home.

Kanpur Plastipack donates face masks

KANPUR (PNS): Kanpur Plastipack donated 25,000 face masks in the presence of Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Raj Shekhar, out of which 10,000 each were handed over to GSVM Medical College and Kanshiram Trauma Centre at Ramadevi and on the divisional commissioner's recommendation, 5,000 to 7 Air Force Hospital in Kanpur. Addressing the function, the divisional commissioner said for the sake of well-being and to restrict the positive cases of COVID-19 it had been decided that the masks be distributed and people be sensitised to wear masks when they move out. He said for the distribution of masks, help had been taken from the district and police administrations and also non-governmental organisations.

DM inspects Covid control room

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

DM Praveen Kumar Laxkar inspected the Covid control room set up at Collectorate compound. He directed the

revenue) Hari Shankar Yadav jointly held a chaupal at Padari police station regarding the panchayat polls on Saturday. Addressing the meeting of the reputed persons of the police



DM Praveen Kumar Laxkar during the inspection of Covid control room on Saturday

ADM (F&R) to activate it properly by deploying the personnel shift wise. He further directed to ensure the presence of the deployed staff and take action if any one was found absent from duty. During the inspection the DM checked the data of computer too and became aware with the updated information about the condition of Corona in the district. He directed the officials of the Health department to ensure more tests daily and keep updated with each and every patient. Interacting with the staff deployed at the control room he made it clear that laxity at any stage will not be tolerated at all. The DM was accompanied by ADM(F&R) UP Singh.

CHAUPAL: SP Ajay Kumar Singh and ADM (land

station area ADM highlighted the main points of model code of conduct for panchayat elections and made it clear that the its violation was punishable. SP Ajay Kumar Singh directed the cops to ensure that no one tried to allure the voters or threatened them. He said no candidate or political party was allowed to hold lunch or dinner parties which could influence the voters. Regular patrolling in the area was a must, he said. Regarding the election campaigning the SP said that no vehicle was allowed for canvassing without permission of the appropriate authority. He made it clear that in such cases not only action will be taken against the candidate but the owner of the vehicle too. He told the public that in case of any violation

the common man could inform the authorities and action will be taken positively and the name of the informer will be kept a secret. He said no any could with a criminal background could become a polling agent. The meeting was attended by the former people's representatives along with prospective candidates and the reputed people of the area and was convened by Padari SHO Vyankatesh Tiwari.

ILLICIT LIQUOR RECOVERED: Chunar police have arrested two persons, recovered 75 litres of illicit liquor and destroyed 12 quintals of 'lahan' (raw material for preparing illicit liquor) along with the brewery on Saturday. During the drive to control the crime, police personnel of Adalpuria outpost raided a brick kiln located at Sursi village under Chunar police station. During the raid the police found that liquor was being manufactured illegally at the place. The police recovered 75 litres of ready liquor in five pots and destroyed 12 quintals of 'lahan'. The police arrested Mahendar Nonia, a resident of Jamuaain village under Madanpur police station in Aurangabad district, Bihar, and Ranthu Mahli, a resident of Kakara village under Maandar police station in Ranchi district of Jharkhand, in this connection After registering the case under relevant sections of Excise Act the police sent the accused to jail. Chunar SHO Gopal Gupta said that the investigation was on and more culprits could be nabbed in this connection.

Bandra Terminus-Mau SF spl to run on April 13, 20 & 27

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

The railway administration will for the convenience of passengers run the 09099/09100 Bandra Terminus-Mau-Bandra Terminus and 09087/09088 Udhna-Chhapra-Udhna special train. It will run the 05059/ 05060 Lalkuan-Anand Vihar Terminus-Lalkuan Bi-Weekly puja special train on from April 13 to June 29 every Tuesday and Thursday. All coaches in these trains will be of reserved category and passengers travelling in them will have to follow the Covid-19 prevention guidelines. Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) Pankaj Kumar Singh said.

BANDRA TERMINUS-MAU SPL: The 09099 Bandra Terminus-Mau superfast special train will on April 13, 20 and 27 (on every Tuesday) depart from Bandra Terminus at 22.25 hrs, from Borivali at 22.48 hrs, from Vapi on second day at 01.07 hrs, from Surat at 03.20 hrs, from Vadodara at 05.05 hrs, from Ratlam at 08.45 hrs, from Kota at 11.55 hrs, from Sawai Madhopur at 13.08 hrs, from Gangapur City at 14.00 hrs, from Hindaun City at 14.47 hrs, from Bayana at 15.30 hrs, from Agra Cantt at 18.15 hrs, from Etawah at 22.05 hrs, from Kanpur Central at 00.10 hrs on the third day, from Prayagraj Jn at 03.10 hrs, from Janghai at 04.23 hrs from Janghai, from Mariahu at 05.13 hrs, from Jaunpur at 06.20 hrs and from Aunrihar at 07.20 hrs, and reach Mau at 09.00 hrs.

M A U - B A N D R A TERMINUS SPL: The 09100 Mau-Bandra Terminus special train April 15, 22 and 29 on every Thursday depart from Mau at 19.00 hrs, from Aunrihar at 20.05 hrs, from

Jaunpur at 21.35 hrs, from Marihau at 22.23 hrs, from Janghai at 23.08 hrs, from Prayagraj Jn at 01.10 hrs on the second day, from Kanpur Central at 03.35 hrs, from Etawah at 05.20 hrs, from Agra Cantt at 09.55 hrs, from Bayana at 12.35 hrs, from Hindaun City at 13.17 hrs, from Gangapur City at 14.10 hrs, from Sawai Madhopur at 15.05 hrs, from Kota at 16.25 hrs, from Ratlam at 20.35 hrs, on tn the third day from Vadodara at 00.53 hrs, from Surat at 02.45 hrs, from Vapi at 04.07 hrs, from Borivali at 06.00 hrs and reach Bandra Terminus at 06.35 hrs. A total of 21 coaches, including 12 of sleeper class, six of general second class, one AC second class and two SLRD coaches will be attached in this special train.

UDHNA-CHHAPRA SF SPL: The 09087 Udhna-Chhapra superfast special train will on April 16, 23, 30 (every Friday) depart from Udhna at 08.35 hrs, from Nandurbar at 10.50 hrs, from Bhusaval at 13.35 hrs, from Itarsi at 19.40 hrs, from Jabalpur at 22.30 rs, from Katni at 23.45 hrs, the second day from Satna at 01.05 hrs, from Prayagraj Chheoki at 04.07 hrs, from Mirzapur at 05.05 hrs, from Varanasi at 07.45 hrs, from Jaunpur at 08.30 hrs, from Ballia at 11.57 hrs and reach Chhapra at 13.20 hrs.

CHHAPRA-UDHNA SUPERFAST SPL: In the return journey, the 09088 Chhapra-Udhna superfast special train will on April 18 and 25 and May 2 on every Sunday leave Chhapra at 00.15 hrs, from Ballia at 01.45 hrs, from Jaunpur at 05.20 hrs, from Varanasi at 06.05 hrs, from Mirzapur at 08.47 hrs, from Prayagraj Chheoki at 10.02

hrs, from Satna at 13.15 hrs, from Katni at 14.30 hrs, from Jabalpur at 15.45 hrs, from Itarsi at 19.40 hrs, on the second day from Bhusaval at 00.15 hrs, Nandubar at 03.40 hrs and reach Udhna at 07.00 hrs. A total of 21 coaches, including 12 of sleeper class, six pf general second class, one AC second class and two SLRD coaches will be attached in this special train.

LALKUAN-ANVT SPL: The 05059 Lalkuan-Anand Vihar Terminus (ANVT) bi-weekly puja special train will April 13 to June 29 on every Tuesday and Thursday depart from Lalkuan at 04.30 hrs, from Rudrapur Sidcul Halt at 04.52 hrs, from Gularbhoj at 05.13 hrs, from Bazpur at 05.28 hrs, from Kashipur at 06.25 hrs, from Piplasana at 06.49 hrs, from Moradabad at 07.43 hrs, from Amroha at 08.13 hrs, from Hapur at 09.17 hrs, from Ghaziabad at 10.08 hrs and reach ANVT at 10.40 hrs.

ANVT-LALKUAN SPL: In the return journey the 05060 Anand Vihar Terminus-Lalkuan biweekly puja special train will on every Tuesday and Thursday from April 13 to June 29 leave Anand Vihar Terminus at 14.15 hrs, from Ghaziabad at 14.52 hours, from Hapur at 15.30 hrs, from Amroha at 16.30 hrs, from Moradabad at 17.30 hrs., from Piplasana at 18.20 hrs, from Kashipur at 19.20 hrs, from Bajarpur at 19.45 hrs, from Gulbarbhoj at 20.05 hrs and Rudrapur Sidcul Halt at 20.27 hrs and reach Lalan at 20.55 hrs. In this special train a total of 12 coaches, including four of general second class, five of general second class chair car, one of air conditioned chair car and two of SLRD, will be attached.

Drive for protection of rly passengers, staff

PNS ■ VARANASI

In view of the increasing Covid-19 cases under the direction of Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vijay Kumar Panjari, a public awareness campaign is being run for the protection of railway passengers and its staff. In the same order, on Saturday for protection from Covid infection, the frontline and Commercial staff and Railway Protection Force jawans working at Chhapra Jn, Manduadih, Mau, Salempur and Azamgarh stations of the division counselled the passengers on how to follow Corona rule in a proper manner. During this time they were told about the three precautions for protection from Covid — wearing of mask properly, washing hands frequently and maintaining physical distancing. Under the campaign at all railway stations and offices of the division through banners and posters extensive dissemination of the message of 'Dawai Bhi, Kadahi Bhi' was being done. Besides a campaign was conducted at Chhapra Junction to ensure



compliance of the face mask rule. During this time masks were also distributed among the passengers who did not have masks. Apart from it face masks were also distributed among the poor vendors around the station. The Corona protocol is being followed at major stations of the division for protection from Covid and the rule of applying masks at all stations and station premises of the division is being strictly followed. PRO Ashok Kumar said. Besides those not applying masks are being fined. Arrangements for single exit and single entry have been made at major stations of the division due to which touchless thermal scanning of passengers is being done. A safe zone with barricading has been created at all major stations of the division to isolate infected passengers from the common ones. At all the stations of Varanasi division use of masks, physical distancing and sanitisers was being done compulsory by the employees.

India should cherish peace process on LAC, says China

PNS/PTI ■ NEW DELHI/BEIJING

With both sides unable to firm up a plan to withdraw from the flash-points during the latest round of talks, China on Sunday said India should cherish the current positive trend of de-escalation and peace on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh.

This statement came two days after the 11th round of Corps Commander-level talks on Friday at the Chushul-Moldo border meeting point at the LAC in Ladakh failed to show any tangible movement forward. Both the sides, however, agreed to continue holding regular dialogue at the military and diplomatic levels to restore peace.

In the talks lasting more than 12 hours, China dilly dallied on pulling back troops from the friction points at Patrolling Points 15, 17 and 17A at the Hot Springs and Gogra, sources said.

The Indian delegation led by Leh-based 14 Corps chief Lt General P G K Menon reiterated the country's stand that disengagement from Hot Springs and Gogra will go a long way in bringing down tension at the LAC. The proposed pull back will ensure peace and stability in the region besides ensuring tranquility, the Indian team insisted.

China, however, did not give any commitment on a plan to disengage and continues to maintain large number of troops at the face-off sites. This led to concern in the Indian security establishment, sources said. The Chinese team was led by Major General Liu Lin.

Faced with the stalling tactics by China in Depsang valley where it advanced into Indian territory in 2013 and continued to remain there, the two Corps Commanders will meet again shortly to continue the momentum of dialogue,



they said.

In this backdrop, the Chinese military said on Sunday India should cherish the "current positive trend" of de-escalation and cooling down of tensions in the border area. A day after the 11th round of Corps Commander-level talks, the Indian army is a statement said on Saturday both sides held a detailed deliberation on the disengagement of troops in the remaining friction points of Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang in eastern Ladakh.

Both the sides agreed to jointly maintain stability on the ground, avoid any new incidents and resolve the outstanding issues in an "expedient manner".

There was no visible forward movement at the latest round of military talks between the two countries as the Chinese delegation came to the talks with a "premeditated mindset" and did not show any flexibility in moving forward on the disengagement process at the remaining friction points.

In its press release on the latest round of talks between two militaries held on April 9, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) said India should cherish the de-escalation and cooling in the border area, in an apparent reference to the disengagement of troops from the most contentious area of the Pangong Lake in February.

Both the sides agreed to jointly maintain stability on the ground, avoid any new incidents

their leaders, continue their communication and dialogue and work towards a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues at the earliest, it said.

"They also agreed to jointly maintain stability on the ground, avoid any new incidents and jointly maintain peace in the border areas," the statement said.

Army Chief General M M Naravane had said last month the threat to India has only "abated" following the disengagement in the Pangong lake area, but it has not gone away altogether. He said China still maintained considerable number of troops in the "rear areas." It means the Chinese troops though pulled back from the eyeball to eyeball confrontation but continued to have heavy armour and troops close by thereby posing threat to Indian interests. Naravane also observed peace will be restored once these additional troops return to their barracks from the forward areas.

Not willing to take any chances, the Army in the last few months substantially bolstered its troop strength besides weaponry. Moreover, the troops remained deployed on the LAC throughout the harsh winter months when the temperature dipped to minus 30 degrees.

The standoff between the two armies started on May 5 last year when the troops from both the sides exchanged blows at the Pangong Tso. Soon, the face-offs commenced at some other places on the LAC.

The border saw massive troop build up by India and China after a bloody brawl on June 15 in the Galwan valley. Twenty Indian soldiers including the Commanding Officer were killed. At least 40 Chinese were also killed by China was yet to officially announce the number of casualties.

Traders' body asks Modi not to impose night curfew, lockdown



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) on Sunday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi not to impose night curfew or lockdown amid rising Covid-19 in the country and instead adopt staggered working time for different sectors. In a letter to the Prime Minister, the traders' association said it would be more appropriate if alternate measures may be adopted at district levels all over the country.

"Instead of night curfew or lockdown which have not proved a worthy step so far to combat escalation of COVID-19, it would be more appropriate if alternate easy measures may be adopted at district levels and staggered working time for different sectors," said CAIT.

CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal said that a closer analysis of the COVID-19 statistics over the last one week have made it ample clear that night curfew and lockdown in different states have not brought the desired results of bringing down the cases. It suggested that working hours of different verticals of trade and commerce should be revised.

"We suggest that government offices, private offices and other all kinds of offices may work from 8 am to 2 pm whereas the markets and shops may be allowed to work from 11 am to 5 pm," said CAIT.

Active Covid cases in India breach 11-L mark

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The active Covid-19 cases in India crossed the 11 lakh mark for the first time after a record high of 1.52 lakh new infections on Saturday. The active caseload till now was at its lowest at 1,35,926 on February 12 and at its highest at 10,17,754 on September 18, 2020.

Amid an unprecedented burden on health infrastructure in 15 States and Delhi, which are witnessing an upward trajectory, authorities have started reserving more COVID hospitals and taking steps to address any shortage of medical supplies, besides enhancing curbs on the movement of people.

The Centre announced a ban on export of Remdesivir, used in coronavirus treatment and its Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients, and asked all domestic manufacturers to display on their website details of their stockists and distributors.

India's COVID-19 tally of cases climbed to 1,33,58,805, and the death toll increased to 1,69,275 with 839 daily new fatalities, the highest since October 18, 2020, the data updated by Health Ministry on Sunday morning showed.

While the cumulative

number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has crossed 10 crore after 85 days, the "Tika Utsav" or a special "vaccination festival" was started till April 14. "Anyone eligible for the vaccine should get the jab, and for this the society and administration have to make full efforts," Prime Minister Modi said pitching for "zero vaccine waste" and urging the people to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour. "This festival is, in a way, the beginning of another major war against corona. We have to lay special emphasis on personal hygiene as well as social hygiene," he said.

Five states — Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala -- cumulatively account for 70.82 per cent of India's active COVID-19 cases, while Maharashtra alone accounts for 48.57 per cent, the Union Health Ministry said.

Besides these states, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Telangana, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal are displaying an upward graph in daily new cases.

Most of these states have reimposed restrictions, includ-

ing the closure of schools, night curfew, weekend and local shutdowns, while ruling out a total lockdown, but as the latest wave of patients continues to flood hospitals, there are some signs of a rethink.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal have said that a lockdown will be the only option if the infections don't abate and the health system shows signs of collapsing. Kejriwal on Sunday said the COVID-19 situation in the national capital is "very serious".

The city recorded 10,774 fresh COVID-19 cases on Sunday, the highest single-day spike so far, with 48 more fatalities. "The fourth wave is more dangerous than the previous wave," he told a press conference, and urged the people not to step out unless there is urgent work.

Speaking at an all-party meeting held virtually to discuss the COVID-19 situation in the State on Saturday, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had indicated the imposition of a strict lockdown in the State given the alarming rise in COVID-19 cases.

CBI to probe cheating, misappropriation of funds case against ex-MP KD Singh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has taken over a case of cheating and misappropriation of funds against former Rajya Sabha MP KD Singh from Uttar Pradesh Police following a reference from the State Government and further notification from the Centre for probe into the case by the Central agency.

The case was originally registered at Kotwali Kanpur Nagar

police station in Kanpur as Crime No. 234/2019 on a complaint from one Pawan Mishra alleging cheating and misappropriation of funds invested by the complainant and other investors in Alchemist Infra Realty Ltd and Alchemist Township Ltd promoted by the former MP.

The investors were promised plots/villas/apartments against their investments. However, they were neither given the promised plots, flats, or villas. They were

not even refunded the funds despite the plots or flats not being allotted to them.

Besides Singh, six directors of the two firms have also been booked in a case of cheating and criminal breach of trust.

The UP Government had requested a CBI probe through an order dated August 16, 2020. The Centre notified the probe by the CBI on April 1 this year following which the CBI re-registered the case on Friday.

FROM PAGE 1

5 NEW VACCINES BY YEAR END: GOVT

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the "Tika Utsav", the vaccination drive between April 11 and 14, marks the beginning of the second big war on Covid-19. He also urged people to adhere strictly to social hygiene and the wearing of masks. In a statement, the PM urged people to keep four things in mind, including "each one, vaccinate one", "each one, treat one" and "each one, save one".

Elderly people or those who may not be much educated should be helped in getting the vaccine, he said, and also asked people to help those Covid-19 patients in getting treatment who may lack resources or information. By wearing masks, people can save themselves and others, Modi added.

The PM also asked families and members of society to take lead in setting up micro containment zones in case of anyone getting the infectious disease, saying this is an important way to fight the disease in a densely populated country like India.

"Our success will be decided by how much aware we are about micro containment zones. Our success will be decided by us not stepping outside homes when not needed. Our success will be decided by that those eligible for the vaccine get it. Our success will be decided by how much we adhere to wearing masks and following other protocols," he said.

"Anyone eligible for the vaccine should get the jab and for this society and administration have to make full efforts," he added. Pitching for "zero vaccine waste", he said it has to be ensured that not a single jab is wasted. "We have to move towards optimum utilisation of the country's vaccination capacity. This is a way to augment our capacity," he said.

In these four days of the vaccination drive, targets have to be set at personal, societal and administration's level, all efforts be made to meet them, Modi said. "I have full confidence that with this people's participation, awareness and fulfilling our responsibility, we will again be successful in containing coronavirus," he added.

INDIA BANS VIRUS DRUG REMDESIVIR'S EXPORT

Moreover, drugs inspectors and other officers are directed to verify the stocks and also take measures to curb hoarding and black marketing of Remdesivir.

"There is a potential of a further increase in demand for Remdesivir injection in the coming days. The Department of Pharmaceuticals has been in contact with domestic manufacturers to ramp up the production of Remdesivir," the Government said in a statement here.

Remdesivir is considered a key antiviral drug in the fight against Covid-19, especially in adult patients with severe complications. Sudden demand of

Remdesivir after it had dipped in December last year to February this year has taken the manufacturers by surprise who said that it would take at least 10 days to overcome the shortage.

The Maharashtra Government, meanwhile, has decided to set up district-level control rooms to ensure a smooth supply of Remdesivir injections and prevent hoarding and black marketing of the drug, officials said on Sunday.

The State is facing multiple issues pertaining to the drug, like the demand-supply gap, its hoarding and black marketing by stockists and pharmacy shops, unaffordable prices and irrational prescriptions by some doctors.

It has also asked the health services commissioner to put in place a separate mechanism to streamline the supply of Remdesivir, in the wake of a rise in its demand due to a surge in Covid-19 cases.

SCHOOLS UP TO CLASS 12 SHUT TILL APRIL 30

hospitals.

It should be ensured that at least 700 beds are available for the treatment of COVID-19 patients in each Covid hospital. For this, all necessary medical resources should be arranged," he said.

The chief minister stressed on availability of medical oxygen, medical staff, essential medicines and equipment and backup in all Covid hospitals. He said ventilators and high flow nasal cannula (HFNC) must be available in Level-2 and Level-3 Covid hospitals.

He said to maintain adequate availability of ventilators and HFNCs, additional arrangements should be made as required by constantly monitoring them. He also asked the officials to increase the number of beds at Level-2 and Level-3 Covid hospitals.

The chief minister said that the Integrated Command and Control Centre should be actively operated. He said in view of the usefulness of monitoring committees, they should be linked to various activities of Covid management.

He said all Covid frontline workers must use masks, gloves and sanitisers. He also stressed on making Covid testing at railway and bus stations and airports more effective.

The chief minister asked officials to make people constantly aware about prevention from COVID-19 and said that the public address systems should be widely used and people should be made aware of the need to adhere to social distancing and mandatory use of masks.

On Sunday, the state reported its highest single-day spike of 15,353 cases till now. With 67 fresh deaths, the death toll too have reached 9,152 in the state, which has reported 6,92,015 cases since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Lucknow reported the maximum 4,444 cases, followed by 1,740 in Varanasi, 1,565 in Allahabad and 881 in Kanpur, the UP government said in another statement.

Of the fresh deaths, state capital Lucknow reported the highest 31, followed by nine in Allahabad, eight in Kanpur, two each in Gorakhpur, Muzaffarnagar and Chandauli and one each in Varanasi, Moradabad, Saharanpur, Ballia, Ayodhya, Lakhimpur-Khiri, Jaunpur, Deoria, Rae Bareilly, Ghazipur, Rampur, Basti and Kannauj.

The count of active COVID-19 cases in the state stands at 71,241.

OPP SEEKS CANCELLATION OF CBSE, ICSE EXAMS

Priyanka said the apprehensions of students are well founded, as giving exams under the spectre of a deadly disease will cause unnecessary anxiety to children and impact their ability to perform as well.

"They are rightfully requesting that the exams be cancelled under the prevailing circumstances. I do hope that the Government will engage in a dialogue with schools, students and their parents so that a safer way for them to fulfil their educational obligations can be found. Rather than forcing them into a potentially dangerous situation, it would be in the fitness of things for them to be given the support, encouragement and protection that is due to them at this very trying time," Vadra said in her letter.

Shiv Sena also appealed to the Centre to take a uniform decision on the board exams of Classes 10 and 12 across the country in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. A unilateral decision by any State would lead to students of that State being at a disadvantage in terms of career and opportunities, Shiv Sena's chief spokesperson Arvind Sawant said in a letter addressed to Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank'.

CBI GRILLS DESHMUKH'S 2 AIDES OVER EXTORTION ORDER TO VAZE

The CBI on Tuesday started its preliminary enquiry into the allegations of corruption and bribery against Deshmukh after the Bombay High Court directed to conduct an enquiry within 15 days and submit a report. The High Court's order came in response to a petition from Singh seeking a CBI probe in the matter.

The agency sent a team of officers from Delhi to Mumbai to carry out the probe. Till now, the agency has questioned Vaze, Singh and other officers of the Mumbai Police.

EXPERTS FEAR KUMBH CAN BE COVID SUPER-SPREADER

"People from across the country particularly from Northern India are participating in the event. This time the virus is more infectious. Those returning from the Mahakumbh will be the potential spread-

er of the disease," he said.

Though Dr VK Paul, Niti Aayog member was recently evasive on a query that if the religious gathering would be a 'super spreader', in March 23 only, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan at a press conference had observed that currently more than 12 states in India have shown a surge in Covid-19 cases in the past few weeks, and the pilgrims who are expected to visit Haridwar during the Kumbh Mela could also be from these states.

The Secretary had also noted that as per the report of the central team, 10-20 pilgrims and 10-20 locals are testing positive every day. "This positivity rate has the potential to rapidly lead to an upsurge in cases, given the expected large footfall during Kumbh Mela," he had said.

The Centre had also noted that some 50,000 rapid antigen tests and 5,000 RT-PCR tests were being carried out every day at the festival, "not enough to effectively offset the huge number of expected pilgrim footfall".

Bhushan said that the Uttarakhand government has been asked to follow all the "stringent measures" to control the spread of the deadly virus during the event.

A study from MIT too suggests that large gatherings have a much larger impact than expected. The study of about 60 super-spreading events showed that events where one person infects more than six other people are much more common than would be expected if the range of transmission rates followed statistical distributions commonly used in epidemiology.

BODY BLOW TO PAK ULTRAS IN J&K, 12 KILLED IN 3 DAYS

According to police, "Chief of Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind Imtiyaz Shah, eliminated by the security forces in Tral on Friday, was tasked with attacking the Amarnath yatra".

Out of three outfits, Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind lost a maximum number of seven terrorists. Three eliminated terrorists belonged to Al-Badr and two had joined the ranks of LeT in the region. All of them were involved in attacks on security forces and intimidation of the local population. They were also working to recruit local youths in the ranks of Pakistan-based terror outfits.

Around three dozen terrorists have been gunned down this year since January 1, 2021 in 15 encounters.

In all these four encounters, security forces ensured no major collateral damage was done. Four soldiers including an officer received splinter injuries while conducting operations inside a religious place. Since one of the operations was carried out inside a religious place in Jan Mohalla area of Shopian, security forces were directed to exercise maximum restraint to protect the sanctity of the place.

In the first two operations, seven terrorists were killed between Thursday and Friday. Two more operations were launched late Saturday evening in which

one terrorist was eliminated in Shopian. Four others, including those two responsible for the killing of Territorial Army jawan Mohd Saleem Akhoo, were eliminated during ongoing operations in Shopian and Semthan area of Bijbehara in Anantnag on Sunday.

Patting the back of officers of the counter-terrorism grid in the region, Director General of Police Dilbagh said, twelve militants, belonging to Ansar Gazwat-ul-Hind (AGuH), Al-Badr and Lashker-e-Toiba outfits, were killed by the security forces in Kashmir within the last 72 hours.

Singh said out of these 12 terrorists seven belonged to AGuH including the outfit's chief, while three were from Al-Badr and two were affiliated with LeT/TRF. The two from LeT/TRF were "hardcore local terrorists" and involved in the killing of a TA soldier at Bijbehara Anantnag on April 9.

Singh said the duo was "active for long and wanted in many cases".

The DGP further said that with the killing of seven AGuH terrorists at Tral and Shopian, the outfit has been "fully eliminated".

In a separate statement a police spokesman said, "on a specific input generated by Shopian Police regarding presence of terrorists in orchards of Reban Bandpawa area of Shopian, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by Police, 34RR and 178Bn CRPF around 5.00 pm on Saturday".

"During the search operation, as the presence of terrorists got ascertained they were given an opportunity to surrender, however they fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party which was retaliated leading to an encounter. In the initial retaliatory firing, one terrorist was killed, but the operation was suspended to give the trapped terrorists another chance to surrender", the police spokesman said.

The joint teams exercised maximum restraint and facilitated the presence of family members of a holed up terrorist Faisal Gulzar to the encounter site so as to persuade him to surrender. However, despite repeated appeals by his family members and assurances by the security forces, the other terrorists didn't allow him to surrender. Ultimately in the wee hours, during the fierce gunfight both the trapped terrorists were killed and bodies of all the three killed terrorists were recovered from the site of encounter.

They have been identified as Aasif Ahmad Ganai and Faisal Gulzar Ganai both the residents of Chitragam Kalan. However, the identity of the 3rd killed terrorist is being ascertained. As per police records, they were part of groups involved in many terror crime cases and linked with proscribed terror outfit Al-Badr.

The second operation also started around the same time after confirming the information regarding presence of terrorists in a residential house at village Semthan area of Bijbehara, Anantnag.

"During the search operation, as the presence of terrorists got ascertained they were given an opportunity to surrender, however they fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party which was retaliated leading to an encounter. The joint teams also rescued all the civilians trapped in the gunfire and halted the operation for the night", the police spokesman said.

DIDI, SHAH LOCK HORNS OVER ELECTION VIOLENCE, DEATHS

On Saturday, around morning, the CISF opened fire on an alleged a crowd of 300-400 people killing four and another person injured at booth number 126 at Jorpatki in Sitalkuchi constituency.

The Special Police Observer appointed by the Election Commission, Vivek Dube, sent a report saying the CISF had to fire in self-defence when villagers tried to snatch their weapons as they were trying to escort 50-60 voters to the polling booth after they were driven away from the booth by reported miscreants who did not want them to vote. There was a misunderstanding between villagers and the CISF, he had said.

"Is CISF trained to control mobs ... besides it is a general rule that the forces should first use batons, then water cannons or other methods before firing ... even firing should be done below the waist," she said adding "it is an unprecedented incident ... I wanted to go to Sitalkuchi today but EC has issued a 72-hour ban. I will go and meet the victim families on the 14th ... I will visit that place after that," Mamata said even as she spoke to Manjur Mian, a relative of Hamidul Mian, one of the victims, over the telephone.

She earlier had demanded the resignation of Amit Shah saying "the entire dirty game is being played by him ... the killing of innocent people was the result of a conspiracy hatched by him ... hes-hould resign." Requesting the people of Bengal to celebrate the festival of democracy peacefully, Shah said "Mamata Didi has asked me to resign ...

I will definitely put in my paper if the people of Bengal want me to do so ... But one thing is for sure that she will have to resign on May 2 when the election results come out ... she will have to submit her resignation to the Governor on that day."

2 KIDS DIE, 150 SHANTIES GUTTED IN FIRE IN NOIDA

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath condoled the loss of lives in the mishap. He has announced a financial assistance of Rs 4 lakh for the family of each of the deceased, the State Government said in a statement issued in Lucknow.

He also directed the officials to extend all possible help to the affected people.

BJP leader and Noida MLA Pankaj Singh too condoled the loss of lives in the incident.

Enhance peacekeeping budget: Army chief to UN

PTI ■ DHAKA

Indian Army chief Gen MM Naravane on Sunday urged the United Nations to enhance the budget for its peacekeeping missions and emphasised the need to provide appropriate logistics and improved technological support for the blue helmet missions in view of the emerging challenges.

Gen Naravane, who is here on a five-day official tour, delivered a keynote address on "Changing Nature of Global Conflicts: Role of UN Peacekeepers" during the "Army Chiefs Conclave" hosted by his Bangladeshi counterpart General Aziz Ahmed, the Indian Army's Additional Directorate General of Public Information (ADG PI) tweeted.

Gen Naravane laid emphasis on enhanced budget for UN peacekeeping activities, Bangladesh defence ministry's Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR) directorate quoted him as saying at the conclave. Bangladesh Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen was the chief guest at the event.

The Indian Army chief also called for providing appropriate logistics and improved technological support for the UN blue helmet missions, pointing out their emerging challenges. He said the

UN peacekeeping missions should run on a participatory basis.

The Bangladesh Army hosted the conclave coinciding with the celebrations of the birth centenary of the country's 'Father of the Nation' Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the golden jubilee of its 1971 independence.

Force commander of UN multidimensional integrated stabilisation mission in Mali Lieutenant General Dennis Gyllensporre, force commander of UN multidimensional integrated stabilisation mission in the Central African region Lieutenant General Sidki Daniel Traore and Bhutan army's deputy chief of operation Brigadier General Darji Rinchen, among others attended the conclave.

Senior diplomats, security strategists and police officers also attended the seminar.

During the event, the Indian Army chief interacted with the senior officers of the participating nations and military observers from the other nations.

Momen told the conclave that the nature of peacekeeping operations in recent periods transformed both in terms of scale and scope for what "peacekeeping missions today are more than truce supervising operation".

The changing situation further expanded the missions' responsibility

taking into account "other dimensions of peace, such as establishing rule of law, protection of human rights, protection of women and children, support to political process, managing elections, reintegration and socio-economic development," he said.

The conclave was held as part of a multilateral UN-mandated counter-terrorism exercise, Shantir Ogroshena (Frontrunners of Peace) that commenced on April 4. An Indian Army contingent of 30 personnel are participating along with the Royal Bhutan Army, Sri Lankan Army and Bangladesh Army in the exercise that will conclude on Monday.

Military observers from the US, UK, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Singapore are also attending the exercise. The aim of the exercise is to strengthen the procedures and enhance interoperability amongst neighbourhood countries to ensure robust peacekeeping operations in the region. The armies of all the participating nations shared their valuable experiences and refined their drills and procedures in peacekeeping operations.

The visit of Gen Naravane, who is here at the invitation of his Bangladeshi counterpart Gen Aziz Ahmed, comes less than two weeks after Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to the neighbouring country.

EXPLOSIVE-LADEN SUV-HIRAN MURDER CASES

NIA arrests Vaze's associate Kazi, suspects he destroyed evidence

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In the fourth arrest in the twin explosive laden SUV planting and alleged Mansukh Hiran murder cases, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Sunday took Assistant Police Inspector (API) Riyazuddin Kazi, a close associate and colleague of incarcerated police officer Sachin Vaze, into custody.

Shortly after he was arrested on Sunday, Kazi was produced before a special NIA court, which remanded him to the custody of the agency till April 16.

Kazi's arrest came after several rounds of questioning by the NIA over the past three weeks.

Kazi was directly working under Vaze, an API heading the Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU) of the Crime Branch-CID of Mumbai Police.

The NIA is looking into Kazi's role in the planning of a Gelatin sticks' laden Scorpio and a threatening letter inside the vehicle, in the vicinity of Mukesh Ambani's 27-storey residence "Antilia" on Carmichael Road in south Mumbai on February 25 and the subsequent alleged murder of Thane businessman Mansukh Hiran. Hiran's body was recovered from the marshy Reti-Bunder creek Mumbra in the neighbouring Thane district on March 5.

The NIA suspects that acting allegedly at the behest of Vaze, Kazi might have destroyed evidence in the case and procured fake vehicle number plates number plates

Vaze was the first accused to have been arrested by the NIA which registered an FIR in the explosive-laden SUV recovery case on March 8.

Vaze had earlier this week created a sensation by making a written submission before the special NIA Court accusing Deshmukh and another Maharashtra Minister Anil Parab of asking him to Indulge in extortion for them.

Vaze, who was arrested on March 13 in connection with the gelatine sticks laden Scorpion recovery

case, was earlier booked under sections 120 (B) (criminal conspiracy) 286 (negligent conduct with respect to explosive substance), 465 (forgery) 473 (making or possessing counterfeit seal) and 506 -2 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and 4 (a)(b)(i) of the Explosive Substances Act, 1908.

Vaze was subsequently booked under sections 16 (Punishment for Terror act) and 18 (Punishment for conspiracy etc) of the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

On its part, Maharashtra's Anti Terrorism -- which initially investigated the circumstances leading to the alleged murder of Hiran -- had on March 21 arrested convicted Mumbai Police constable Vinayak B. Shinde (51) and a cricket bookie Naresh R. Gaur (31) in connection with Hiran's alleged murder. The arrest of Shinde and Gaur came a day after the Union Home Ministry asking the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to take over the investigations into the murder of Hiran.

Shinde and Gaur are said to be accomplices of Vaze. Shinde is a dismissed policeman, who has been convicted in the case involving the fake encounter of Ramnarayan Gupta alias Lakhnan Bhaiya. Bhaiya was killed in a fake encounter on November 11, 2006. In 2013, a Mumbai sessions court had awarded life sentences to 21 people, including Shinde and 12 other Mumbai Police personnel, convicted in the case.

Shinde has been on parole. The investigations by the ATs have revealed that Shinde was in regular touch with Vaze and helped the latter in his activities.

During the investigations that followed, the NIA seized from Shinde and Gaur two mobile, one iPhone, 7 SIM cards, a blank cover of SIM card, a note with 14 mobile numbers mentioned including 5 in the name of arrested-suspected cop and prime accused Sachin Vaze with 'Ok' written (for activation) beside them.

World's richest Malayali, wife escape unhurt as their chopper crash-lands

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

MA Yusuf Ali, the richest Malayali in the world, (net worth \$4.8 billion) and his wife had a miraculous escape from an air crash on Sunday morning at Kochi. The helicopter ferrying them to a hospital owned by Yusuf Ali made a force landing in the marshy area along the Kochi-Thiruvananthapuram National Highway.

There were five persons in the chopper including the Alis and all were brought out of the sleeky flying machine once the rotors came to a standstill.

The pilot and Ali suffered some minor injuries and were rushed to the Lakeshore Hospital for first-aid. All are safe and hearty, according to sources in the hospital. According to eye witnesses who watched the low flying chopper force landing in the

marshy stretch, there was heavy wind and rains when the incident happened.

An enquiry has been ordered into the incident.

Yusuff Ali who owns the Lulu Group business empire is a close friend of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and other top CPI(M) leaders in the country. The business tycoon enjoys cordial ties with leaders of all political parties, though the Marxists in the State visit the oil kingdoms in West Asia as the guests of Ali who have built up a vast business empire across the Arab nations in Asia, Africa and Europe.

Yusuff Ali, who owns a fleet of executive jets and helicopters, had been awarded Abu Dhabi Prize, the country's highest civilian honours, on Friday by crown prince Sheikh Mohammed Bin Sayed Al Nahyan.

Navreh celebration in J&K from today

Jammu: Sanjeevani Sharda Kendra, Bohri, Jammu in association with more than one hundred and twenty five Kashmiri Hindu organisations globally has formulated a three-day programme from 12 th to 14 th April, 2021 with the intention to celebrate Tyaag, Sankalp and Shaurya Divas and urge the Kashmiri Hindus to take a pledge for returning to their homeland on the auspicious occasion of Navreh.

The Celebrations were expected to culminate with a virtual address by Sarsangchhalak Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Dr Mohan Bhagwat.

Now it is not clear whether Dr Bhagwat would be able to address the august gathering as he has been

admitted in the hospital in Nagpur after he tested positive for Covid-19.

According to a press statement issued by the Sanjeevani Sharda Kendra, "the Navreh celebrations will commence on 12 th April-the Tyaag (Sacrifice) Divas in the memory of the Shriya Bhat. The Indian history records the great contribution in saving Hindu culture by a Kashmiri Pandit Shriya Bhat, as early as the 15 th century.

Shriya Bhat was able to cure a dreadful disease of Sultan Zainulab-ud-Din and was offered enormous wealth and property. But Shriya Bhat instead negotiated for the safety and security of Kashmiri Hindus and their religious places.

On April 13, Navreh (first day of New Year) is being celebrated as Navreh Sankalp Divas. Globally all Kashmiri Hindus shall take a solemn pledge.

On 14th April, 2021 the Shaurya Divas will be celebrated in the honour of the great 8th century King of Kashmir, Laladitiya Muktapada for his valour and victory over Turks.

Sanjeevani Sharda Kendra has already released an audio and video of a song on Navreh Celebrations composed by Dr. Kuldeep Raina Sudeshi, written by Sunita Raina Pandit, sung by Lovely Chandra and Vishal Pandita and video edited by Pardeep Pandita.

Departmental probe against Param Bir

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Less than a fortnight after it constituted a judicial probe under retired High Court Judge Kailash U Chandavil into allegations of corruption against former State Home Minister Anil Deshmuh, the Maharashtra Government has initiated a departmental probe against Mumbai's former police commissioner Param Bir Singh under senior IPS officer Sanjay Pandey for alleged breach of service rules and dereliction of duty.

In a development that has come in the midst of a Preliminary Inquiry (PE) launched by the CBI into Singh's allegations of corruption made against Deshmukh, Pandey—who has been entrusted with additional charge as the State General Police – has begun the probe against the former city police commissioner.

The Maharashtra government has ordered the probe against Singh on the basis of a report submitted by Mumbai's new Police Commissioner Hemant Nagrale to it on matters relating to suspended and incarcerated police officer Sachin Vaze.

Among other things, Pandey will look into the charge about Singh's alleged dereliction of duty arising out of his failure to keep the state government about his personal investigations into the alleged malpractices by Deshmukh, whether his charge of corruption made against the former state Home Minister had any substance, why had not only given so much importance to Vaze but also asked him report to him directly to him and whether he assigned Vaze to investigate the explosi8ve laden SUV recovery case.

In a report submitted to the State Home department on April 3, Nagrale also stated that Vaze was posted as the in-

charge of the Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU) of the Mumbai police as per the orders of former Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh.

"API Sachin Vaze never reported to any officer of the Crime Branch during his tenure of nine months from 10/06/2020 to 12/03/2020. No officers of the Crime branch gaver any review/opinion/direction in the investigation handled by Sachin Vaze because he directly reported to the then Commissioner of Police," the report stated.

"As per oral orders of the then commissioner of police, the then joint commissioner of police (crime) transferred police inspector Vinay Gorphade and Sudhakar Deshmukh to Unit 10 and Unit 1, respectively and Vaze was posted in-charge of CIU," the report stated.

"Vaze has not followed the rules and he directly and independently reported to the then CoP (Singh) and he investigated under his guidance... was following the guidelines of (Singh) about raid on illegal activities, whom to arrest or not, to call whom as witness and accused of sensitive crimes," stated the report.

Vaze, who jumped on his own into the investigations involving the recovery of explosive laden SUV near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's skyscraper mansion in south Mumbai on February 25, also took up points of the CIU in remands, bail, anticipatory bail pleas and other critical decisions, and if he required manpower for various investigations, it was given as per Singh's directions.

As the in-charge of CIU, Vaze handled sensational cases like TRP rigging scam, the Anvay Naik suicide case and the death of her mother Kumud Naik.

TN logs 6,618 fresh cases

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

With 6,618 new persons getting diagnosed with Covid-19 on Sunday, situation in Tamil Nadu has turned grave all over the State. The State saw 22 persons succumbing to the pandemic till 7 pm on Sunday.

On Saturday, 5,989 persons tested positive throughout the State while the death toll on the single day stood at 23.

Chennai has to bear the brunt as the Metropolis registered 2,124 new cases on Sunday while the number of new persons diagnosed with the pandemic on Saturday stood at 1,977. As on Sunday, Chengalpet, the neighboring district saw 631 new cases getting admitted to the hospital.

Dr C V Krishnaswamy, eminent physician, boldly stated that situation was critical and grave in both Tamil Nadu and Kerala. "The ever increasing number of Covid-19 patients in these States are matters of concern. Both the State administrations should discuss with the medical fraternity and evolve a mechanism to prevent the spread of this pandemic," said Dr Krishnaswamy.

He also cautioned the doctors and policy makers about the impact the disease could cause in youngsters. "You forget all those who are above 60 years of age.

Their good days are over. What is of concern is the complaints from youth who were afflicted with Covid-19. Those who came out of the ordeal have started complaining about weakness, loss of memory and stamina. Many persons who had the harrowing experience of Covid-19 are likely to face a series of medical issues," said the doctor. Dr Rajeev, ayurvedic physician, from Kerala, too echoed the concerns of Dr Krishnaswamy. "Many persons, especially youth, are complaining loss of memory and stamina after attack by the Covid virus. This is an issue which has to be studied in detail because it is becoming detrimental to the future of the country," said Dr Rajeev.

Maha CM meets Covid task force, asks to prepare SOPs for lockdown

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid clear indications that it might go in for a full-fledged lockdown to break the chain of the rapid infections across Maharashtra, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday met the members of the Covid 19 Task Force, his Cabinet colleagues and senior bureaucrats to make full-fledged preparations for the proposed lockdown.

At the meeting, the chief minister discussed with those present about the need for increasing vaccination, setting up oxygen plants, increasing Covid-19 beds, increased availability of Remdesivir injections and ensuring early vaccination of health workers across the state.

The chief minister said that he would make one more request to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to increase availability of vaccines to Maharashtra.

During the course of the meeting, the chief minister asked the Task Force members and senior bureaucrats to prepare what he called "all inclusive" Standard-Operating Procedures (SOPs) to be followed during the proposed lockdown. In the SOPs, the factors stemming from experiences the state government had

gained from handling the Covid-19 in the state during the past one year.

Among other things, the chief minister asked the state administration to explore ways to bring Oxygen cylinders in big way from the states like Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, where there is abundant availability of Oxygen.

At the meeting, the task force members stressed on the need for reducing the excessive use of Remdesivir injections by Covid-19 patients in the state. "Nine five per cent of Covid patients get well by being in home quarantine. Only serious patients should get themselves admitted to hospitals. In housing societies, the authorities can create isolation centres and make available Oxygen concentrators and covid-19 beds so that patients can be looked after at the local levels," one of the task force members suggested at the meeting.

Earlier at the meeting, Chief Secretary Sitaram Kunde said that of the 1,200 metric tonnes of Oxygen available, 980 metric tonnes of Oxygen was being used for medical purposes. "In consultation with the Centre, we are looking at ways to bring additional oxygen to the state," Kunte said.

Air purifiers in lifts, poorly ventilated spaces helpful in Covid spread: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Air purifiers in lifts (elevators) and other poorly ventilated confined spaces could actually increase the spread of airborne virus droplets, according to researchers who have called upon the health authorities to look for such places which might be turning out to be super spreader for Coronavirus which is spreading like a raging fire.

When people infected with the Cov-SARS-2 virus, responsible for the current Covid-19 pandemic, sneeze, talk or simply breathe, they expel thousands of contaminated saliva droplets.

These droplets are now recognized as being the main way in which the virus spreads to other individuals and people are

being advised to wear masks to curb contamination. Regularly airing indoor spaces to reduce the concentration of viral particles is also important.

Since the quality of air in a small space can quickly deteriorate even when there is just one person in that space (mainly because of the increased CO2 levels) produced as we breathe out), lift manufacturers routinely include ventilator systems. These can, however, increase the rate at which air – possibly laden with bacteria and viruses – circulates. While adding an air purifier to the lift in addition to the ventilator should help in theory, the way in which the purifier affects air circulation, and thus transmission of airborne viruses is unclear, said the researchers.

Air purifiers work by suck-

ing in stale air and exhausting cleansed air, but this adds to the overall circulation of air – an aspect that previous studies, or indeed air purifier manufacturers themselves, have not considered. To investigate this issue, Dimitris Drikakis and Talib Dbouk of the University of Nicosia analysed air circulation and found that the air purifier actually increases the spread of saliva droplets in the cabin.

"This is because the air intake integrated inside the purifier equipment induces flow circulation that can add to the transport of these droplets," explains Drikakis.

They also found that the risk of airborne virus transmission is lowest for low ventilation rates. This is due to reduced flow mixing inside the lift, says Dbouk.

Ex-CIC calls for making virtual hearing permanent feature of judicial system

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Central Information Commissioner. Shailesh Gandhi has called for making virtual hearing a permanent feature of the judicial system, stating that the achievements of a Supreme Court e-committee, which has been around since 2005, have been "inadequate".

He has made this suggestion in his submission to Justice DY Chandrachud, the Chairperson of the SC e-committee, saying the draft report placed by the committee in public domain lacks "any real evaluation of the effectiveness of the earlier efforts and recommendations".

Gandhi, who had set in motion paperless working in the Central Information Commission a decade back said, "The Supreme Court E-

Committee has been around since 2005 and it appears its real achievements are inadequate."

Citing the findings of the Committee, Gandhi said the report mentions that a total of Rs. 639.411 crore plus Rs 1670 crore have been spent implementing Information and Communication Technology based systems in courts.

"If I presume an expenditure of 309.411 crore for software and consultancy, it would mean Rs 2,000 crore for hardware. Assuming about 20,000 courts, this would mean an average expenditure of about Rs.10 lacs per court for hardware. This should be more than adequate. Yet, most courts did not function effectively during the pandemic using virtual hearings," he said.

He said as against an

increase of four lakh pending cases before courts between 2005-19, just last one year has seen an addition of 75 lakh cases to the pendency.

Gandhi said the Committee mentions setting up of 'some Virtual Courts', whereas all courts should be effective virtual courts. "In fact, I would submit that all courts should be prepared and mandated to allow lawyers and litigants to appear virtually or physically without any specific need to inform anyone or take permissions," he said. The former Information Commissioner said to achieve this there is no requirement for any serious training, but just ability to use a keyboard, which is a common skill available to any literate person and at best a two-hour familiarisation video should be adequate.

'Focus on micro containment zones to curb Covid march'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday suggested to Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on focusing on "micro containment zones" to contain the spread of Covid-19 infection in the State.

Karnataka has seen a surge in COVID19 cases since the beginning of this month and is reporting nearly 7,000 fresh cases per day for the last couple of days.

The Chief Minister who spoke to the Prime Minister said that the latter also appreciated the state governments efforts to counter the second wave of Coronavirus pandemic.

"Spoke to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodiji and apprised him about the measures being taken in the state to mitigate second wave of pandemic. PM appreciated the

UP man held for announcing reward on priest's head

IAN5 ■ MEERUT

The Meerut police have arrested a youth for allegedly announcing a reward for killing a controversial priest of a temple in Ghaziabad's Dasna area.

The man, Danish Ali, a resident of Meerut, had uploaded a video on a social media platform saying that anyone who beheads the controversial priest, will get a reward of Rs 51 lakh.

The priest, Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati, recently made a controversial statement against the Prophet, for which the Delhi Police booked him for hurting religious sentiments.

The statements were made at a press conference at Delhi Press Club.

Danish is heard in the video purportedly saying, "I will sell my property, jewellery, everything I have and will arrange Rs 51 lakh."

Though Danish did not name Saraswati, he referred to him as the 'priest of the Dasna temple in Ghaziabad'.

Meerut's Superintendent of Police (SP) Vineet Bhatnagar said, "We have arrested Danish Ali. We have also seized the mobile phone through which he had made the controversial announcement."

Shot shortage

Amid a plethora of issues, from safety to availability, the second wave of pandemic has hit India hard

India seems to be back to square one where fighting the pandemic is concerned, with more than 70 vaccination centres in Mumbai having shut down after running out of the COVID doses. Other parts of the country, too, like Punjab, Rajasthan, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, are facing a shortage of the coveted shots. And this shortage is being faced despite there being major vaccine hesitancy in the country and the inoculation drive still not open to all. How massive the shortage would become if the Government decides to vaccinate all citizens is anybody's guess. When the pandemic began over a year ago, India was faced with the harsh reality of a poor healthcare infrastructure, shortage of hospital beds, ventilators, healthcare professionals, sanitisers, drugs and the know-how regarding the handling of the contagion. However, to the Government's and India Inc's credit, our "jugaadu" spirit kicked in and we overcame all these shortages by manufacturing everything in India and even reached a point where we began exporting PPEs, sanitisers and so on. Even where the vaccine was concerned, we surprised the world by coming out with two vaccines; in fact, India began gifting or selling vaccines to countries around the world. All this was done parallel to our own ambitious countrywide vaccination drive. As the first wave of the outbreak seemed to subside, it gave the Centre's vaccine diplomacy a shot in the arm. It looked like we had it all under control, till the second wave hit.

Now, it seems that we have not learnt any lessons from the first wave and prepared ourselves better to handle the inevitable second wave, which empirical evidence suggests is always worse than the first one. So not only are we again facing a bed and oxygen shortage, we are beginning to fall short of the vaccines as well. A political slugfest has broken out over the issue with Maharashtra alleging that the Centre was "discriminating" against the non-BJP ruled States and the Government, for its part, accusing the States of having a lackadaisical attitude. A hectic debate is also on within the country whether charity should begin at home and the Government should have ensured that all of its citizens were covered first before exporting the shots. After all, even the US, the leader of the free world, has banned all exports until it vaccinates its own citizens. Be that as it may, the fact that we were not prepared to handle the inevitable second wave is a collective failure: Of the healthcare system, the policy planners, the bureaucracy, the Centre, States and the people as a whole. To make matters worse, some European regulators are talking about a possible link between the AstraZeneca vaccine (available in India under the brand name Covishield) and some rare occurrences of blood clots. Though the Indian panel on 'adverse event following immunisation' is studying the safety of Covishield, it will be some time before it gives its verdict. So, for now, it remains to be seen how our ingenuity gets us out of this jam.

PICTALK



A 3,000-year-old lost city in Luxor, Egypt, which was unearthed recently

AP/PTI

Deliverance

Uttarakhand has decided to free 51 shrines from the Govt's control and hand these back to the priests

In a politically sensitive development ahead of the Uttarakhand Assembly elections in February 2022, Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat-led BJP Government has overturned his predecessor Trivendra Singh Rawat's decision enabling the Government to take over the management of 51 prominent temples and shrines. Trivendra's argument had been that the new Act would help in the professional management of these shrines. The Act paved the way for setting up the Devasthanam Board, which was chaired by the Chief Minister. The Board was meant to control the management of renowned temples such as Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri; the annual pilgrimage to these temples is popularly called the Char Dham Yatra and is a money-spinner not only for the temples but also for allied businesses like the travel, hotel and tourism industries. In 2019, over three million people visited the four shrines, though 2020 was a damp squib owing to the COVID outbreak. Most worryingly for the seers, the Act had the provision to sack a priest found involved in any "wrongdoing". It

had been a long-pending demand of these *teerth purohits* (pilgrimage priests) that the Government roll back its decision as, they pointed out, they have been managing for generations the affairs of these temples, which were set up by their ancestors.

Now, though it can't be truthfully claimed that everything was hunky-dory at these religious establishments when their affairs were being managed by the respective *teerth purohits*, there's also no denying the fact that the State Government's move must not have spawned from any idea of piousness or welfare for the pilgrims, who descend on the hill State from across the length and breadth of the country. It is true that the infrastructure at the halting places leading to these places of worship is in a dilapidated condition and excessive commercialisation there has massively added to the nature's burden, the result of which we all saw in the tragic Kedarnath flash floods of 2013. However, the Government didn't stir all along to ameliorate the pathetic conditions. We would suggest that rather than taking extreme positions, let the temple management remain with the *teerth purohits* but, at the same time, the Government should keep an eye on them and the way they run the temple affairs and oversee the upkeep, facilities and amenities there.

Of Sri Lanka and the Andamans

The issues between Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalas may be resolved if India concurs to transfer the former to the Andamans



PRAFULL GORADIA

Two communities not being able to coexist is a perennial problem in the Indian subcontinent. An old saying goes, "Ek myaan mein do talwarein nahi reh sakti", meaning two swords cannot fit into one scabbard. The problem began by being underscored in our own India, which was divided into Pakistan for Muslims and Hindustan for the rest. MA Jinnah argued that Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations and could not coexist. The first leader to push this two-nation thesis was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan of Aligarh fame.

Some UP Muslims believed their new country, Pakistan, was a new Medina. Muslims in the western wing despised eastern Bengalis as inferior, short and dark. Their economy was exploited from day one. Jinnah visited Dacca early in 1948 and peremptorily told university students that Urdu alone would be Pakistan's national language. Bengali, which they are proud of, was not in the reckoning. The two wings were daggers drawn from 1948; the clash came in 1971, in less than 24 years of the new Medina's birth. In December that year, they separated; Bangladesh was born.

Thus, India was divided into three. Now we hear that the people of Sindh wish to separate. This separatist movement is called "Jio Sindh". They are unable to exist under the yoke of the dominant Punjabis. Baluchistan is another unhappy province which was partly British India and partly the princely State of Kalat. It had an Embassy in Karachi until 1948 when Pakistan forcibly took it over. The Pathans of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) with their main city, Peshawar, have always wished to unite with all Pathans in Afghanistan, though this demand is dormant now.

With Sri Lanka, it is an old problem. I visited my in-laws-to-be in Colombo in 1964 as they wanted to introduce me to their society in the city where they had lived and worked for 32 years. In the course of my four-day stay,



there arose the question of who would be the next managing director of the British Ceylon Corporation, a British firm similar to the one we had in Kanpur, the British India Corporation, until the early 1960s. My father-in-law said that one Ramaswamy, a local Tamil, was the ablest choice but was unlikely to get the promotion. The prize was likely to go to DM Pereira as he was a Sinhala. The existing Board of directors was largely British, headed by a distinguished gentleman called Singleton-Salmon. There was no partiality in the company but the emerging milieu in Colombo was such. Ramaswamy was likely to emigrate to Australia.

My father-in-law explained that the Sinhalas were an overwhelming majority, an easy-going, fun-loving Buddhist people. They were jealous of the Tamils who were serious at work, and more efficient. There had developed a wedge between the two groups as far back as then. Their differences were bound to explode sooner or later. The fact that the people of Tamil Nadu have a soft corner in their hearts for their Sri Lankan brethren is natural but



IF WE CAN OFFER A TRANSFER OF WILLING SRI LANKAN TAMILS TO THE ANDAMANS, INDIA'S ADVANTAGE WOULD BE POPULATING THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS, WHICH MAKES TAMILS' SURVIVAL SAFER, TAMIL NADU HAPPIER AND THE INDO-SRI LANKAN RELATIONS PERMANENTLY SUSPICION-FREE

that makes the Sinhalas suspect Indian intentions from time to time. When Rajiv Gandhi was India's Prime Minister and President JR Jayewardene headed Sri Lanka, we sent the IPKF military to help the Tamils. Instead of helping them, we only killed them and left the Sinhalas alone. This indicates that our Governments have mostly not understood Sri Lankan affairs.

Colombo's rulers smile at New Delhi and pretend to be friendly although they feel that the faraway yellow giant is less dangerous than the Indian giant, only 40 km to the north. They did appreciate the IPKF's help for some time; thereafter it became a distant memory. Lanka appears to have erred in owing China all the money for upgrading the Hambantota port as well as a highway from Colombo to Galle and further south. If Sri Lanka cannot repay the loan in time, these may be taken over as Chinese property. Yet Colombo would rather deal with Beijing than New Delhi. This mentality is likely to continue indefinitely until India takes a drastic step to relieve the Sinhalas of their Tamil

suspensions. From the Indian point of view, there is the fear, however remote, that one day the Chinese may convert Sri Lanka into a yellow colony.

What should New Delhi do? Consider whether we can offer a transfer of willing Sri Lankan Tamils to the Andaman Islands. They are a community of four million people, mainly in the Jaffna area in the northeast of Sri Lanka and some scattered across the east of the island. The Andamans occupy about 9,000 sq km with only about four lakh people. Not all Sri Lankan Tamils are likely to accept the transfer. For those willing, Sri Lanka should pay a total ₹2 lakh per head towards resettlement, convenience costs and compensation. This means several billion rupees for Sri Lanka to borrow or somehow fork out, but a small cost for solving their greatest problem. India's advantage would be populating the Andaman Islands, which makes Tamils' survival safer, Tamil Nadu happier and the Indo-Sri Lankan relations permanently suspicion-free.

(The writer is a well-known columnist and an author. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AMP UP VACCINE PRODUCTION

Sir — In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has rightly questioned the Centre's decision to export COVID-19 vaccines. It seems that the export was also an oversight, like many other decisions of the NDA Government. It also cannot be denied that it was an effort to garner publicity at the cost of our own citizens.

The Government, before launching the world's largest vaccination drive should have calculated the domestic demand and supply. As several States are now alleging shortage of vaccines, it is time for the Centre to completely stop their export. India played the vaccine diplomacy card thinking that it was close to developing herd immunity. New Delhi wasn't granting or exporting vaccines to only the poor nations but also to the UK, Saudi Arabia and Canada. Despite India's stupendous efforts to vaccinate at a large scale, majority of the people are outside its purview. This is a situation when there exists an age criteria to get vaccinated. It's not hard to imagine the situation if this age bar is removed and everybody is allowed to get vaccinated.

The current situation might lead to an increase in the prices of vaccines or, if the pharmaceutical companies ramp up production without increasing the prices, the quality will definitely get compromised. The Centre and State Governments must give up politics and find an amicable solution to this problem which will likely aggravate in the coming days if viable answers are not explored and worked upon.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

NEED TO TAKE IT SERIOUSLY

Sir — It should be a cause of worry for New Delhi that the US Navy recently carried out a Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) in India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) without its prior consent to challenge India's "excessive" maritime claims. According to the statement issued by the Commander of the US' Seventh

Nix the corruption in Maharashtra



It refers to the editorial 'Tightening the screws' (April 10). I fully concur with the editorial view that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) should work in tandem to unravel the Anil Deshmukh and Sachin Vaze maze. If tainted police officials and politicians can work hand-in-glove, then why not our sleuths? The revelations made by arrested police officer Vaze are disturbing. It shows

how rotten our whole system is and there is an open loot of public money. It seems that things like extortion, killings, transfer of honest officials, nepotism or using political influence to get Government contracts have become the order of the day in Maharashtra. Not only this, it can also not be denied that the links of corrupt police officials like Vaze and politicians like Deshmukh must be with Maoists or terrorists, else from where the gelatin sticks used in Antilia bomb scare case came?

Both the agencies must also focus their investigation on these lines. Corrupt politicians when in power at the State or the Centre give patronage to criminals and anti-social elements in a *quid pro quo* so that they may use them as and when required. Nothing could be more shameful for the Maharashtra Government than the recent happenings and the alleged involvement of Deshmukh in grave corruption. It must be investigated properly and the accused should not be spared.

Abhishek Singh | Varanasi

Fleet, the operation was conducted by guided-missile destroyer USS John Paul Jones on April 7 and is consistent with the international law. The Ministry of External Affairs responded that the Government's stated position on the UN convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is that the Convention does not authorise other States to carry out operations in the EEZ. What is shocking is that it came at a time when India and the US are trying to strengthen their ties and working in close cooperation in Quad for a free and open Indo-Pacific. US President Joe Biden's "tough talk" on China shows that Washington sees Beijing as its rival. However, the recent US misadventure can harm its good rapport with New Delhi.

TV Jayaprakash | Palakkad

NO REASON TO LOWER GUARD

Sir — We are responsible for the rise in

the Coronavirus cases as we have lowered our guard and are not following the guidelines. People must understand that it is necessary to break the chain of transmissions to curb the spread of the Coronavirus.

The vaccines are no panacea. Not following the appropriate COVID-19 behaviour is not just laxity but is a criminal act as it is a major reason for the surge. After the vaccination programme kickstarted, people felt they should not wear masks. Many people hang their masks around their neck, some keep it in their pocket and some do not use it at all. It is only after such gross negligence and laxity on the part of people that Coronavirus cases have started increasing.

Jubel D'Cruz | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

COVID is surging and it is our responsibility to push the Government to move away from PR tactics and act in the interest of the people.



Congress interim president — Sonia Gandhi



Iran proposes the logical path to full Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action compliance. The US, which caused this crisis, should return to full compliance first.

Iranian Foreign Minister — Mohammad Javad Zarif

My parents organised a celebration on the eve of my birthday in advance as a surprise! I'm the luckiest person in the world to have such parents.



Actor — Swara Bhasker



The Opposition gets nervous about AB de Villiers. We have depth in batting which we want to utilise. AB is probably the only one in the team who is so versatile.

Cricketer — Virat Kohli

Lockdown is not an option. However, we will be putting some restrictions in place to contain the spread of the virus.



Delhi CM — Arvind Kejriwal

FIRST COLUMN

BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

This can give the impetus to meet climate commitments while making contributions to post-COVID recovery



RIYA RAHIMAN

Countries have been grappling with the impact of climate change and extreme events as they pose various risks to people, infrastructure, economies and future development. A significant proportion of the economic losses due to extreme events is attributed to the loss and damage to infrastructure systems, thereby stressing the need for integrating disaster and climate resilience for infrastructure development. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed an unprecedented impact on infrastructure sectors worldwide. Even though it has not led to direct damages to physical infrastructure, it led to interruptions in infrastructure services, with significant implications on economies. The outbreak is the latest reminder of the need to invest in resilient infrastructure. It exposed systemic risks across various sectors and underlying drivers such as poverty, poor health systems and limited social welfare schemes that perpetuated them. The risks cut across different sectors and strongly brought out the imperative to understand and address systemic and cascading dangers and fragilities.



As part of global recovery, infrastructure investments are being looked at as an indispensable part of stimulus packages aimed at restarting economic activities. Countries are expected to invest heavily in infrastructure sectors as an attempt to mitigate the impacts of the economic fallout as well as create employment and improve competitiveness simultaneously. While the health and economic implications take centre stage when planning for COVID-19 recovery, the urgency of the climate emergency cannot be ignored. The pandemic has clearly brought out the need to focus on managing systems risks for strengthening resilience, a lesson one must heed, to make headway against climate change as well. With countries submitting their national climate action plans as part of the Paris Agreement, this is a crucial year for climate action as well. It is vital that the post-COVID recovery and climate action plans complement each other.

Studies show that infrastructure construction and operations account for 70 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and the provision of quality infrastructure underpins the achievement of 92 per cent of targets across all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) also highlights the role of resilient infrastructure as a cornerstone for sustainable development. The four specific targets relate to loss reduction in SFDRR, focus on cutting global disaster mortality, the number of affected people, economic loss and damage to infrastructure. However, the SFDRR target on reducing damage to critical infrastructure is an important prerequisite for achieving the three other targets on loss reduction. In view of this, infrastructure investments and policies to bolster economies should be leveraged as an opportunity to deliver on global commitments such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, SDGs and the SFDRR targets. Though some progress has been made on the SDGs and the SFDRR target, the overall action to meet them has not advanced at the required pace. The pandemic has further pushed back their progress. The COVID-19 recovery can be utilised as an opportunity to progress on these global goals and build a healthy, inclusive and climate-friendly future. Investing in disaster and climate-resilient infrastructure can provide the much-needed impetus in meeting global commitments while also making contributions to post-COVID recovery.

(The writer is Senior Specialist for Infrastructure Resilience, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. The views expressed are personal.)

The big tent of the PPP decoded

Pragmatic centrism and the need to remain a bridge between Sindh’s electorate and the political fruits of federalism may help explain why the PPP made a grab for the Senate



NADEEM PARACHA



IN PAKISTAN, BECAUSE OF CERTAIN OVERARCHING ECONOMIC SHIFTS, THE MOOD WAS CLEARLY SHIFTING TO THE RIGHT. IN THE SECOND HALF OF BHUTTO’S TENURE, THE REGIME TRIED TO APPROPRIATE THIS MOOD AND, BY THE TIME THE GOVERNMENT FELL IN 1977, THE PARTY BELIEVED IT HAD UPSTAGED THE FAR-RIGHT ISLAMIST GROUPS THAT WERE OPPOSING IT

The writer is a senior journalist and columnist. The views expressed are personal. Courtesy: Dawn



A reading of the PPP’s Foundation Papers makes it clear that, right from the onset, its founders saw the PPP as a “big tent” party modelled on established Social Democratic parties of Europe. Rahim believed that the country’s bourgeoisie had begun their march towards a revolutionary phase, just as the European middle classes had done in the 19th century. Yet, at the time, a majority of Pakistanis lived in rural areas and the process of industrialisation, though rapid during the Ayub era, was still concentrated in just a few urban centres.

When the party was launched, it exhibited three main groupings: On the Left were Marxist student leaders, socialist intellectuals, trade unionists and peasant leaders. On the Right were “progressive” landed elite and in the Centre were what became to be known as “Islamic socialists”, or those who appropriated Islam as a welfarist and socialist doctrine, as opposed to a theological expression of politics (à la Jamaat-i-Islami).

During the 1970 elections, the party’s “big tent” tactics were a success, aiding it to attract the majority of middle and lower-middle class votes, and the votes of small farmers and peasants in (West) Pakistan’s two largest provinces,

Punjab and Sindh.

In December 1971, the party suddenly found itself in power after the acrimonious departure of East Pakistan. The party’s Left wing was more assertive during Bhutto’s first year in power. But this assertion was stalled when Bhutto began perceiving the party’s radical Left as agents of anarchy with a juvenile understanding of Marxism.

According to Gunther and Diamond, in an effort to expand their electoral appeal to a wide variety of groups, the policy orientations of “big tent” parties were eclectic and shifted with the public mood. In Pakistan, because of certain overarching international economic shifts, the mood was clearly shifting to the Right. In the second half of Bhutto’s tenure, the regime tried to appropriate this mood and, by the time the Government fell in 1977, the party believed it had upstaged the far-Right Islamist groups that were opposing it.

But it seems that the party did not go far enough and was toppled by an Islamist General. With its leader hanged in 1979, and its other major players either in exile or in prison, the reins of the party fell in the hands of its lower-tier leadership. Bhutto’s daughter Benazir was at the helm, but she

was under arrest. This was also when the party’s leftist militant tendencies, which had been subdued by Bhutto, resurfaced. In 1986, however, fearing that the US would stall the party’s return to power for being “too Left-wing”, Benazir began to gradually push the party back towards the Centre.

This push continued through the 1990s, especially with the appearance of the Pakistani Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) as the “big tent” party of the Right. Under Asif Ali Zardari, the PPP has dug its heels deep in pragmatist centrism. Its electoral appeal in Punjab was neutralised by the PML-N and then the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). This has blocked its path to Islamabad as a ruling party.

The PPP continues to enjoy power and electoral traction in Sindh. But this traction is largely based on the fact that the Sindhi speakers perceive the PPP as a bridge between them and the economic and political fruits of federalism. For this, the PPP needs to continue having a strong presence in federal institutions.

This is why it was important for Zardari to recently bag a majority in the Senate, even if he ended up upsetting his allies in the anti-Government Pakistan Democratic Movement.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE CRPF HAS SHOT FOUR PEOPLE IN COOCH BEHAR. THERE’S A CONSPIRACY UNDER THE HOME MINISTER’S ORDER AND THIS INCIDENT IS PROOF. —WEST BENGAL CM MAMATA BANERJEE



DIDI AND HER GOONS ARE PERTURBED, SEEING THE PEOPLE’S SUPPORT FOR THE B.J.P. SHE HAS STOOPED TO THIS LEVEL AS SHE CAN SEE HERSELF LOSING. —PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

Quaking over Iran’s phantom nuclear weapons

There are many countries that already had nukes when they signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. They have obligations, too. How are they doing?

First, the good news. The US and Iran had talks in Vienna on Tuesday, and the nuclear deal they and all the other great powers signed in 2015, is coming back.

It’s not exactly back yet. After then US President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled out of the treaty in 2018 and re-imposed harsh sanctions on Iran, the Iranians retaliated by slowly deviating from their own commitments under the deal one baby step at a time. So now there has to be an agreement on a timetable for unwinding those steps as well as cancelling the US sanctions.

On a better run planet, the US special envoy for Iran, Rob Malloy, would just declare that all the US sanctions on Iran wrongly put in place by the discredited Trump Administration are



GWYNNE DYER

Gwynne Dyer’s new book is ‘Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy (and Work)’. The views expressed are personal.

cancelled as of today. The Iranian delegation, led by Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, a veteran of the 2015 talks, would reply that Iran will immediately return to compliance with all the terms of the treaty and invite UN inspectors to verify that all its temporary deviations from treaty obligations over the past three years have been reversed. And we would all live happily ever after.

However, in the real world it is not so. The negotiators in Vienna are not even in the same hotel. All the countries that are still observing the treaty (China, France, Germany, Iran, Russia and the UK) are in one hotel, and the American mission is in another, with messages going back and forth between the two parties. Porcupines mate with less difficulty, but there

has already been some progress.

“The United States knows that, in order to get back into compliance, it’s going to have to lift those sanctions that are inconsistent with the deal that was reached with Iran,” said Rob Malloy. The Iranian Government’s spokesman Ali Rabiei replied that he “saluted” Malloy’s remarks. “We find this position realistic and promising,” he added.

Two working groups have been set up that include American representatives, with the task of choreographing reciprocal moves by the US and Iran to return to the treaty and a target of full compliance by both sides within two months. Just in time for Iranian moderates to claim credit for ending the US sanctions a week or so before the June election.

So that’s probably sorted,



but what about all the countries that actually do have nuclear weapons? Iran originally got into trouble because it signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1970 and later tried to get nuclear weapons anyway, but the countries that already had nukes when they signed the NPT have obligations, too. How are they doing?

The NPT states that “nuclear-weapons States agree to...pursue nuclear disarmament

aimed at the ultimate elimination of their nuclear arsenals.” But it has been a long pursuit and 50 years later not one of them’ has actually managed to catch the damn thing.

The US has got turned around somehow and is pursuing in the wrong direction. It’s in the midst of a trillion-dollar-plus “upgrade” of its nuclear forces, including a new generation of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and new submarine-launched cruise missiles.

According to President Vladimir Putin, Russia has developed nuclear-powered cruise missiles and torpedos with unlimited range, a hypersonic vehicle called Avangard to deliver nuclear weapons at a low level and ultra-high speed, and a new ultra-heavy ICBM called

‘Sarmat’ that is able to carry even more and bigger warheads (10-15) over a longer range (18,000 km.) There have also been reports of a new nuclear-powered drone torpedo that is capable of delivering a 100-megaton warhead (biggest ever tested was 50 megatons) over a range of 10,000 km. Then it would explode off an enemy’s coast to create a tsunami wave 500 metres tall to inundate the coastal regions with highly radioactive water. But maybe this one is fiction.

Then there’s Little Britain with its four submarines that carry nuclear-tipped missiles. Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently announced that he was increasing the number of warheads they carry from 180 to 240, but it doesn’t really make much of a difference.

Traditionally the UK’s strategy is “no first use”, which

means Britain’s retaliation would be on cities, not on empty silos. So you’re just bouncing the rubble after the first few dozen warheads explode. That’s probably why Johnson broke with tradition and said that Britain might use nuclear weapons in response to non-nuclear attacks, including even cyber attacks. One way to compensate for not really being very dangerous is to sound very reckless.

Then there’s France (mostly harmless, despite some 280 nuclear weapons) and China (320 but still talking about expansion). Plus India (150), Israel (90), North Korea (30-40) and Pakistan (160), all countries that “unsigned” or never signed the NPT. But at least we’re safe from Iran’s nuclear weapons, which never existed and still don’t.

SBI collects ₹300 cr from zero balance a/cs: Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Several banks, including State Bank of India (SBI), have been imposing excessive charges on certain services provided to poor persons having zero-balance or Basic Savings Bank Deposit Accounts (BSBDA), a study by the IIT-Bombay has revealed.

The study observed that the SBI's decision to levy a charge of ₹17.70 for every debit transaction beyond four by the BSBDA account holders cannot be considered as "reasonable."

It highlighted that the imposition of service charges resulted in undue collections to the tune of over ₹300 crore from among nearly 12 crore Basic Savings Bank Deposit Account (BSBDA) holders of SBI during the period 2015-20.

India's second-largest public sector lender Punjab National Bank, which has 3.9 crore BSBDA accounts, collected ₹9.9 crore during the same period.

"There had been systematic breach in the RBI regulations on BSBDA's by few banks, most notably by the SBI that hosts the maximum number of BSBDA's, when it charged @ Rs 17.70 for every debit transac-

tion (even via digital means) beyond four a month.

"This imposition of service charges resulted in undue collections to the tune of over ₹300 crore from among nearly 12 crore BSBDA holders of SBI during the period 2015-20, of which the period 2018-19 alone saw a collection of ₹72 crore and the period 2019-20, Rs 158 crore," the study by IIT Bombay professor Ashish Das stated.

Levying of charges on BSBDA is guided by September 2013 RBI guidelines. As per the direction these accounts holders are 'allowed more than four withdrawals' in a month, at the bank's discretion provided the bank does not charge for the same.

"While defining the features of a BSBDA, the regulatory requirements made it amply clear that in addition to mandatory free banking services (that included four withdrawals per month), as long as the savings deposit account is a BSBDA, banks cannot impose any charge even for value-added banking services that a bank may like to offer at their discretion," the study said.

The RBI considers a withdrawal, beyond four a month,

a value-added service, it said.

"We assess the dereliction in SBI's duty towards the PMJDY when the BSBDA users were unduly (and against the extant regulations) forced to part with such high charges for their day-to-day (noncash) digital debit transactions that the bank allowed in a BSBDA," it said.

SBI, in breach of RBI regulations set forth as early as 2013, had been charging the BSBDA holders for every debit transaction beyond four a month, it said, adding, the charges were as high as

Rs 17.70 even for digital transactions like NEFT, IMPS, UPI, BHIM-UPI and debit cards for merchant payments.

"On the one hand, the country strongly promoted digital means of payments, while on the other hand, SBI discouraged these very people, to transact digitally for their day-to-day expenditures, by charging an exploitative Rs 17.70 per digital transaction. This dwarfed the spirit of financial inclusion," it said.

The RBI's nonchalant attitude to supervise its own regulations encouraged other banks to become unreasonable towards charges beyond four debits a month, it said.

Some industrialists fear another exodus of migrant workers



PTI ■ COIMBATORE

With the second wave of Covid-19 sweeping across various parts of Tamil Nadu, some of the industrialists in the State are apprehensive of migrant workers leaving for their hometowns considering the health conditions.

The industries recovered from the jolt of the first wave of coronavirus when over one lakh migrant workers from both Coimbatore and Tirupur industries rushed back to their home towns in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha by special trains.

Even as the business started picking up, the 30 per cent increase in the raw materials has affected the industries, sources from different industrial associations said.

A few workers reportedly left for their natives early last week as they feared the availability of transport like trains to reach their towns.

However, there was no major exodus from the industries as the workers working on weekly payment basis had taken their wages Saturday last, the sources said.

Coimbatore and Tirupur reported increased infection cases and a correct picture of workers returning would emerge only after another week, they said.

No worker left the city till Saturday from nearby Tirupur, a major hub of knitwear garments where 80 per cent of over three lakh workers hailed from the North, said sources in the Tirupur Exporters Association.

CAIT urges PM for staggered working time for different sectors to control Covid-19

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic traders' body CAIT on Sunday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi not to impose night curfew or lockdown amid rising Covid-19 in the country and instead adopt staggered working time for different sectors.

In a communication to the prime minister, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said it would be more appropriate if alternate measures may be adopted at district levels all over the country.

"Instead of night curfew or lockdown which have not proved a worthy step so far to combat escalation of COVID-19, it would be more appropriate if alternate easy measures

may be adopted at district levels and staggered working time for different sectors," it said.

CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal said that a closer analysis of the COVID-19 statistics over the last one week have made it ample clear that night curfew and lockdown in different states have not brought the desired results of bringing down the cases.

It suggested that working hours of different verticals of trade and commerce should be revised.

"We suggest that government offices, private offices and other all kinds of offices may work from 8 am to 2 pm whereas the markets and shops may be allowed to work from 11 am to 5 pm," it said.



'E-commerce growth in tier-2, 3 cities outpace tier-1 Indian cities'

IANIS ■ MUMBAI

The growth of e-commerce volumes in tier 2 and 3 cities in India is outpacing that in tier-1 cities, according to a recent report. "Smaller Indian cities are now accounting for a bigger volume of e-commerce sales. E-commerce growth in tier 2 and tier 3 cities in India is outpacing that of tier 1 cities," said an ICICI Securities report. Volume share of these smaller cities in India's e-commerce market increased to 46 per cent in Q4CY20 from 32 per cent YoY. Also, online spending per customer in tier 2 and tier 3 cities has also improved as these cities held a 43 per cent share of the e-commerce sales value last quarter, up from 26 per cent YoY. "This has raised hopes of a sustainable last mile delivery economics emerging for the industry - yet hyperlocal last mile small parcel deliveries remain economically as challenging as ever," it said.

"We continue to see emergence of end-to-end logistics contracts with Bajaj Electricals and Flipkart with Mahindra Logistics," it said, adding that the trend, while accreting value to the service provider, also gains currency as emergence of multiple channels is increasing supply chain challenge and risks.

Rise in Covid cases to delay demand recovery in global oil market



IANIS ■ MUMBAI

Fresh surge in Covid-19 cases, eventual lockdowns is likely to delay the demand recovery in the global oil market, said an ICICI Securities report.

It however, noted that with 'OPEC+' capping supply to ensure supply deficit, impact on oil prices is likely to be muted.

"Fresh surge in Covid cases, consequent lockdowns and slow rollout of vaccines, especially in Europe, are likely to delay demand recovery to pre-Covid levels," the report said. However, delay in demand recovery may delay gross margin recovery for refineries.

The ICICI Securities report also noted that vaccine-driven

recovery in global oil demand and permanent closure of refineries is estimated to boost global refinery utilisation to 77.8 per cent in CY21E from 37-year low of 72.5 per cent in CY20E.

"We estimate global refinery utilisation to gradually rise from 79.1 per cent in CY22E to 80 per cent in CY26E. IEA estimates permanent closure of 3.6m b/d (barrels per day) of refining capacity, but believes 6m b/d is required to ensure global refinery utilisation is sustainably above 80 per cent."

It noted that in CY07-CY18, 16.5 million b/d of refining capacity was added globally, but 8 million b/d was shut implying net capacity addition of just 8.5 million b/d.

Nobel laureate trashes theory of limited Govt intervention to uplift poor

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Renowned economist and Nobel laureate Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee has trashed the ideology that calls for lesser or limited government interventions towards uplifting the poor arguing that such freebies make the poor lazy, saying there is no evidence whatsoever proving so.

He said his own research on the subject across diverse economies in Asia, Africa and Latin America in the past decade and more does not support this ideology, rather it proves that those who have benefited from public and non-governmental interventions wherein they were given free assets did in fact become more productive and creative.

Addressing the 20th foundation day of Bandhan Bank, the non-profit-turned-MFI-turned-small finance bank, on Sunday, Banerjee said there is no data and no empirical evidence anywhere to establish the ideology that getting freebies or getting free assets make the poor people lazy.

This ideology has been pushing successive governments to give less to the poor so that they don't become lazy. But we have seen no evidence



to this effect anywhere, not even in India, instead we have seen everywhere improvements, he said.

The economist also partly blamed those people hawking this ideology for the large number of the poor here and elsewhere as this had successive governments leaving poverty reduction and other socioeconomic impactful measures to non-profits and private sector till about the middle of the first decade of the new millennium when Manmohan Singh-led government unveiled the rural jobs guarantee scheme.

This and many other affirmative actions has lifted early tens of millions out of poverty in five years after the implementation.

He said an analysis of a decadal data from Bandhan when it was an NGO, clearly established the impact of its

work on the poor who have seen on average 25 per cent income growth helping them consume 18 per cent more.

This is a great data-driven lesson, gained from his randomised

control trials, in fighting poverty over a long period, Banerjee

said, adding the first lesson in this is that when the poor become better off, they become more creative in generating more wealth and leading better lives including by sending their kids to better schools far away from their villages.

Data from my randomised control trials clearly showed that they're those people who benefited from public/non-government help have seen income increasing by 25 per cent leading to an 18 per cent jump in consumption he said.

While calling for more globalisation and free trade, he however admitted that fight against poverty has become more complicated in a globalised world as globalisation has created new forms of risks - the now raging pandemic is one of the best examples of such new risks- especially for the poor as they suffered the most from the lockdowns across the world.

Fuel prices unchanged for 12th straight day

IANIS ■ NEW DELHI

Oil marketing companies (OMC) kept petrol and diesel prices unchanged for the 12th straight day across the four metro cities on Sunday.

In the national capital, petrol was sold for ₹90.56 per litre.

Prices of the fuel in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata were at ₹96.98, ₹92.58 and ₹90.77 per litre respectively, same as the previous levels.

Petrol and diesel prices fell by 22 paise and 23 paise per litre, respectively, on March 30 in wake of the global softening of oil prices. The OMCs have decided to pause price revision as they want to watch the crude price movement that has now dropped below the \$63-per-barrel mark.

In tandem with petrol prices, diesel was sold at unchanged levels of ₹80.87, Rs 87.96, ₹85.88 and ₹83.75 per litre, in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, respectively.

After petrol stayed at record levels for a considerable period and were steady for past 24 days, OMCs went on price cut for the first time this year on two consecutive days - March 24 and 25.



It again reduced the price on March 30. Thereafter, fuel prices have

remained unchanged. Earlier, petrol and diesel prices increased 26 times in 2021.

Business faces tricky path navigating post-Trump politics

Washington (AP): For more than a half-century, the voice emerging from the US Chamber of Commerce's monolithic, Beaux Arts-styled building near the White House was predictable: It was the embodiment of American business and, more specifically, a shared set of interests with the Republican Party.

The party's bond with corporate America, however, is fraying.

Fissures have burst open over the GOP's embrace of conspiracy theories and climate change denialism, as well as its rejection of the 2020 election outcome.

The most recent flashpoint was in Georgia, where a new Republican-backed law restricting voting rights drew harsh criticism from Delta Air Lines and Coca Cola, whose headquarters are in the state, and resulted in Major League Baseball pulling the 2021 All-Star Game from Atlanta.

Republicans were furious. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky warned that their actions were quite stupid, alienating "a lot of Republican fans."

GOP strategists argued that they no longer needed corporate America's money to win elections as they try to rebrand as a party of blue-collar workers. That extends an opportunity to President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats to find an ally in an unlikely place when the party has unified control of the federal government for the first time in a decade.

Biden is pushing an ambitious USD 2.3 trillion infrastructure package that includes corporate tax increases which the White House is characterising to CEOs as upfront investments that will ultimately make companies more profitable.

"It's important for making the country more competitive," said Cedric Richmond, the White House's director of

public engagement.

"We think the plan is so important to the country that we are advocating and singing its praises to all businesses."

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo estimates she has talked to more than 50 business leaders about the plan, including a round of Easter weekend phone calls. She is encouraging companies to focus on the entire package instead of the tax increases.

You can't look at one piece of it and say that one number makes you walk away, she said. They say, That's fair. Let me think about it. That's how they run their businesses."

Whether the corporate split with the GOP widens could help answer questions about the political direction of the country and the extent to which business can continue to influence Washington.

Nobody in the business community wants hostile communities, angry finger-pointing workforces and turbulent shareholder bases, said Jeffrey A. Sonnenfeld, a senior associate dean at the Yale School of Management.

It makes your job so much harder to have every constituency group at war within themselves, which has become the hallmark of the GOP.

Corporate America's marriage with Republicans has long been one of convenience, united by a belief in low taxes and the need to repeal regulations.

But the relationship, already strained during Donald Trump's presidency, has come under increasing pressure as companies take cultural stands.

That Republicans and businesses report to increasingly distinct constituencies helps explain the tension.

A solid majority of Republican voters are white (86%) and older than 50 (62%), according to APVoteCast, a national survey of the 2020 electorate.

Amazon India launches mentor programme for startups

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amazon India on Sunday announced the launch of its 'Mentor Connect' programme, which is aimed at accelerating the growth of startups and emerging brand owners enrolled under its Amazon Launchpad initiative.

Through the programme, startups and emerging brands will gain access to guidance from venture capital firms, industry veterans and Amazon leaders through expert knowledge sharing sessions, networking events and 1:1 mentorship sessions, a statement said.

Mentors from educational institutions and VC firms like Fireside Ventures, DSG Consumer Partners, Elevation

Capital, Tomorrow Capital have already signed up for the programme to contribute to the Indian startup growth story, it added.

"Startups and emerging brands enrolled in the Amazon Launchpad programme can access guidance from these mentors through various ways. This includes one-to-one mentorship with chosen mentors over a three-month period, ongoing networking opportunities with a wider pool of industry experts, or knowledge sharing sessions between these experts and other Launchpad brands," the statement said.

This offers entrepreneurs a platform to engage, learn and showcase their startups to the industry's leading subject mat-

ter experts to help tackle strategic and functional challenges, it added.

"The Amazon Mentor Connect programme is not limited to startups and emerging brand owners enrolled in the Amazon Launchpad programme, but will also be extended to the winners of the Amazon Smbhav Entrepreneurship challenge in the upcoming Amazon Smbhav summit," the statement said.

be the first cohort of startups to receive the benefits associated with the Amazon Mentor Connect programme, it added. Amazon Launchpad currently showcases over 2 lakh products offered

by more than 800 emerging brands across 30 different

product categories. Popular sectors catered to by these brands include health and personal care, beauty and grooming, grocery and home products.

The second edition of 'Amazon Smbhav' will be hosted from April 15-18, 2021.

"India has a large startup ecosystem that is key to disruptive innovation and accelerating India's progress towards an Aatmanirbhar Bharat. Most of these startups are led by first time entrepreneurs who have the passion to drive a change, but don't have the experience to deal with the breadth of challenges they face along the way," Amazon India Director (MSME and Selling Partner Experience) Pranav Bhasin said.

DoT likely to issue guidelines for telecom PLI within week

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) is likely to issue guidelines on implementation of production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes for manufacturers in the sector and start inviting applications for the same in about a week, according to government officials.

Telecom gear makers firms such as Ericsson and Nokia are keen to expand their operations in India, and global companies like Samsung, Cisco, Ciena and Foxconn have "shown interest" to set up manufacturing bases in the country for telecom and networking products for domestic and export markets.

"Telecom PLI has already been



approved by the government. The DoT is ready with guidelines to implement it, application format, incentive allocation, etc. It should be published on the DoT website within a week," the official, who did not wish to be named, told PTI.

The DoT notified the PLI scheme for

telecom and networking products on February 24, 2021, with a financial outlay of Rs 12,195 crore, over five years.

The scheme for telecom gear manufacturing in India which is expected to encourage production of equipment worth Rs 2.44 lakh crore and create direct and indirect employment for about 40,000 people.

The investor can earn incentive for incremental sales up to 20 times the committed investment enabling them to reach global scales and utilise their unused capacity and ramp up production.

The scheme is expected to bring an investment of over Rs 3,000 crore and generate tax revenue of about Rs 17,000 crore.

Myanmar forces kill 82 in single day

AP ■ YANGON

At least 82 people were killed in one day in a crackdown by Myanmar security forces on pro-democracy protesters, according to reports on Saturday from independent local media and an organisation that keeps track of casualties since the February coup.

Friday's death toll in Bago was the biggest one-day total for a single city since March 14, when just over 100 people were killed in Yangon, the country's biggest city. Bago is about 100 kilometers (60 miles) northeast of Yangon. The Associated Press is unable to independently verify the number of deaths.

The death toll of 82 was a preliminary one compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which issues daily counts of casualties and arrests from the crackdown on the aftermath of the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Their tallies are widely accepted as highly credible because cases are not added until they have been confirmed,



with the details published on their website.

In its Saturday report, the group said that it expected the number of dead in Bago to rise as more cases were verified.

The online news site Myanmar Now also reported that 82 people had been killed, citing an unnamed source involved with charity rescue work. Myanmar Now and other local media said the bodies had been collected by the military and dumped on the grounds of a Buddhist pagoda.

At least 701 protesters and

bystanders have been killed by security forces since the army's takeover, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

The attack on Bago was the third in the past week involving the massive use of force to try to crush the persistent opposition to the ruling junta.

Attacks were launched Wednesday on hardcore opponents of military rule who had set up strongholds in the towns of Kalay and Taze in the country's north. In both places, at least 11 people — possibly

The death toll of 82 was a preliminary one compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which issues daily counts of casualties and arrests from the crackdown in the aftermath of the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi

including some bystanders — were reported killed.

The security forces were accused of using heavy weapons in their attacks, including rocket-propelled grenades and mortars, though such allegations could not be independently confirmed by The Associated Press. Photos posted on social media from Bago appeared to show fragments of mortar shells.

Most protests in cities and town around the country are carried out by nonviolent

demonstrators who consider themselves part of a civil disobedience movement.

But as the police and military escalated the use of lethal force, a hardcore faction of protesters armed themselves with homemade weapons such as firebombs in the name of self-defense. In Kalay, activists dubbed themselves a "civil army" and some equipped themselves with rudimentary hunting rifles that are traditional in the remote area.

A report by Myanmar Now said residents of Tamu, a town in the same region as Kalay, used hunting rifles Saturday to ambush a military convoy, and claimed to kill three soldiers.

The junta has taken other measures as well to discourage resistance. It recently published a wanted list of 140 people active in the arts and journalism charged with spreading information that undermines the stability of the country and the rule of law. The penalty for the offense is up to three years' imprisonment. Arrests of those on the list have been highly publicised in state media.

‘Suspicious’ blackout strikes Iran’s Natanz nuclear site



This satellite photo from Planet Labs Inc. shows Iran's Natanz nuclear facility

Dubai: Iran's underground Natanz nuclear facility lost power Sunday just hours after starting up new advanced centrifuges capable of enriching uranium faster, the latest incident to strike the site amid negotiations over the tattered atomic accord with world powers.

As Iranian officials investigated the outage, many Israeli media outlets offered the similar assessment that a cyberattack darkened Natanz and damaged a facility that is home to sensitive centrifuges. While the reports offered no sourcing for the evaluation, Israeli media maintains a close relationship with the country's military and intelligence agencies.

If Israel caused the blackout, it further heightens the tensions between the two nations already engaged in a shadow conflict across the wider Middle East.

It also complicates efforts by the US, Israel's main security partner, to re-enter the atomic accord aimed at limiting Tehran's programme so it couldn't pursue a nuclear

nuclear program spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi told Iranian state television.

"We still do not know the reason for this electricity outage and have to look into it further," Kamalvandi said. "Fortunately, there was no casualty or damage and there is no particular contamination or problem."

Asked by the state TV correspondent if it was a "technical defect or sabotage," Kamalvandi declined to comment. Malek Shariati Niasar, a Tehran-based lawmaker who serves as spokesman for the Iranian parliament's energy committee, wrote on Twitter that the incident was "very suspicious," raising concerns about possible "sabotage and infiltration." He said lawmakers were pursuing details of the incident as well. **AP**

Iran calls blackout ‘nuclear terrorism’

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran on Sunday described a blackout at its underground Natanz atomic facility an act of "nuclear terrorism," raising regional tensions.

Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, stopped short of directly blaming anyone for the incident. Details remained few about what happened early Sunday morning at the facility, which initially was described as a blackout caused by the electrical grid feeding the site.

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"To thwart the goals of this terrorist movement, the Islamic Republic of Iran will

continue to seriously improve nuclear technology on the one hand and to lift oppressive sanctions on the other hand," Salehi said, according to state TV.

He added: "While condemning this desperate move, the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasises the need for a confrontation by the international bodies and the (International Atomic Energy Agency) against this nuclear terrorism."

Sunday's developments also complicate efforts by the U.S., Israel's main security partner, to re-enter the atomic accord aimed at limiting Tehran's programme so it can't pursue a nuclear weapon. As news of the blackout emerged, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin landed Sunday in Israel for talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz.

Power at Natanz was cut across the facility, which is comprised of above-ground workshops and underground enrichment halls, civilian nuclear programme spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi earlier told Iranian state TV.

GLOBE TROTTING

EX-B'DESH PM KHALEDA TESTS COVID POSITIVE

Dhaka: Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia tested positive for Covid-19 on Sunday, a year after she was released from jail temporarily amidst the pandemic, according to media reports.

RESCUERS FIND 4 DEAD FROM VESSEL IN ATLANTIC

Madrid: Spanish authorities said on Sunday that they had recovered the bodies of four migrants from a boat along with 19 survivors who had taken the treacherous route from West Africa to the Canary Islands. Spain's maritime rescue service said that its crews had responded to an alarm call by a fishing boat that had located the migrants in a flimsy craft unfit for the high seas.

ECUADOR, PERU HEAD TO POLLS UNDER COVID NORMS

Lima, Peru: Ecuador and Peru choose new presidents Sunday under strict public health measures prompted by the coronavirus pandemic, which has recently strengthened in the neighboring South American nations. Ecuadoreans face a runoff between a conservative businessman and a protégé of former leftist President Rafael Correa, while Peruvians have 18 options to pick from in the first round.

IRAN REPORTS HIGHEST DAILY DEATH TOLL OF 2021

Tehran: Iran on Sunday reported its highest single-day death toll from Covid-19 this year, bringing the country's total deaths in the pandemic to nearly 64,500, state TV reported. The report said 258 new deaths were recorded in 24 hours. Iran's deadliest day of the pandemic was in mid-Nov, when over 480 deaths were tallied.

20 HURT AS CHARIOT FALLS IN NEPAL

Kathmandu: Twenty people have sustained injuries after a chariot fell and clashes erupted during a religious festival in Nepal's Bhaktapur. "Bisket jatra", a chariot-pulling festival, started in Bhaktapur municipality, 16 km east of Kathmandu, on Saturday morning. Soon after the festival was declared open a chariot fell and clashes erupted.

UK: Shops, pubs gear up for easing of lockdown

London: Non-essential retail shops, including shopping malls, pubs and restaurants and hairdressers are among the businesses gearing up to reopen their doors to customers from Monday, when England enters its next stage of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions being eased.

Indoor gyms, swimming pools, libraries, zoos and nail salons are also among the establishments now allowed to reopen, with pubs and restaurants required to strictly follow outdoor dining rules.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson had declared that he would be among the first people to order a pint of beer in a beer garden when the rules are relaxed. **AP**

Trump: The key to Republican success is more Trumpism

AP ■ PALM BEACH

Staking his claim to the Republican Party, former President Donald Trump is casting his populist policies and attack-dog politics as the key to future GOP success.

In a closed-door speech Saturday night to donors at his Mar-a-Lago resort, Trump also reinforced his commitment to the party, according to prepared remarks obtained by The Associated Press.

His appearance came as Republican officials are trying to play down an internal feud over Trump's role in the party, his commitment to GOP fundraising and his plans for 2024.

While Trump's advisers report he will emphasize party unity, he rarely sticks to script.

"The key to this triumphant future will be to build on the gains our amazing movement has made over the past four years," Trump told hundreds of leading Republican donors, according to the prepared remarks.

"Under our leadership, we welcomed millions upon millions of new voters into the Republican coalition. We transformed the Republican Party into a party that truly fights for all Americans."

It was the final address of the Republican National Committee's weekend donor summit in Palm Beach. Most of the RNC's invitation-only gathering was held at a luxury hotel a few miles away; attendees were bused to Trump's club for his remarks.

Jordanian prince makes first public appearance since arrest

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Jordan's Prince Hamzah on Sunday made his first public appearance since he was placed under house arrest last week, attending a ceremony with King Abdullah II in what appeared to be an attempted show of unity on a major Jordanian holiday.

But it remained unclear whether the king and his popular half brother had put aside the differences that escalated last week into the most serious public rift in the ruling family in decades. Hamzah joined members of the Jordanian royal family marking the centenary of the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan, a British protectorate that preceded the kingdom.

The royal palace released a photo and video with Abdullah, Hamzah, Crown Prince Hussein and other dignitaries at the grave of King Talal in Amman, Jordan's cap-



This photo from the Royal Court twitter account, shows Jordan's King Abdullah II, centre, Prince Hamzah bin Al Hussein, second left, and others during a visit to the tomb of the late King Hussein, in Amman Jordan on Sunday **AP**

ital. It was the first time that Hamzah was seen in public since he was placed under a form of house arrest on April 3 following accusations that he was involved in a "malicious plot" to destabilise the kingdom.

In statements leaked to the media, Hamzah denied the accusations and accused the country's government of cor-

ruption and incompetence.

Abdullah subsequently said authorities had thwarted an attempt at sedition involving his half brother and some 18 suspects, while saying he was angry and in shock. Abdullah also suggested there was continued control over Hamzah's movements, saying the prince was "with his family, at his palace, under my care."

Prince's death a ‘huge void’ for Queen: Andrew

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II has described the death of her husband of 73 years, Prince Philip, as having left a "huge void in her life", their son Prince Andrew said on Sunday.

As he left a memorial service for his late father, the Duke of Edinburgh, who passed away aged 99 on Friday, Prince Andrew said his passing was a "terrible loss" and the family was grateful for all the messages of support and condolence.

"It's a great loss. We've lost almost the grandfather of the nation," Prince Andrew, also the Duke of York, told reporters.

"I feel very sorry and supportive of my mother, who's feeling it more than everybody else. The Queen, as you would expect, is an incredibly stoic person and she described his passing as a miracle, and she's contemplating. She



Britain's Prince Edward, Sophie Countess of Wessex and their daughter Lady Louise Windsor, attend the Sunday service at the Royal Chapel of All Saints at Royal Lodge, Windsor, in England on Sunday **AP**

described it as having left a huge void in her life. We as a family are rallying around to support her," he said, on being asked about his mother's emotions.

About his late father, he added: "He was a remarkable man. I loved him as a father. He was always somebody you could go to and he would always listen."

Religious leaders recall Philip's spiritual curiosity

AP ■ LONDON

Churches in Britain held services Sunday to remember Prince Philip as people of many religions reflected on a man whose gruff exterior hid a strong personal faith and deep curiosity about others' beliefs.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby led a service of remembrance at Canterbury Cathedral in southeast England for the husband of Queen Elizabeth II, who died Friday at the age of 99.

Welby, who is set to preside at Philip's funeral on Saturday at Windsor Castle, led prayers for Philip, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh, and contemplated "a very long life, remarkably led."

OVER 2,000 YEARS ON Sanskrit remains popular in China: Chinese Professor

PTI ■ BEIJING

Sanskrit studies are flourishing in China, over 2,000 years after the ancient Indian language was brought to this country along with Buddhism, making a profound impact on Chinese monarchs and scholars over the centuries, according to a distinguished professor here.

Wang Bangwei, a well-known Chinese scholar in Sanskrit and Director of Sino-Indian Buddhist Studies, Institute of Oriental and Indian Studies at the Peking University, said Sanskrit which is the root of Indian culture continues to remain popular in China, contrary to its modest progress in modern India.

Wang said the Peking University is one of the oldest in China and this year marks

the completion of 100 years of teaching Sanskrit at the leading varsity. Wang credited 4th Century AD Indian scholar Kumarajiva for spreading Sanskrit in China.

Kumarajiva was instrumental in translating Buddhist sutras into Chinese language during his stay in China over 2,000 years ago, earning the royal title of "National Teacher of China". He was the first among numerous scholars who laid a firm foundation for civilisational links between the two countries.

Kumarajiva, hailing from a Kashmiri Brahmin family from the then Kucha Kingdom, spent about 23 years in China in the 4th century AD both as a prisoner and as a most revered scholar.

Sanskrit, its associated culture and its development was

kept alive by numerous Chinese scholars, like Fa Xian and Xuan Zang and others, who visited India, Wang said, while launching the Sanskrit learning application "Little Guru" of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, (ICCR) at the Indian Embassy here on Friday, along with Indian Ambassador, Vikram Misri.

Sanskrit teaching programme started at the Peking University a century ago but Sanskrit research and teaching in China has a history of over 2,000 years, Wang said.

When Buddhism came to China from India, Chinese Buddhist monks started translating Indian texts into Chinese.

"From that moment, Sanskrit study and research started. China has a long history of Sanskrit tradition, till that time outside of India,

China has the longest and strongest scholarship in the world," he said. Over 100 Chinese scholars studied in Nalanda University until it began to decline in 11th Century, Wang said.

"Sanskrit is a major language of Indian culture. More and more people in China are interested in Indian culture and Sanskrit is a good way to learn more about Indian culture," he said.

He said Sanskrit was the most important language through which Chinese learned about Hinduism, Buddhism, ancient Indian medicine, astronomy and mathematics.

"While Buddhism declined in India, it became very strong in China and has become part of Chinese culture," he told **PTI**. Once the language became strong in China, the need to go to India

to learn it declined, he said.

"China gradually became centre of Buddhism in Asia. In India, Buddhism has declined and in China it grew," he said, adding that thanks to numerous scholars who visited India over the centuries, China has some rare Sanskrit scriptures brought by them, which may not be available in India.

Y.E. Shaoyong, Associate Prof of Sanskrit in Peking University, said the Sanskrit studies in China are booming. His department now has 10 scholars specialising in the language while 200 others studied as part of the subject for their graduate programme.

The job prospects of the Sanskrit learning students are also good as most of them pursue academic career in Buddhist studies, specially its history, he said.

US-Philippines officials discuss concerns over China's ships

AP ■ ABOARD A US MILITARY AIRCRAFT

Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin on Saturday discussed with his Philippine counterpart China's recent positioning of "militia vessels" near the Philippines in the South China Sea.

Austin spoke by phone with Philippine Secretary of National Defence Delfin Lorenzana while Austin was flying from Washington to Israel to begin an international trip.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Austin and Lorenzana discussed the situation in the South China Sea and the recent massing of Chinese vessels at Whitsun Reef, which has drawn criticism from Manila.



Bollywood
 'Nomination in BAFTA was way more than a big deal for me, so I have zero expectations.'
 —Adarsh Gourav

A GLIMMER OF HOPE

Advanced AI-driven surveillance systems, when used efficiently, have the potential to bring safety back into society, says ABHISHEK KUMAR

A secure city is arguably the sign of an attractive and prosperous place, where all residents and visitors live, work and travel in peace, knowing that they are safe. Though this concept seems dream-like, it is steadily evolving, thanks to the futuristic vision of some state-of-the-art surveillance players. These players are working towards creating real-time, dynamic and proactive AI-based video surveillance systems. It brings us closer to the dream of walking down the street feeling secure while being productive. There are a lot of ways that these systems can make a difference in our lives but the following are some major areas where surveillance systems can truly be a game-changer, especially in India.

Safety of residents

Until recent times, whenever we thought of security, our mind would go to a person standing guard at a police post or the entrance of a building. In this regard, it's not impossible for human errors, omissions and negligence to seep in sometimes. This scenario leaves a chink in the armour, doesn't it? We have faith in our compatriots, but being solely dependent on them can be unwise. We need technological interventions for their support. Hence, an automated surveillance system comes into play. The right surveillance system can monitor visitors in a residential area so that there is a clear record of anyone entering and leaving. It can keep a sharp eye on people to ensure they're safe, and it can also detect other major incidents like break-ins, thefts and violence. Such systems raise an alert with the security personnel in real-time, thereby leading to quick response.

To ensure personal liberty of under-trials

We are aware that a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. So, in order to set a good precedent, we must begin with digitising our



police stations and courthouses to the extent possible. The highly-publicised double murder of a father and son by police personnel at a Tuticorin police station highlights the need for these surveillance systems. NCRB data states that there were over 1,700 custodial deaths between 2001 and 2018. There were 452 custodial deaths between 2014 and 2018, in which no police officers were held responsible. Surveillance systems are everywhere across India and deploying them across our courthouses and police stations will bring greater confidence of people in our institutions. Also, ideally, the video footage should not be stored locally and will be streamed directly to the police headquarters so that tampering is averted.

Women security

Women's security should be more than just a priority. Going back to a

gut-wrenching incident back in 2017, where a 25-year-old woman at the Pune Infosys campus was raped and strangled to death in her office by a security guard — demonstrates the horrendous threat that women face daily. In this case, the culprit was caught but what about the others that get away with their crimes? Should we not prevent such dreadful incidences from repeating over and over again? Bengaluru City has announced that it will be setting up 16,000 CCTV cameras for women's safety but workplaces also need to follow suit. They need to step up security measures for women in the workplace so that they can follow their dreams without the constant fear looming over them.

Traffic management

Traffic monitoring and management have grown to a whole new level

due to the latest surveillance technology. Commuters can now monitor the news to get the latest traffic reports before heading out to work. CCTV cameras have been installed on busy roads, atop traffic signals and at busy intersections. Cameras are used for monitoring traffic, recording the pattern data, overall observing traffic and to issue *challans*. However, this infrastructure is largely restricted to the metropolitan cities.

India has the highest accident mortality and theft rate. Deploying traffic cameras across smaller cities would urge drivers to exercise caution and discourage violations. Transport authorities can also use them to monitor vehicle flow in case of road closures or accidents. They do so by issuing automated tickets for moving violations by simply picking up the offender's number plate information.



To stop terrorism

Sadly, India is no stranger to terrorism. There have been numerous attacks in our country in the past and we've recently honored the 12th anniversary of the infamous Mumbai attacks in 2008, where 171 people lost their lives and 239 were injured. These horrific instances have demonstrated to us the need for high-tech surveillance. With the latest technology, modern surveillance systems are equipped with features such as facial recognition. It can be linked to government and police records to identify known criminals and suspicious individuals. When installed at various junctures around cities, it could identify and inform authorities of a wanted individual or threat well in advance without stirring up mass panic.

After going through the aforementioned points, it becomes plain to see that surveillance is no longer a choice but a need in today's world. So that our children could play safely outside, women could walk freely or sit in their office alone, and the only people approaching them are the ones who want to offer help. Advanced AI-driven surveillance systems give us a glimmer of hope. And when used efficiently, they have the potential to bring safety back into society.

(The writer is the regional director of Oncam.)

WEBBED



THE DISCIPLE

Self-doubt, sacrifice and struggle converge into an existential crisis for a devoted classical vocalist as the mastery he strives for remains elusive. Starring Aditya Modak, Arun Dravid and Sumitra Bhavne, it releases on Netflix on April 30.



SEXIFY

To build an innovative sex app and win a tech competition, a sexually inexperienced student and her friends must explore the daunting world of intimacy. Starring Aleksandra Skraba, Maria Sobocinska and Sandra Drzymalska, it releases on Netflix on April 28.



THINGS HEARD AND SEEN

A young woman discovers that both her husband and their new home harbour sinister secrets after they leave Manhattan for small-town life. Starring Amanda Seyfried, James Norton and Natalia Dyer, it releases on Netflix on April 29.



Actor Gauhar Khan launches The Park Holidays Actor's International Mobile App in Delhi. Photo: Pankaj Kumar

We have witnessed a steep rise in maternal deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis has shown us that we must strengthen health systems to cope with emergencies without impacting essential services," says Executive Director, Population Foundation of India, Poonam Muttreja.

Besides the overwhelming burden of COVID-19 cases in India, the indirect effects of the pandemic are cause for concern, especially in the case of already vulnerable communities. Women and children have been disproportionately affected, with studies registering a significant increase in the numbers of stillbirths and maternal deaths compared to pre-COVID periods. A recent review in The Lancet, of studies on maternal and child health outcomes, has confirmed that the impact of the COVID-19-associated lockdowns has been devastating for mothers and newborns. Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) have been worst affected.

Clinics and public health facilities being inaccessible to many during pandemic-induced lockdowns cut off thousands from essential health services. The United Nations has estimated that this may have caused an additional 2,20,000 child deaths and 11,000 maternal deaths in South Asia alone. These numbers are likely to increase with India potentially accounting for the largest proportions. In India, the number of women who received all four antenatal check-ups during the pandemic also dropped by 51 per cent and the number of institutional deliveries were down by 79 per cent. The demand for family planning services satisfied by modern methods fell by 67 per cent.

National Safe Motherhood Day is celebrated on April 11 every year, on Kasturba Gandhi's birth anniversary. This year, the focus must be on ensuring access to quality family planning services and reproductive health services for all.

A robust family planning programme is an important way of curbing preventable deaths. "More accessible and equitable family planning services that offers a wider choice of contraceptive

A cause for concern

Prior to National Safe Motherhood Day, public health expert Poonam Muttreja says that the focus needs to be widened to include morbidity as an important aspect of maternal health



methods to couples are a simple, low-cost intervention that can reduce maternal and child mortality by preventing early pregnancies and unwanted pregnancies at a later age," says Poonam.

"At Population Foundation of India, we have engaged with policymakers, donors, NGOs and communities to consistently raise the discourse on the need for informed decision making on women's health. We promote effective and gender-sensitive health and development strategies and policies. We have constantly emphasised the importance of planned families, birth spacing and delayed marriage as strategies to improve maternal health," she adds.

Gender inequality, gender-based violence and lack of agency continue to

impact women's ability to access maternal and antenatal health services. In India, regressive gender norms continue to result in a preference for sons, leading to frequent pregnancies. Further social norms around child and early marriages also impact maternal and child health.

While the full impact of the pandemic on the public health system will not be clear for some time, COVID-19 has underscored that stronger maternal and child care systems are a critical requirement of health system strengthening going forward.

The foundation has been working at the national, state and community level to change perceptions around gender family planning, adolescent sexuality and reproductive health.

No competition between actors: Pratik Gandhi

He became a pan-India sensation almost overnight, with his portrayal of Harshad Mehta in last year's popular series *Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story*, and has now planted his feet in Bollywood. With the spotlight firmly on him, actor Pratik Gandhi says he does not believe in competition among contemporaries.

"There can't be competition between actors. Had it been products, there would have been competition. If I was a biscuit or a soap, there would be competition," Pratik said.

He added, "I am a human being. How can two people, looking so different and having distinct types of acting, be compared? I don't take the pressure that your next thing has to be bigger than the previous one."

Gujarati actor Pratik first made his mark on stage and his name was included in *Limca Book Of Records* for a monologue he performed in three languages, in the play *Mohan No Masalo*. He would tell you the *Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story* success has been a progression of his steady rise as an actor, and it has opened up opportunities.

"I would convert this as excitement where people are giving me different opportunities now. They are open to work with me in different subjects — which is very exciting for me as an actor, and I am just looking forward to playing another character. So yeah, I don't think that much. My theatre background is helping me here," Pratik said.

He insists fame and success are peripheral products. "I don't think about all these things (fame and success) because they are peripheral byproducts. I am getting much love from the audience all across, and across all age groups. I don't think



about it much. It is the character that worked for them," he said, about his *Scam 1992* success.

Before starring in the OTT show, Pratik was also seen in the Hindi film *Loveyatri*, but he admits Hansal Mehta's web series was a game changer for him.

"It is an absolute gamechanger. It changed a lot of things for me personally and professionally. More so, it has changed the way people look at me now," he said.

He finds all the love coming his way satisfying and describes it as "a very overwhelming feeling."

"It has something that I have been waiting for, over the last 16 years," he concluded.

—IANS

TRENDBLAZER



TAAPSEE'S MANTRA: SUIT UP, SMILE UP, SHOW UP

Actor **TAAPSEE PANNU** shared a mantra in life that she follows.

"Suit up... smile up.... show up," she wrote as caption on Instagram, with a picture where she is dressed in burnt orange pants paired with a white shirt and a blazer.

The actor is currently busy shooting for *Shabaash Mithu*, based on the life of Indian women's ODI cricket team captain Mithali Dorai Raj.

She also has *Looop Lapeta*, *Haseen Dillruba* and *Rashmi Rocket* coming up.

fairtalk

AAHANA KUMRA



"I know as an actress, I have the power to influence people, and I want to do it in the right direction. Films can have an enormous impact on society, especially young minds. So, I never want to be associated with a project that will showcase women in a poor light. It's important and a high time to have conversations around women's rights and safety."

dailytalk

RASHMIKA MANDANNA



"Since I am just a beginner in the field of acting, as a person I am curious how it is going to pan out when I do different things. For me, every film I choose, I do a different character because, for me, I wouldn't want to watch myself do the same content twice. I like to keep surprising myself — 'am I really doing this?' I am craving to do better work in any language."

SCARY TO HAVE A BABY IN PANDEMIC: JONES

Actor **FELICITY JONES** said that it was an intense experience giving birth to a baby during the pandemic.

"I made banana bread three times and burnt it each time. I had a baby in the first one. It seems ages ago now in the really scary lockdown when we were all advised to wash our groceries and we didn't know what was going to happen. It was pretty intense, but having kids is intense anyway. The pandemic just added a little extra," she said.

She added: "To have a baby in an apocalyptic moment is pretty scary."



EDUCATION: A POWERFUL WEAPON

While there are schemes like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* that aim to educate girls but continuous awareness and persistent effort are needed to enable them to benefit at the ground level, says RAMA SHARMA

There are several powerful women, who have shattered the patriarchal norms and have shown the rest of the world what women can do if they have equal rights. Chhavi Rajawat is one such name that has done exactly that and more. India's first woman sarpanch with an MBA degree, Chhavi was the sarpanch of her village Soda in Malpura block, Tonk district in Rajasthan. She had left her lucrative corporate job to serve as a sarpanch. Her ardour to work for the community has not just touched lives but has led the way for several girls and women who have set their hearts on serving the community.

One such life that Chhavi has inspired is that of 25-year-old Radha Rajawat. A resident of Lalwari village in Niwai block of Tonk district in Rajasthan, Radha has not only educated herself but made a huge difference in the lives of girls in and around her village by fighting for their rights to education. Her journey, however, has been a tough one. She had to put up a fight against her parents first and then, against the entire Rajput community of her village to reach where she is today.

"Initially, we were against her idea of pursuing education after Class 8th as that would have meant sending her outside the village," shared her parents who had to eventually give up in front of their daughter's perseverance. Their support was faced by the opposition not just from their extended families but from the Rajput community as well. The pressure forced Radha's parents to withdraw their support, but Radha was adamant. She put up a brave fight against everyone, worked as a laborer, and managed to complete Class 12 with a good score of 70 per cent.

Radha's journey had started while she was still in Class 8th. Under the Sakshar Bharat Mission — a centrally sponsored nationwide literacy scheme of



the Indian Department for School Education and Literacy (DSEL), Radha was selected as a child reporter. This provided her a platform to raise issues concerning her village and panchayat through newspapers. Slowly, she started mobilising the villagers.

In 2013, she led the girls and women from the panchayat to address the issue of corruption. "Led by Radha, the group submitted a memorandum not only to the District Collector but also to the Chief Minister requesting solution the challenge of negligence and corruption at the panchayat level," informed

Poonam Rajawat, a member of Kishori Manch — an adolescent group run by a local non-profit organisation in the region.

One of the most important transformations that Radha brought to this panchayat was setting up a school till Class 12. Her persistent efforts to address the concerns of thousands of girls who had to give up education due to lack of a higher secondary school in their village led to this impact. The girls of the village, now, do not have to compromise on their dreams of completing school education.

Not just for girls, she soon started working towards the

education of the entire village. "In 2014, as a panchayat motivator, she took the initiative to educate 1,800 illiterate people of the village and encouraged them to sit for the examinations," said Panchayat Assistant, Hemraj Singh.

Shashi Kanwar, who was tutored by Radha, shared that there wasn't a single educated woman in the village. "It is a result of her hard work and efforts of the other adolescent girls associated with her that today, nearly 70 per cent of women in the village are literate." As far as the education of adolescent girls is concerned,

prior to 2013, only 30 per cent of girls in Lalwari panchayat were educated, while today, more than 80 per cent are linked with mainstream education. Not only this, 30 to 40 per cent of the girls are stepping out of the village boundary to pursue their dream of higher education.

"Overwhelmed by Radha's zeal to work for the better future of her community, she was requested by the girls, women and other responsible people of the village to contest the panchayat elections," said Maina Rana, a colleague of Radha's. She obliged their

request and contested the election but couldn't win. She, however, continued to support the winner, Devalal Gurjar, who is also her colleague, to serve the community with sincerity.

Babulal Sharma, a local teacher, said, "Radha has tried to raise social issues, problems and challenges not only at the panchayat level but also at the district and state level from time to time. It is the result of her dedication towards the society that she had the opportunity to meet the former Vice President of India, Hamid Ansari. Taking note of her confidence and her ability to lead the youth, local political groups had also offered her to join them. Radha, a true social worker, showed her will to rise above politics and work for all the sections of society.

Her life, however, is not only occupied with social responsibilities but is equally dedicated to her family. "I am a cancer patient. Radha, as responsible as she is, has taken the entire charge into her hands. Along with pursuing further education, she is working in a private firm. Currently, I am receiving free treatment with the help of Dr Prahlad Dhakad, a Senior Doctor working in Jaipuria Hospital. It is because of her that I am able to get this free treatment. I was completely against her education but now I realise my mistake and understood the importance of girls' education," said Radha's father.

Her struggle and passion for social awareness is an outstanding example of women's empowerment. While there are schemes like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* that aim to educate girls but continuous awareness and persistent effort are needed to enable them to benefit at the ground level. For women to become self-reliant and courageous, they should have equal right and opportunities to educate themselves.

—Charkha Features



LEARN AND UNLEARN

One should give up self-conceit and accept changes if one wants to do better in life, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

There is hardly any human being in the world who is not inclined to improve himself/herself. Of course, some aspire for improvement in their relationship with whom they have to live and work, whereas others work for improvement in their economic status. Some want to improve or enhance their personality, whereas others are more concerned about their spiritual progress. In any case, the will to make some progress is basic to all normal beings and the efforts to improve are a sign of life. And, the volition, under-lying all efforts of man to bring about improvement is mainly one's aspiration to be happier. If one ponders over this question of attainment of true happiness, one would come to the conclusion that man's happiness ultimately depends upon his behaviour or his reaction to the external stimuli and his ways of thinking which, in turn, depends upon his inner urges, his tendencies and the training he had. So, in order to have any other kind of improvement, man has to bring about improvement in

his outlook, habits, mannerism and ways. For this, he has to pick up and learn certain things and unlearn others. If man's process of learning (or unlearning wrong things) stops and his effort to put into practice what he has learned already ceases or his capacity and will to make efforts are exhausted, his improvement and progress also come to a halt. Not many are aware of the fact that the path to progress is paved with some obstacles which are mostly of man's own making. One of these is man's pride and arrogance about his own knowledge. It is easy to teach him who has no pride in his own intelligence. But he who regards himself as perfectly wise would say to others, "There is nothing that I do not know." It is difficult to offer correction to such a man, for he assumes air in such a manner that people would stutter in his presence; he loses temper no sooner than anyone would start informing him on any subject. So, if one wants to improve and, for that purpose, is inclined to accept some changes, one should give up self-conceit because it precludes the possibility of learning good things of life and unlearning wrong things.

Another major hurdle in man's path to progress is his attachment to worldly objects, his lust for sensual pleasures, his sense of deep involvement, and his attachment to his body. Little does man realise that, at this fat-end of iron age, when a man has lost his morals, the worldly things are devoid of their original essence. One who wants spiritual improvement should know that the present unrighteous world has no substance. Is the bark of a sugar cane worth anything when the juice has been squeezed out of it? So has the world lost all its sap and truth because it has become debased. This body of ours is assailed by several different diseases and is made of debased matter. So one who aspires for self-improvement should push out attachment to objects of senses or thirst for these, with only one determined effort, as, otherwise, it would mean that one has lost or is losing one's precious life over a mere trifle.

Knowing all this, one should get rid of body consciousness. The first step for this is to withdraw one's attachment from 'religions' of the body, which rob one's life of its essence, and to devote one's mind and body and possessions towards the welfare of the world. This will bring in man qualities such as service, dedication, sacrifice, meekness, fellow-feeling, tolerance, and hundred-and-one other noble traits of high character. It will quicken his efforts for self-improvement.



Whether working from home or office, toiling away for long hours without breaks and physical activity can begin to damage your body, vitality and even without tell-tale signs.

"It is important to achieve a healthy work-life balance in order to live a fulfilled life. But there are moments in life when you have to finish certain deadlines and cannot avoid spending a lot of time on your desk," says Beenu Rajpoot, noted filmmaker and a Fit India Champion.

The fitness expert has these suggestions for those busy hours that will not only nourish your body and mind, but also increase overall productivity:

Between emails, meetings and calls, try to take a stroll even for a few minutes to reset your body and brain. A little bit of movement during those long sitting hours will go a long way to ensure that your body and joints do not become too stiff by sitting.

Check your breath during intervals. Take a few long breaths engaging your abdominals to ensure that your body is getting enough oxygen. Learn some *Pranayama* techniques to recreate yourself quickly so that you can maintain a constant energy level throughout the long span of desk sitting.

Remember to do a few neck and shoulder stretches while on your desk to avoid neck pain or back pain later. It will also help in keeping your posture upright. Add useful stretches from your yoga class to these intervals.

Choose the appropriate ergonomic chair and table in order to maintain a good posture while sitting for long hours. Some of the important factors

Keep your body, mind active

Working long hours can damage your vitality even without tell-tale signs

to be considered are — shape of the chair, its height, height of the table, lumbar support in the chair, among others. Ensure that your chair has some kind of lumbar support. Lumbar support will protect your lumbar spine from pressures of excessive flexion during long sitting hours. It is also important to choose a chair where you can adjust the height of the chair so that you can adjust its height vis-a-vis your table. It will be good for your mid-upper back and shoulders. Often people who ignore this advice can develop health conditions like scoliosis and rounded shoulders.

Keep drinking water during a long shift. It's quite common that people under pressure keep suppressing their thirst subconsciously that makes them dehydrated. Remember to keep sipping the water every hour or so to keep your body rich in fluids that will improve the circulation and will keep your blood pressure in check, apart from many other benefits of drinking water.

Decorate your space nicely and keep it clean, organised and minimal. Avoid too much clutter around in your space. Too much physical clutter affects



the states of your mind, too. Practice the yogic principle of *Aparigraha* or minimalism to keep your space, physical as well as mental, free.

Ensure that you are getting some sun during the day. It will not only enrich your Vitamin D levels but also give a big

boost to your immune system. It is very common among the big cities in India that people don't get enough Vitamin D as they are not exposed to the sunlight often. Lack of exposure to the sunlight leads to Vitamin D deficiency that is often linked to other health issues.

Gives your eyes some rest in between after every half an hour or so by doing a simple yoga technique of palming. Rub your palms together and just cover your eyes with your warm palms. Your eyes will feel energised immediately. —IANS

“Invest in your dreams. Grind now. Shine later.” —Unknown

TREATING SLEEP APNEA MAY REDUCE DEMENTIA

Older adults who received positive airway pressure therapy prescribed for obstructive sleep apnea may be less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease and other kinds of dementia, new research suggests.

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is a condition in which the upper airway collapses repeatedly throughout the night, preventing normal breathing during sleep.

OSA is associated with a variety of other neurological and cardiovascular conditions, and many older adults are at high risk for OSA.

"We found a significant association between positive airway pressure use and lower risk of Alzheimer's and other types of dementia over three years, suggesting that positive airway pressure may be protective against dementia risk in people with OSA," said lead author Galit Levi Dunietz, Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan.



CHILDHOOD DIET LINKED TO LESS ANXIETY LATER

Exercise and a healthy diet in childhood leads to adults with bigger brains and lower levels of anxiety, a new study suggests.

The mouse-model study determined that early-life exercise generally reduced anxious behaviors in adults. It also led to an increase in adult muscle and brain mass.

"During the COVID-19 lockdowns, particularly in the early months, kids got very little exercise. For many without access to a park or a backyard, school was their only source of physical activity," said researcher Marcell Cadney from the University of California - Riverside. "It is important we find solutions for these kids, possibly including extra attention as they grow into adults," Cadney added.

The researchers determined that early-life exercise generally reduced anxious behaviours in adults. It also led to an increase in adult muscle and brain mass. When fed "Western" style diets high in fat and sugar, the mice not only became fatter, but also grew into adults that preferred unhealthy foods.



OBESITY LINKED TO HEAVY PERIODS

Ladies, here is one more reason to reduce your body weight. Obesity is linked to greater menstrual blood loss, which may result from increased inflammation in the womb lining, delaying its repair, according to a study conducted both on women and mice.

The study, led by researchers from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, UK, found a weak but statistically significant association between increasing body mass index (BMI) and more heavy periods in women.

In the mouse study, the team found that after shedding their womb lining, the mice on a high-fat diet showed delayed repair of the remaining womb lining in comparison to mice on a normal diet.

Further examination of womb tissue from the mice indicated that inflammatory factors were also higher in mice with greater body weight. The findings are detailed in the Journal of Endocrinology.



'JUMPING' GENES CAN PREVENT BLOOD CANCER

US scientists have found that transposons, also known as jumping genes, can protect against certain blood cancers and help develop new therapeutic targets.

Transposons are DNA sequences that can move, or jump, from one location in the genome to another when activated. These "jumping" genes are a source of genetic mutations responsible for a number of human diseases.

The findings, published in the journal Nature Genetics, can help predict how patients will respond to cancer therapies and find new therapeutic targets for acute myeloid leukemia (AML) — the deadliest type of blood cancer in adults and children.

"Our initial finding was a surprise because it's been long thought that activated transposons promote cancer development by generating genetic mutations. We found it was the opposite for blood cancers, and that decreased L1 activity was associated with worse clinical outcomes and therapy resistance in patients," said Jian Xu, Associate Professor in the CRI.



NEW DRUG CAN STOP TUMOURS FROM GROWING

US researchers have found that an oral drug can be effective in stopping tumours from growing. The team from the University of Colorado Cancer Center found that slowing down NLRP3 can reduce inflammation and curb tumour growth and progression.

"NLRP3 is a member of a larger family that is involved in sensing danger signals," said Carlo Marchetti, from the varsity's School of Medicine.

It is a receptor that surveils the intercellular compartment of a cell, looking for danger molecules or pathogens.

"When NLRP3 recognises these signals, it leads to the activation of caspase-1, a protein involved in the processing and maturation of interleukin-1-beta into its biological active form, causing an intense inflammatory response. We found that in melanoma, this process is dysregulated, resulting in tumour growth," Marchetti said.



Rana, Tripathi power KKR to win



PTI ■ CHENNAI

Opener Nitish Rana (80) and Rahul Tripathi (53) hit fluent half-centuries to script Kolkata Knight Riders' a comfortable 10-run win against Sunrisers Hyderabad in their Indian Premier League match, here on Sunday.

SRH's Rashid Khan (2/24) was yet again at his best, asking tough questions to the KKR batsmen but most of his bowling colleagues proved ineffective on a slow yet decent batting wicket.

Hyderabad lost skipper David Warner (3) and Wriddhiman Saha (7) early and were always playing a catch-up game despite Jonny Bairstow's fighting half-century. They could manage 177 for five in the end.

Warner was dropped on nought by Pat Cummins in the first over bowled by Harbhajan Singh but he could not make good use of the life and became a victim of pacer Prasidh Krishna while Saha was cleaned up by Shakib Al Hasan.

Jonny Bairstow (55) and Manish Pandey (61 not out) formed a partnership at a steady run rate. Australian pacer Cummins broke their 92-run stand when he had Bairstow caught at backward point by Rana.

SRH needed 70 off the last five overs.

Mohammed Nabi (14) was hit on his neck by Krishna but the Afghan responded with a cracking six. He went after a slower one but only to be caught by Eoin Morgan.

The 19-year-old Abdul Samad, who hails from Jammu and Kashmir, creamed off two sixes and a four off Cummins in the penultimate over to keep SRH in hunt. Requiring 22 runs from the last over, KKR's Andre Russell held his nerves to deny SRH

a win.

Earlier, left-handed opener Rana struck the ball hard and clean to provide his side a confident start after they were asked to take first strike.

His strokes on the off-side -- the drives and cuts -- were of highest quality and a treat to the eye.

Neither Bhuvneshwar Kumar nor T Natarajan could stop Rana from hitting boundaries even as Subhman Gill was quiet initially. Sandeep Sharma was hit for three boundaries in a row by him.

Gill opened up his arms to hit a massive straight six off Natarajan to make it even better for KKR.

However, the run-flow was affected when ever-reliable Rashid got the ball in his hands. He also provided the breakthrough when he deceived

Gill with a wrong'un to find the stumps.

Rana though kept going strong, completing his half-century with a six off Vijay Shankar after surviving an LBW appeal off Rashid. He got the decision overturned, taking the DRS call.

Rana's six-hit continued after getting his fifty as he punished Natarajan and Sandeep again.

His colleague at the other end Rahul Tripathi also stroked confidently and fluently.

He smashed a massive six off Bhuvneshwar and then followed it up with a cheeky four in the third-man region.

He completed his fifty with another boundary off Bhuvneshwar but was dismissed by Natarajan soon after when he top-edged a ball.

Rashid too sent back dangerous Andre Russell (5) back.

Mohammed Nabi (2/32) got rid of Rana and Eoin Morgan (2) off successive balls in the 18th over.

PLAYER	RUNS
1. Shikhar Dhawan (DC)	85
2. Nitish Rana (KKR)	80
3. Prithvi Shaw (DC)	72

PLAYER	WKTS
1. Harshal Patel (RCB)	5
2. Avesh Khan (DC)	2
3. Rashid Khan (SRH)	2

MOST SIXES	
1. Nitish Rana (KKR)	4
2. Suresh Raina (CSK)	4
3. Chris Lynn (MI)	3

MOTION PICTURE



Chennai Super Kings' Suresh Raina spends time in kitchen @chennaiIPL



David Warner's daughters Indi Rae, Isla Rose and Ivy Mae get ready to cheer for Sunrisers Hyderabad @davidwarner31

Big-hitters galore

RR, Punjab Kings aim for winning start to IPL campaign

KEY PLAYERS
<p>BEN STOKES English all-rounder will have an extra responsibility with the ball this time in absence of Archer.</p>
<p>CHRIS GAYLE He will be the X-factor in Kings line-up. Gayle's power hitting can take PBKS to big total.</p>

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Another battle of big-hitters is on the cards when KL Rahul's Punjab Kings take on the Sanju Samson-led Rajasthan Royals, two line-ups dotted with expansive stroke-makers and in pursuit of a winning start to their IPL campaigns here on Monday.

Rajasthan will be banking heavily on their swashbuckling all-rounder Ben Stokes. Stokes will be keen to get some runs under his belt and so will be the likes of Englishman Jos Buttler and newly-appointed skipper Samson, who is a mine-field of talent.

The Royals could opt to open with the highly-rated Yashasvi Jaiswal and Buttler. While Samson, who would be itching to prove a point, and Stokes would then form strong middle-order.

If the four fire on all cylinders, they can pummel any attack into submission and Punjab would be no exception on the Wankhede track, which is usually batting-friendly.

Royals also have an several other options at their disposal, including all-rounders Shivam Dube, Shreyas Gopal, Rahul Tewatia, Rivan Parag and Liam Livingstone.

Gopal, Tewatia and Parag, all bowl leg-spin, so it would be interesting to see whether the Royals opt to go in with two leg-spinners.

Tewatia and Dube have the ability to whack the ball outside the park

VENUE: WANKHEDE STADIUM, MUMBAI

HEAD TO HEAD

Matches	21
Rajasthan Royals	12
Punjab Kings	9

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES



Rajasthan Royals defeated Punjab Kings by 4 wickets at Sharjah



Rajasthan Royals beat Punjab Kings by 7 wicketa at Abu Dhabi

1922

Punjab Kings Skipper Lokesh Rahul who scored 1922 runs at an average of 54.91 in 42 innings of as many matches ,needs 78 runs to become only second batsman after Shaun Marsh (2477 runs) to score over 2000 runs for Punjab Kings in IPL.

and look to be certainties in the playing XI.

With star pacer Jofra Archer missing due to injury, the pace attack will have to be led by Rajasthan's newest recruit — South African all-rounder Chris Morris, who will be eager to justify his huge price tag of Rs 16.25 crore.

RR will have to get their combination right as only four foreigners can make the playing XI.

So, it will be interesting to see whether Royals opt for left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman or go in with either Jaydev Unadkat, Kartik Tyagi or Chetan Sakariya.

Unadkat, with his experience, might get the nod.

On the other hand, Punjab boast of some hard-hitters like Rahul (670 runs in 2020 season), Mayank Agarwal (424 runs) and Chris Gayle.

Rahul and Agarwal formed a lethal opening combination in 2020 and would continue to open.

They also have the likes of Englishman Dawid Malan, one of the finest T20 batsmen currently, hard-hitting Tamil Nadu batsman M Shahrulkh Khan, and West Indian Nicholas Pooran.

For them too, it would be all about getting the combination right.

Shahrulkh could get the nod ahead of others like Deepak Hooda and Sarfraz Khan, and could play the role of a finisher.

Dhawan impressed by Pant's calmness on captaincy debut

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Delhi Capitals experienced opener Shikhar Dhawan was mighty impressed with Rishabh Pant's leadership qualities, saying the youngster led the team in a calm and composed manner in his first match as captain and will only get better with time.

Pant was thrust into captaincy after regular skipper Shreyas Iyer sustained a shoulder injury during the recent ODI series against England and was ruled out of the tournament.

The 23-year-old wicketkeeper-batsman made a memorable start to his captaincy stint as he led DC to a convincing seven-wicket win over three-time champions Chennai Super Kings in their opening match of the IPL 2021 here on Saturday.

"He (Rishabh Pant) did quite well. First of all, glad that he won the toss. It was a bit of a sticky wicket, so it was good for us to bat second.



Picture credits: IPLT20.com

ond. He kept his calm and kept on motivating the boys," Dhawan said during the post-match press conference.

"He made good changes as well. It was his first match (as captain), so I am sure it is only going to get refined from here. He has just

started and with experience, I am sure, he is only going to get better.

"The best thing about Rishabh Pant is that he stays calm. His presence of mind is quite there, which is very very good."

Asked if he gives his advice to Pant as a senior player, Dhawan said: "...Of course, I give my advice to him. The youngsters, whenever they come to me to ask for batting tips or mindset things, I always share my knowledge with them."

Dhawan smashed a 54-ball 85 studded with 10 fours and two maximums and alongwith Prithvi Shaw (72) shared a 138-run opening stand as Delhi chased down 189 with eight balls to spare.

Asked about his sweep shots against the pacers, Dhawan said: "I started practising it at the nets and then introduced it in the game. We have to play according to the field set. I knew Chennai keeps square leg and fine leg inside the 30-yard circle and keep covers behind for me.

Missing Jofra is big blow: Sangakkara

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Star pacer Jofra Archer's absence because of injury is a "big blow" to Rajasthan Royals but their new Director of Cricket Kumar Sangakkara is confident that the team's young Indian fast bowlers will rise to the challenge in this year's Indian Premier League.

Archer, who played with a hand injury during the India series, is currently recuperating from a surgery and the duration of his availability during the later part is still not clear.

"Sanju and I will both agree that it's a big blow for us. Jofra is a very vital part of our make-up and not to have him is unfortunately the reality of it. We have to work around it and plan contingencies," Sangakkara told PTI during a virtual press conference on Sunday ahead of the clash against Punjab Kings here on Monday.

The former Sri Lankan captain is, however, hopeful that Archer will be available at some point and "play his part in the IPL."



Picture credits: @rajasthanroyals

The weak link for Royals, over the years, has been their Indian pace attack where the most experienced name Jaydev Unadkat hasn't exactly set the stage on fire.

Apart from Unadkat, they have his left-arm back-up

Chetan Sakariya and the immensely talented Kartik Tyagi.

"Inexperience can probably work for you and it could mean that opposition hasn't seen you either. Fast bowling in IPL is not an easy task and we saw that yes-

terday (Delhi Capitals vs Chennai Super Kings) as well," said Sangakkara, who has played a number of seasons in the IPL.

"Most of the wickets are good for batting. So, you have to be quite skilful. We have Kartik Tyagi, who did pretty well last season in patches and this year we have new additions (pacer) Kuldeep Yadav (Jr) and Chetan Sakariya," he stated.

For Sangakkara, it is imperative that these youngsters are prepared to understand match situations and bowl accordingly.

"It's about keeping them focussed on what their job is and get them trained and prepared to execute different deliveries, scenarios and match plans for the opposition but at the same time, giving them confidence about their own strengths."

The Royals skipper Sanju Samson has gone slightly off the radar as far as the national team is concerned after having failed to grab even a single opportunity. However, Sangakkara believes that both the captain and Rahul Tewatia, who recently was in

India squad for the T20 series against England, could be national team regulars if they can trust their abilities a bit more.

"Pressure is always there. Whether it is Sanju or Rahul, reality is they will tell you that expectations and pressures will always be there. Everyone has various coping mechanisms to deal with it, focus is to stay in the moment," he said.

"It is very important to have those grand ambitions of playing regular international cricket, and both Sanju and Rahul are very capable of not just being regulars but great, outstanding performers at the international stage."

The eloquent former glovesman wants each of his 11 players to be "problem solvers", who can think on their feet and help the skipper.

"...That really helps the skipper Sanju a lot on the field when people are thinking themselves as to what's going on (match situation), and it also builds a lot of trust within the unit," he added.