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Covid situation turns grave in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Covid situation in Uttar Pradesh is fast going out of hands as the state reported the highest ever 18,021 novel coronavirus positive cases in the last 24 hours with 85 deaths, which is also the highest single day fatality, and acute shortage of beds and medicines being reported from across the state.

"In the past 24 hours, 18,021 fresh cases were reported from across the state while 3,474 COVID-19 patients recovered during this period. There are 95,980 active cases in the state while 6,18,293 COVID-19 patients have been treated and discharged. The state has reported a total of 9,309 COVID-19 deaths till now since the start of the pandemic," Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad told reporters here during his daily press briefing.

The severity of the novel coronavirus infection can be gauged from the fact that in just the first 13 days of April, the cases have increased seven times. In the last 24 hours, there has been a 31 per cent spike in fresh cases as 13,685 new positive cases were found on Monday and in 24 hours this number has gone up to 18,021, an increase of 4,336 cases.

The spike has thrown normal life haywire. There is an acute shortage of beds in Covid hospitals and there is a long wait for ambulances. The essential medicines have sud-

CM isolates himself

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The day Uttar Pradesh reported its highest ever single day spike, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath went into self-isolation after several officers in the Chief Minister's Office tested positive for COVID-19.

The chief minister said he was isolating himself a precautionary measure.

"Some officers of my office have tested positive for COVID-19. These officials have been in touch with me so I have isolated myself as a precaution. I will fulfill all my duties virtually," Yogi Adityanath tweeted in Hindi.

denly evaporated from the shelves of pharmacies while there is a long queue at the cremation grounds in almost all the big cities of the state.

Senior government officer Manish Dixit's daughter is admitted in a hospital and was in dire need of Remdesivir injection. A senior doctor called him up on Sunday to say that they had exhausted the stock of this injection and needed the injection immediately.

"This injection was not available in important chemist stores in Lucknow. I

approached a 'dala' and got the injection after paying a hefty amount of money," he said.

The situation is so pathetic that even a senior IAS officer was made to wait in an ambulance for four hours before he could get a bed in Sanjay Gandhi Post-graduate Institute of Medical Sciences in Lucknow.

The novel coronavirus infection has wreaked havoc on the chief minister's office as well. The chief minister's OSD Abhishek Kaushik has also been infected. In addition, a private secretary at the chief minister's office has been found to be coronavirus positive. This forced the chief minister to hold the Covid meeting with his Team 11 virtually on Tuesday.

In state capital Lucknow, 5,382 new novel coronavirus positive cases were reported on Tuesday against 3,892 on Monday. In Prayagraj, the number of positive cases increased from 1,295 on Monday to 1,856 on Tuesday. But there was a slight reprieve in Varanasi where the number of new cases dropped from 1,417 on Monday to 1,404 on Tuesday. In Kanpur Nagar, the new positive cases grew from 716 on Monday to 1,271 on Tuesday. Meanwhile, the UP government has appointed Bharti Singh as acting SSP of Bulandshahr as the present SSP Santosh Kumar Singh has been infected with coronavirus. Bharti Singh, Commandant of 41st Battalion PAC at Ghaziabad, will hold the charge of SSP Bulandshahr till further orders.

Look at lockdown in worst-hit dists: HC

Allahabad (PTI): The Allahabad High Court Tuesday directed the Uttar Pradesh government to look into the viability of complete lockdown in those districts where COVID-19 has spread at alarming rate in the last two or three weeks saying if the situation is not handled carefully and cautiously it may lead to complete collapse of the public health system.

The high court, which favoured restriction on public gatherings to 50 persons, also asked authorities to give priority to public health over elections (panchayat).

"We understand that complete lockdown for weeks together may not be feasible but looking to the current surge of pandemic, we direct the government to look into the viability of complete lockdown in those districts where spread has increased alarmingly, for at least two weeks or three weeks and at least immediately all public gatherings must be restricted to 50 persons," a bench comprising Justices Siddhartha Varma and Ajit Kumar said.

Districts like Prayagraj, Lucknow, Varanasi, Kanpur, Gorakhpur have been badly hit by Covid infection.

The high court directed the

Centre and the State Government to ensure sufficient production of Remdesivir drug by making its raw materials available to pharma companies and ensuring its supply in open market and to take stern action against those who are hoarding it and are involved in its black marketing.

"The surge has absolutely paralysed public life and all the medical aid systems have reached a stage of complete saturation. We have been informed that Covid Hospitals are over-flooded with Covid patients and there is both manpower shortage and available facilities in hospitals," the bench observed.

"The situation is so alarming that if it is not handled carefully and cautiously we may lead to stage of complete collapse of the public health system," observed the bench which was dealing with a PIL on the condition of quarantine centres and treatment of coronavirus infected patients in Uttar Pradesh.

The bench, which passed a slew of directions, said "While we insist for emergency purchases of bipap machines and high flow cannula masks to meet the demand of patients who may even be lying in the

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Maharashtra bars public movement

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Stopping short of announcing formally a full-fledged lockdown across the State, the Maharashtra Government has decided to impose more stern restrictions, including Section 144 of the CrPC and night curfew, ban on movement of people in public places without a valid reason and closure of all public places and private offices and activities barring the essential services, for 15 days from 8 pm on April 14 to May 1, 2021.

Announcing a new set of stern guidelines aimed at breaking the chain of rapid spread of infections announced late on Tuesday, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said, "Without any alternative on hand, we have imposed stern restrictions. We have already wasted enough time. Earning livelihood is important for people. But, saving lives is more important for us at this juncture."

The night curfew will be in force from 8 pm on Wednesday. One of the major restrictions will be a ban on movement of people in public places without valid reasons as mentioned in the guidelines.

All essential services, including medical stores hospitals, supply of medicines, among others will remain oper-



Passengers gather outside Lokmanya Tilak Terminus to board outstation trains, amid the ongoing spike in Covid cases, in Mumbai on Tuesday PTI

ational. The local transport will also function for those involved in essential services, the CM said.

Decision regarding inclusion of domestic help/drivers/attendants to work in the exception category will be taken by the local authorities based on the local conditions, the "break the chain" issued on Tuesday night stated.

The announcement about the new restrictions came on a day when an alarming 60,212 fresh infections were recorded, while 281 more died in the State.

Hospitals, diagnostic cen-

tres, clinics, vaccinations, medical insurance offices, pharmacies, pharmaceutical companies, other medical and health services, supporting the manufacturing and distribution units along with their dealers, transport and supply chain, manufacturing and distribution of vaccines, sanitises, masks, medical equipment, their ancillaries, raw material units and support services have been exempted from the restrictions.

Among other things, groceries, vegetables shops, fruit vendors, dairies, bakeries,

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Didi accuses EC of bias, poll panel bans Bengal BJP chief for 48 hours

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Soon after the 24-hour ban on her election campaigns ended at 8 pm on Tuesday, Bengal Chief Minister hit out at the Central Government and the Election Commission for discriminating between the BJP and the Trinamool Congress insofar as their rights to campaign was concerned.

Attacking the BJP, she said, "They have controlled all the agencies and are trying now to stop me from reaching out to the electorate."

In an apparent reference to the Commission, Mamata, who was addressing an election rally at Barasat in the northern fringes of Kolkata, asked, "Why there is a bid to stop me only and why the BJP is not being stopped?"

Saying that she was not the kind of person to get intimidated by such actions (banning from campaigns) Mamata said, "I am not the one who will run back to safety of home... I will hit back if I am hit at."

Alleging that there was a bid to make Bengal a Gujarat of sorts, she said, "I will never



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, sitting on a wheelchair, stages a protest after EC imposed a 24-hour campaigning ban on the TMC leader, in front of the Gandhi Statue in Kolkata on Tuesday PTI

allow Bengal to be made a Gujarat... Bengal will remain what it is."

Amid criticism of the poll body by the TMC for allegedly acting tough on the TMC leaders and going soft on the BJP rabble rousers, the Election Commission banned former Bengal BJP president Rahul Sinha — who is contesting on a BJP ticket from Habra in North 24 Parganas for 48 hours — from campaigning for making inflammatory speeches regarding the Sitalkuchi police

firing in which four persons were killed.

The ECI banned Sinha till Thursday 12 pm, after "strongly condemning" his inflammatory statements. It "sternly warned him to be careful from such statements while making public utterances" during the election. Sinha had earlier told that the CPF "should have shot dead not four but eight people" in Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar because "such terrorists deserve to be killed like that."

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India to have more jabs in basket Centre to give approval to vaccines made in US, UK, Japan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After India granted permission to Russia made Sputnik V vaccine for emergency use, moves are afoot to widen the ambit of Covid-19 vaccine basket by giving approval to more jabs manufactured in countries like the US, the UK, Japan.

Meanwhile, the Centre on Tuesday maintained that there was no vaccine shortage given that over 1.67 crore Covid-19 vaccine doses were still available with States and UTs and the main problem was that of better planning.

Addressing a Press conference here, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said so far States and UTs have received 13,10,90,370 vaccine doses, out of which the total consumption, including wastage, has been 11,43,69,677. "As per 11 am data, unutilised doses available with States and Union Territories for administration is 1,67,20,693. From now till April end, 2,01,22,960 doses are in supply pipeline to states and UTs," he said.

Vaccines on the WHO's emergency use list will also be

part of this opening up with an aim to meet the growing demand for Covid-19 surge following a surge in infections in the country.

Presently, Covishield and Covaxin developed by Oxford University-AstraZeneca and manufactured by Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech International Ltd (BBIL) respectively are provided under the nationwide vaccination programme launched on January 16.

Now the Government has accepted the recommendation of an expert panel which said that Covid-19 vaccines which have been developed and are being manufactured in foreign countries and which have been granted emergency approval for restricted use by authorities in the US, Europe, the UK, Japan or which are listed in the WHO Emergency Use Listing, may be granted emergency use approval in India.

The expert panel also mandated the requirement of post-approval parallel bridging clinical trial in place of conduct of local clinical trial.

According to the Union Health Ministry, the first 100



Employees pack boxes containing vials of AstraZeneca's Covishield vaccine at the Serum Institute of India in Pune AP

beneficiaries of such foreign vaccines shall be assessed for seven days for safety outcomes before it is rolled out for further immunisation programme within the country.

The DCGI gave its nod for the emergency use of Sputnik vaccine based on recommendations of the Subject Expert Committee. The interim results of safety immunogenicity and efficacy from Russian Phase-III clinical trial have been published in Lancet journal.

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US recommends 'pause' for J&J vax over clot reports

Washington: The US on Tuesday recommended a "pause" in using the single-dose Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine to investigate reports of rare but potentially dangerous blood clots, a development that could jeopardise the rollout of vaccines around the world. P10

CAPSULE

PM PAYS TRIBUTES TO JALLIANWALA MARTYRS

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tributes to the victims of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre on Tuesday, and said their courage, heroism and sacrifice give strength to every Indian.

AT 40.2° C, DELHI SEES HOTTEST DAY SO FAR

New Delhi: Delhi on Tuesday recorded a maximum temperature of 40.2 degrees Celsius, the highest so far this month, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The minimum temperature settled at 19.4 degrees Celsius, a notch below normal, it said.

3 FISHERMEN FEARED KILLED AS SHIP COLLIDES

Mangaluru: At least three fishermen are feared dead and nine others are missing after their fishing boat collided with a foreign vessel off the coast of Mangaluru early on Tuesday, sources said.

Modi for global synergy to face pandemic challenge

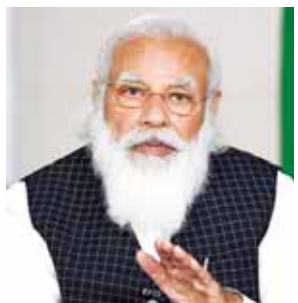
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday cautioned that in the fight against corona pandemic the world is still "underprepared" and called for a united global approach to face the challenge.

He also called for changing the mindset in bracing for future threats and called for human centric approach in dealing with them.

Making this assertion here while inaugurating the sixth edition of the Raisina Dialogue, he also said the world still faces violence in many facets, especially proxy war and terrorism, despite creation of several international bodies after the Second World War.

In his address delivered virtually, Modi said the four-day Raisina Dialogue was taking



place at a watershed moment in human history.

"A global pandemic has been ravaging the world for over a year. The last such global pandemic was a century ago," he said.

"During this pandemic, in our own humble way, within our own limited resources, we in India have tried to walk the talk. We have tried to protect our own 1.3 billion citizens

from the pandemic. At the same time, we have also tried to support pandemic response efforts of others," he said.

Highlighting India's role in the fight against corona pandemic, the Prime Minister said, "We understand fully, that mankind will not defeat the pandemic unless all of us, everywhere, regardless of the colour of our passports, come out of it. That is why, this year, despite many constraints, we have supplied vaccines to over 80 countries."

In his nearly ten-minute address, Modi said, "Although, humanity has faced many infectious diseases since then. The world today is underprepared to handle Covid pandemic. Our scientist, researchers and industry have answered some questions.

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Goa Forward Party withdraws from BJP-led Govt

PTI ■ PANAJI

The Goa Forward Party walked out of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on Tuesday, citing "anti-Goan policies" of the BJP-led State Government.

However, the move of the GFP, which has 3 MLAs in the 40-member Goa House, will not have any impact on the stability of the Pramod Sawant Government in the State since the Vijai Sardesai-led party is not a ruling constituent.

The GFP extended support to the NDA in 2017 to facilitate the formation of the then BJP-led state government under the leadership of Manohar Parrikar.

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Kerala Min Jaleel quits days after nepotism findings by Lok Ayukt

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

KT Jaleel, the controversial Minister for Higher Education in Kerala's Pinarayi Vijayan Cabinet, resigned on Tuesday. The resignation came after the findings by the Lok Ayukt that Jaleel has committed impropriety and was guilty of "nepotism, abuse of power and violation of oath office" in appointing KT Adeb, his close relation as the general manager of Kerala State Minorities Development Finance Corporation in 2016.

The last three days saw the CPI(M) and its intellectual giants like Minister AK Balan and politburo member Kodiyeri Balakrishnan ruling out Jaleel's resignation. But things took a turn for the worse on Monday following revelations that it was Chief



KT Jaleel

Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who had signed the papers authorising the appointment of Adeb, who did not have the minimum qualifications for the post.

The file dealing with the appointment of Adeb in the senior post of the Government-owned body was not discussed in the Cabinet. It was also revealed that Vijayan had signed the file against the advice by the officials of the general administration department of the State.

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Monsoon to be normal this year: Skymet

New Delhi: Skymet — a private weather forecasting agency — said on Tuesday the southwest monsoon in 2021 that will start from June is expected to be normal or above normal for the third consecutive year.

In its preliminary monsoon forecast for 2021, Skymet Weather said monsoon rain from June to September is likely to 103 per cent of the long period average (LPA). In 2020 and 2019, the monsoon was above normal at 110 per cent and 109 per cent of LPA respectively.

The last time India had three consecutive years of normal monsoon was between 1996 and 1998.

The LPA for June to September rainfall is estimated to 880.6 mm, meaning if the forecast comes true, the actual rainfall in the country will be around 907 millimetres. PNS

3.50 lakh in the fray for first phase of panchayat elections

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As many as 3.50 lakh candidates are in the fray for the first phase of panchayat elections in UP for 2.21 lakh posts in 20 districts. The returning officers are sifting through nominations papers, with the process still far from done, as affidavits of candidates also have to be uploaded online this time. The State Election Commission has deployed 23 IAS and PCS officers in 20 districts while additional observers have been posted in the districts with more than 20 development blocks.

The total number of candidates in four phases for close to 8.69 lakh posts of the three-tier panchayat bodies is likely to reach around 17 lakh. In comparison, around 4,850 candidates contested for the 403 Uttar Pradesh assembly seats in 2017. “If we compare just the block panchayat, zila panchayat and gram pradhan seats in the first phase, the number is 10 times that of the state’s Vidhan Sabha,” Additional Election Commissioner Ved Prakash Verma said.

The electoral battle for panchayat elections is going to be significant as all the major political parties are openly backing candidates this time. This has made the panchayat elections a virtual seminal for the assembly polls next year. Among those in the race are the Aam Aadmi Party, AIMIM and Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad’s Azad Samaj Party, which are making their debut in the state.

According to SEC sources, enforcement of the Covid protocol is going to be an uphill task for the

Fogging, sanitisation drive in villages

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The villages are agog with the spirit of panchayat election and to save masses from coronavirus infection, fogging and sanitisation has started in villages to protect people from the second wave of infection of the deadly virus. The cleanliness drive is being carried out under the supervision of the officials of the Panchayati Raj Department.

The drains of villages are being cleaned. Garbage is being removed and fogging is being done in villages so that people remain protected from coronavirus infection.

A senior official said that the chief minister believes that sanitisation could control spread of dengue, chikungunya, Japanese encephalitis and other infectious diseases in general.

He said under this decision of the chief minister taken on April 9, Additional Chief Secretary (Panchayati Raj) Manoj Kumar Singh directed all the district magistrates and director, panchayati raj of the state to carry out special sanitation campaign at the state level for the prevention of coronavirus and other vector-borne diseases.

According to this order, on Saturday, 82,052 per-



sonnel sanitised 62,291 revenue villages, while on April 11, over 72,768 personnel in 59,559 revenue villages cleaned the drains. Fogging and other sanitisation work was also carried out. On April 13, 81,356 people sanitised 59,468 revenue villages.

administration given the large number of candidates and voters. There are already reports of long queues and unruly crowds scrambling for forms before nomination deadlines, without masks and flouting the social distancing norms. The SEC, before the commencement of the nomination process began, had issued instructions to all district magistrates for compliance of the Covid protocol. However, the candidates and their supporters have barely followed the norms.

Elections are being held for gram pradhans, members of gram

panchayat, kshetra committee and zila panchayat. Officials expect at least half the posts of gram panchayat members to go unopposed and 18-20 per cent to go uncontested.

Verma said there was another difference from previous years. “Earlier districts used to be distributed into four sections for four phases - in other words, they had a block-wise model. This year, there is a district-wise model, meaning one entire district is going to election in a single phase.”

Verma said the SEC was aware of the problem of Covid norms

being violated. “We are examining the situation and are issuing directions to the respective DMs as COVID-19 cases are once again increasing at a fast pace.”

In the first phase, Saharanpur, Ghaziabad, Rampur, Bareilly, Hathras, Agra, Kanpur Nagar, Jhansi, Mahoba, Prayagraj, Rae Bareli, Hardoi, Ayodhya, Shravasti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Gorakhpur, Jaunpur and Bhadohi will vote on April 15. The second phase will see voting on April 19, the third phase on April 26 and the fourth phase on April 29.

Notification issued for third phase of panchayat polls

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh State Election Commission (SEC) on Tuesday notified the third phase of panchayat polls to be held in 20 districts on April 26. Over 123 million voters are eligible to cast their votes in the four-phase polling through ballot papers to be held on April 15, 19, 26 and 29 with counting of votes on May 2.

Meanwhile, campaigning for the first phase of polling ended on Tuesday and polling would be held on April 15 from 7 am to 6 pm in 18 districts.

The SEC official here on Tuesday said nomination process for third phase polls in 20 districts would continue for two days, Tuesday and Wednesday, scrutiny of papers would be done on April 16 and last date of withdrawal of papers would be April 18.

Polling for the phase would be held on April 26. Candidates can file their nominations for the posts of gram pradhans, gram panchayat, kshetra and zila panchayat members. Each voter will cast four votes, one each for gram panchayat member and pradhan, kshetra panchayat member and zila panchayat member.

The nomination papers will be filed between 8 am and 5 pm at all the development block headquarters in the districts on the two days. Strict Covid protocol would be enforced during the nomination process.

Additional Election Commissioner Ved Prakash Verma said instructions had been issued to all the district magistrates that the crowd of supporters of the candidates coming to the block headquarters should be stopped outside the radius of 200 metre on the nomination day and only the candidate, his election agent, proposer and one more person be allowed to enter the nomination room.

In the third phase, polling will be held in Shamli, Meerut, Moradabad, Pilibhit, Kasganj, Firozabad, Auraiya, Kanpur Dehat, Jalaun, Hamirpur, Fatehpur, Unnao, Amethi, Barabanki, Balrampur, Siddharthnagar, Deoria, Chandauli, Mirzapur and Ballia districts.

UP bags E-Panchayat Puraskar

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As a testament to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath’s incessant efforts towards the betterment of rural areas, Uttar Pradesh has won the E-Panchayat Puraskar 2021, outclassing all the other states of the country.

The Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj announced the results of e-Panchayat Puraskar 2021 under different categories, and Uttar Pradesh ranked first in Category I, followed by Assam and Chhattisgarh at second place and Odisha and Tamil Nadu at third.

The Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj has instituted the award to promote use of information technology for keeping a tab on the works done by the gram panchayats.

“Uttar Pradesh has been awarded for flawless and efficient implementation of the e-application developed by the Centre and a few more apps developed by the state government,” an official said.

Blind woman killed, her ornaments robbed in Ambedkarnagar

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a sensational broad daylight incident in Ambedkarnagar, a blind woman was killed and her ornaments were looted on Tuesday, while in Agra, a woman was found murdered in mysterious circumstances.

In Ambedkarnagar, Ramlali (50), wife of Hariprasad Jaiswal, was said to be sitting at her shop in Langadi Hafizpur village on Ramnagar-Baskhari Road when some motorcycle-borne miscreants reached her shop on Tuesday morning.

The woman was said to be blind and her husband was not present when the youths reached the shop.

The miscreants brutally stabbed Ramlali to death and also robbed her ornaments and escaped.

A case was registered in this regard against unknown persons and efforts were on to identify the miscreants.

In Agra, a woman was

found murdered on Tuesday morning.

Rakesh, a resident of Rudhmuli locality of Bah in Agra, claimed that all his family members had gone to fields on Monday night as they were getting a bore pump installed there.

He said that in the wee hours, his wife Mithilesh (55) returned home with other family members. He said that Mithilesh slept outside.

On Tuesday morning, when the sitting gram pradhan reached his home to seek vote, he was shocked to see Mithilesh lying in a pool of blood. The assailants had brutally hacked her to death with an axe.

The local police registered a case against unknown persons and sent the body for post-mortem.

Meanwhile, two little girls fell victim to sexual abuse at separate places and one of them was killed.

In Mathura, an 11-year-old girl living in Jamunapur area

went to purchase cold drinks from a local shop owned by one Mukesh last Sunday afternoon.

SP (City) Martand Prakash Singh said the shop owner asked the girl to come inside and take the soft drink. However, as she went inside, he and three of his friends present there gang-raped the girl.

The victim later reached home and revealed her trauma to the family members and they reported the incident on Monday after which the police raided the place and arrested Mukesh along with Manoj and Muveer.

Efforts are on to nab the remaining accused.

The victim was sent for medical examination and a case under POCSO Act was registered against the accused.

In Budaun, a 5-year-old girl was allegedly raped and killed.

The incident occurred in the Civil Lines police station area on Sunday night when the

girl went to the fields with her family to collect wheat, local police claimed.

The accused, who was hiding in the field, raped the girl and then killed her when she tried to scream, the police added.

The accused, in his mid-twenties, is a resident of Uttarakhand’s Udham Singh Nagar district. His family had brought him to a religious place here for some treatment but he ran away, according to the police.

Meanwhile, on realising that the girl was missing, her family started looking for her. During their search, they stumbled upon the youth along with the girl’s body following which they thrashed him, the police said.

After that police reached the spot and arrested the youth, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Sankalp Sharma said, adding that the body was sent for post-mortem and the matter was being probed.

Maurya: PWD is giving momentum to development agenda

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Giving further momentum to the development agenda of the government, the Public Works Department (PWD) is engaged in construction of 75 major government buildings worth over Rs 50 crore each. All the works are being done on the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode.

Giving details of the major contracts taken up by the PWD, Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya said that maintaining the high quality of work besides meeting the completion deadlines, the PWD gained 18 major contracts of the Labour Department, 16 projects of Medical Education Department, 18 projects of the Home Department, three of Minority and Waqf Department, three projects of the Prison Department, four projects of the Higher Education Department, six projects of the Law Department and one project each of Higher Secondary Department, Ayush Department, Animal Husbandry, Sports, Urban,



Medical and Health and Charitable departments respectively. He said that 38 projects of these 75 contracts procured by PWD were in progress.

Giving further details of the major works taken up by PWD, Maurya said that the department was engaged in expansion and beautification work of Kashi Vishwanath Temple involving Rs 345.27 crore, 18 Atal residential colleges involving Rs 1256.44 crore, 13 medical colleges involving Rs 637.21 crore, Atal Medical University involving Rs 201.76 crore, Unani Medical College worth Rs 129.50 crore, university in Aligarh at a cost of over Rs 1,014 crore, university in Ballia at a cost of Rs 92.76

crore, university in Saharanpur at a cost of Rs 92.04 crore, and a multi-level parking in Allahabad High Court in Prayagraj involving Rs 573 crore. Meanwhile, an official spokesman of PWD said that 65 out of 75 works had been assigned and detailed projects reports (DPRs) of 59 of them were ready and forwarded for necessary action while DPRs of six projects had been prepared. He said that a contract for 35

of the total 38 projects in progress was also awarded and the tender process was underway for three others.

He said the major projects for which contracts had been awarded included Atal Medical University in Lucknow, Rajkiya Medical College in Lalitpur (Rs 287.57 crore), Rajkiya Medical College in Kanpur Dehat (Rs 283.38 crore) and Rajkiya Medical College in Kushinagar (Rs 263 crore).

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1. Tender NO.T-90/SECMC-I/CMDD-II/2020-21 Online e-bids are invited for the work of **annual M&R of running operation and maintenance of tubewells for water supply of CISF colony, Obra** thermal power station E-tender has been uploaded on **30.03.2021** on <http://etender.up.nic.in> Estimated cost of work approximately **Rs. 3,44,878.00** only, time period **01 year** E.M.D. cost **Rs. 6,900.00**, Tender cost **Rs.590.00** last date of submission **15.04.2021 at 18:00 hrs.**

Total Quality of work, tender specification and other terms & condition is as per tender document available on the e-tender portal. Concerned superintending engineer has right to cancel any or all e-Bids without assigning any reason. Corrigendum, addendum, Extension if any shall be uploaded only on the above website. Bidders are advised to visit the website regularly for updated information from time to time.

पत्रांक : 20 / ज० स० का० / निविदा दिनांक 13.04.2021

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Several injured as supporters of sitting, ex-pradhans clash

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The clashes in panchayat elections in the state continue, with a fresh incident being reported from Binjor where supporters of a sitting and former gram pradhans attacked each other leaving over half a dozen persons injured.

The clash took place on Monday night and a heavy police force has been deployed in the village to avert fresh violence. Cross-cases have also been registered by both the sides.

According to reports, supporters of sitting pradhan Nafees Ahmed and former pradhan Anwar aka Annu of Pithapur village were taking out their procession which came head to head leading to heated arguments between the two groups.

The situation took a violent turn when both the groups started pelting stones at each other in which over half a dozen were injured.

The supporters of Annu damaged several vehicles parked outside the election office of Nafees and his main election office.

Later, a heavy police force reached the spot and took the

supports in custody. The cops detained Annu and his supporters and also registered a case against both the parties.

N.E. RAILWAY

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Description of work :- Deep screening of existing ballast cushion with and providing ballast to increase ballast cushion by 250 MM including earth work in filling in formation, Widening of bank and cess repair etc. In Phephna - Aurnihar Section (16.6 Km). **E-Tender No.-** NER-BSB 2021-06, **Approx Cost (₹):-** 2,15,94,131/-, **Date of Closing Tender :-** 11.05.2021, **Date of completion/period from issue acceptance letter :-** 09 Months. **Description of work :-** Raising and extension of platform no. - 1 and RCC pale fencing at Pharia Kurahat and Sathion. **E-Tender No. -** NER-BSB 2021-07, **Approx Cost (₹):** 5,86,41,722/-, **Date of Closing Tender :-** 11.05.2021, **Date of completion / period from issue acceptance letter :-** 10 Months. • E-Tender Notice no. NER-BSB-2021-06 to NER-BSB-2021-07 on line can be submission upto 14:30 hrs. on 11.05.2021. • For full details and submission of bid please see the Indian Railways website www.ireps.gov.in. • In case any disparity arises between Hindi and English version of tender notice, English version will hold good and will be followed.

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Executive Engineer

Government of India

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (Medini Puraskar Yojana)

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change under its Medini Puraskar Yojana, starting from 1st April, 2018 for promoting writing of books originally in Hindi on Environment and related subjects such as . (i) Environment Protection; (ii) Pollution Control; (iii) Environmental Impact Assessment; (iv) Ecological Restoration and Development; (v) Forest Conservation; (vi) Forest Resources and Development; (vii) Protection of Wildlife; (viii) Bio-diversity; (ix) Climate Change; (x) Conservation of Nature and Biosphere Reserve; (xi) Environment Education; and (xii) Nature & Environment related topics/subjects etc, invites entries from Indian authors. Cash awards to be given under the scheme are :-

First prize	Rs. 1,00,000/-	(one)
Second prize	Rs. 75,000/-	(one)
Third prize	Rs. 50,000/-	(one)
Consolation prize	Rs. 25,000/-	(one)

Under the said scheme, original books published after 1st April, 2018 to 31 March, 2021 for the last three (03) consecutive years and atleast 100 printed pages of dimai size would be accepted for consideration for awards. Any book which has received any award, subsidy or any financial assistance under any similar scheme, being operated by Government of India or any State Government or any organisation would not be eligible for consideration for the said award. Authors, whose books have already been awarded by the Ministry, would not be eligible for participating under the scheme for the next three years.

Any Indian author may send his entries, duly filled in the prescribed proforma, alongwith seven copies of his/her book, latest by **15th May, 2021** at the following address: -

Director (OL)
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
Room No.P227,
Indira Paryavaran Bhawan,
Jor Bagh Road, Aliganj,
New Delhi-110003.

Entries received after 15th May, 2021 would not be considered. Detailed proforma can be had from website moef.gov.in

Satya Prakash
Director (OL)
011-24695446

davp 13101/11/0003/2122

CM Yogi stresses on 'test, trace and treat'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Asking officials to control the spread of COVID-19 as per the target of 'test, trace and treat', Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that adequate availability of Covid beds and medical oxygen should be ensured in all the districts and also directed officials to ensure smooth operation of ambulance services for the COVID-19 patients.

The chief minister was reviewing the status of COVID-19 at a high-level meeting convened through virtual medium on Tuesday.

He said that the medical system should be strengthened by paying special attention to Lucknow, Kanpur Nagar, Varanasi and Prayagraj. He said the number of Covid beds in Level-2 and Level-3 hospitals should be increased in every district and availability of medical oxygen should be maintained in all districts.

The chief minister stressed on regular monitoring of private medical colleges. He said along with medical staff, other medical resources

should also be arranged for these hospitals as per the requirement. He said it should be ensured that there was availability of oxygen, ventilator and high flow nasal cannula (HFNC) according to the standards prescribed for the Covid hospitals.

Yogi directed the chief secretary, additional chief secretary (health) and principal secretary (medical education) to regularly review the arrangements of Covid hospitals and the availability of various medical resources.

"Testing has an important role in breaking the chain of coronavirus infection. In view of this, the testing capacity should be increased. It should be ensured that in the next few days at least 1.5 lakh Covid tests are carried out daily through RT-PCR method and for that the testing capacities of King George's Medical University and Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences should be doubled," he said, adding that to increase the number of RT-PCR tests, more and more private laboratories should be

added.

The chief minister said that to ramp up testing, various central institutes like CDRI, NBRI, IITR, BISIP in Lucknow, IVRI in Bareilly and NICPR in Noida should conduct tests. He said that TruNat machines should also be used for Covid testing.

"To increase the number of RT-PCR tests, laboratories should be set up in 12 districts and training should be imparted to paramedics," he said.

New labs will be set up in Amethi, Auraiya, Bijnor, Kushinagar, Deoria, Mau, Siddharthnagar, Sonbhadra, Bulandshahr, Sitapur, Mahoba and Kasganj.

The chief minister said that people should be constantly made aware about COVID-19. He said this awareness should be carried out effectively through the public address systems at major crossroads and other public places. "Make the messages being transmitted through the public address systems such that people listen carefully," he added.

Minister for lockdown if situation doesn't improve

Lucknow (PNS): As there is an exponential increase in novel coronavirus positive cases in Lucknow, Law and Justice Minister Brajesh Pathak has written a letter to additional chief secretary (health) and principal secretary (medical education) saying the situation is very bad in the state capital and if it does not improve, lockdown should be imposed in the state capital.

"The infection is continuously increasing and the situation is getting worse. Hospitals do not have beds and people are not getting ambulances on time," Pathak said in the letter, painting a pathetic picture of the state of affairs of Lucknow. Pathak wrote in his letter: "It is taking four to seven days to get the test report of the COVID-19 patients in Lucknow. Patients are not getting ambulance. It is reaching their houses after 5-6 hours. Even it takes two days to get an admission slip from the office of CMO (chief medical officer)." He also mentioned in his letter about the tragic death of historian Yogesh Praveen and how he did not get an ambulance in time. "After Yogesh Praveen's health suddenly deteriorated, I personally spoke to the chief medical officer on phone and requested him to provide an ambulance immediately. I am sorry to say that the ambulance reached late for which he could not get timely treatment and died," the minister wrote in his letter. He also said there was a shortage of beds in hospitals and test kits were in short supply.


"I spoke to a senior officer of the Medical Department a week ago, and he told me that the department needs 17,000 kits for examination every day, but only 10,000 test kits were being made available," he said. "It is necessary that the number of Covid beds should be increased and adequate test kits should be given. Non-Covid patients suffering from serious diseases should get proper treatment immediately. If the situation is not brought under control a lockdown may have to be imposed in Lucknow," he said.

Lucknow (PNS): A head constable was duped of more than Rs 1 lakh by an unidentified person who introduced himself as a mobile company representative. Complaint Moolchand Ram is posted in UP Special Zone Suraksha Vahini in Gomtinagar. "The represen-

Head constable duped of over ₹1L

tative of the company told me that my SIM card would be deactivated within a few minutes and he needed to get it reactivated by paying Rs 10," Moolchand said. He said he made the

transaction of Rs 10 and the caller asked me to download an app. "I downloaded the app and after a while, a sum of Rs 1.23 lakh was withdrawn from my bank account," he told police.

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L-2, L-3 bed capacity increased, says DM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amidst the growing demand for beds due to the surge in Covid-19 cases, District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash said that Lucknow would win the battle against coronavirus together with all the stakeholders being part of the team. "We have increased the level-2 and level-3 beds by 40 per cent compared to last peak, and more will be added," he said.

"It has come to my knowledge that many doctors and paramedical staff, both in government and private hospitals, were not on Covid duties on one or the other pretext. All efforts are being made to fight the pandemic and hence it is mandatory for those who in the medical and paramedical services to take permission from the CMO before going on leave," the DM said.

Meanwhile, nodal officer for Covid at Lok Bandhu Hospital Dr Arun Tewari said the situation is the same as it was last week.

"The situation is out of control with the severity of the disease intensifying and all ICU and HDU beds being full. We have to increase the beds and the administration is trying but it requires bigger efforts along with huge infrastructure apart from large number of trained and qualified staff. Although the state government is trying its best, the problem is that the number of cases is on an unprecedented rise," he said. He added that there are 32 doctors already working at the hospital but they require 62 doctors for three shifts. The director has already written to higher authorities in this regard.

He pointed out that patients are turning serious in a day or two. "We have seen patients with mild symptoms become serious and ultimately succumb," he added.

Spokesperson of Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences Dr Shrikesh Singh said the ICU and HDU beds are full to capacity. "We are under tremendous pressure. We are focusing on proper treatment and availability of beds. We are hiring more manpower and restricting our non-Covid activities. From April 15, we will have only emergency services, Covid services, cancer services and semi-emergencies," he said.

He pointed out that a majority of staff is testing positive which is also a big problem.

Meanwhile, president of Lucknow University Teachers Association Vineet Kumar Verma has asked to the vice-chancellor to extend the closure of the university shut after April 15. "A driver from the Social Work department died of Covid-19 on Tuesday morning. Prof Kavi Raj from Political Science department and Prof NK Pandey from Physics department have also tested positive," he wrote to the VC.

UP gears up to meet rush of migrants returing to state

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the fear of lockdown looming large over Maharashtra, migration of migrant workers has started. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed the authorities concerned to ensure all facilities to the migrant labourers returning to the state.

Participating in a meeting to take stock of the current Covid situation in the state, the chief minister directed Team 11 officials to set up quarantine centres at the earliest in all those districts that were reporting return of migrant workers.

Yogi Adityanath also instructed the officials to make proper arrangements for Covid testing and quarantining of migrant workers, as well as their food. Furthermore, the chief minister has asked the nodal officers and local committees of different districts to coordinate with their respective district magistrates in this regard and ensure all facilities to the returnees.

The government had taken care of the daily needs and livelihoods of millions of migrant workers who returned to the state amid nationwide lockdown last year. The government ensured that the basic needs of the workers, especially street vendors and hawkers, were provided during the pandemic. In addition to this, the UP government provided maintenance allowance to the construction workers.







ज्ञान का विकास ही मनुष्य का अंतिम लक्ष्य होना चाहिए

- डॉ. भीमराव आंबेडकर

भारतीय संविधान शिल्पी भारत रत्न

बाबा साहब डॉ. भीमराव आंबेडकर

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हेल्पलाइन नं. **104**

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Traders among worst-hit in second wave

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The trader community has accounted for 75 per cent cases of coronavirus infection and deaths, according to president of Akhil Bharatiya Vyapar Mandal Sandeep Bansal. He said it is the average figure which they have estimated. Bansal said they have started a campaign across UP where they are asking the traders to ensure the prevention of themselves and their families because it is only after that they can help others.

"The traders who have died due to Covid-19 include the head of Chemist Association, secretary of Mobile Association and general secretary of Kirana Market among several others. One cannot even count the deaths of common traders," he said.

He added that traders are at a higher risk because of maximum public dealing. "There is, of course, some amount of carelessness amongst the traders and hence they are facing consequences," Bansal said. He pointed out that they

had first started the 'No mask, no purchase' campaign. "If you go around Hazratganj, every shop has a huge mask on the display as a part of the campaign," he added.

Regarding crowd control in the shops, he said: "How can we tell a person not to come to the shop or make any purchases? The only carelessness on the part of the traders was they allowed customers without masks in, but not every trader is strictly going to adhere to the protocols."

He said they have asked the state government to ensure better health infrastructure facilities. "The health services are not sufficient and need to be improved upon. This is our first demand. Even people in medical services are finding it difficult to get a bed for themselves, let alone the common man, including traders," he pointed. On how to prevent deaths, Bansal said they are planning to do something though the pandemic is quite intense at the moment. "The first thing that we will highlight is that the traders should pro-

'One patient infecting more than 2'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The increase in R-value is responsible for the sudden spike in coronavirus cases in Uttar Pradesh, according to a member of the KGMU Covid task force Dr Surya Kant Tripathi. "R-value is a way of rating coronavirus or any disease's knack to spread. R is the number of people that one infected person will pass on a virus to on an average," he said.

On how this R-number (or reproduction number) is calculated, he said: "You can't capture it the moment people are infected. Instead, scientists work backwards. Data — such as the number of people dying, admitted to hospital or testing positive for the virus over time — is used to estimate how easily the virus is spreading. If the R-value is higher than one, the

number of cases keeps increasing. If it is lower, the disease will eventually stop spreading, because not enough new people are being infected to sustain the outbreak."

According to a study conducted on R-value by the Institute of Mathematical Sciences in Chennai, one of the parameters of the coronavirus transmission is 1.32, indicating that one infected person spreads the virus to more than one but less than two people, he pointed out.

"The R-value suggests the pandemic might be growing faster in Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar. After tracking the per-day cases in the last two weeks, the effective reproduction number for Uttar Pradesh is estimated at 2.14, followed by Jharkhand (2.13) and Bihar (2.09). It means

one infected person is infecting more than two people in UP, Jharkhand and Bihar. If it's below one, the outbreak may eventually subside. In mid-September, it went below 1," he explained.

He said Uttar Pradesh has had over 3,000 cases every day in the first week of April. "In the first week of March, the state reported only 105 new cases. A similar trend has been observed in Jharkhand where over 870 new cases were reported per day in the last seven days, almost 20-fold higher than the figures last month (average 45 new cases). In Bihar, around 732 new corona cases have been reported daily in the last seven days, which is 24 times higher (average 31 new cases) than the last month of the same week," he added.

tect themselves and their families from infection. There is such a big crisis as every third

trader has tested positive," he pointed out. Regarding the economic aspect, he said it has

been a double blow for the traders as sales have also been affected in a big way.

Adhere to guidelines even after curve flattens: Min

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Chapter of PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHD-CCI) organised a virtual awareness session on 'Tika Utsav' on Tuesday to encourage people to get vaccinated and follow Covid-19 protocols.

Health Minister Jai Pratap Singh asked people to have faith in the government's health system and continue fighting the highly contagious disease by adhering to all the safety protocols.

The minister said that the government and doctors are working dedicatedly but the battle against Covid-19 can be won only with collective efforts and people's support is also

required. He said people must not take this disease lightly even after the curve flattens, and follow all the safety protocols and guidelines unless the virus is eradicated.

He also urged PHDCCI to cascade the information about the Covid vaccination through its large membership base of industrialists as much as it can so that people who aren't aware or have apprehensions get themselves vaccinated.

Head of KGMU's Respiratory Medicine department Dr Surya Kant KGMU, Brand Ambassador gave a brief presentation on the number of people vaccinated in the country so far. He said over 100 vaccine trials are going on across the globe and by the end of July,

the government plans to vaccinate around 30 crore people.

He said Uttar Pradesh was the first state to encourage the use of Ivermectin as a preventive medication against Covid-19. He also spoke on the continued efficacy of Ivermectin tablets even today in reducing the transmission in the early stage by acting as a barrier between the human body and the virus.

Former Drug Controller General Dr GN Singh pointed out that India is called the pharmacy of the world due to its role as a producer of medical products. He also appreciated the Central and state governments for promoting the vaccination drive and urged people to take the jabs on their turn.

Medical experts divided on herd immunity

Lucknow (PNS): With the coronavirus infection cases increasing manifold across the state, there is no consensus among medical experts on whether or not the herd immunity is in sight. Head of SGPGI's Microbiology department Dr Ujjawala Ghoshal said UP is far from herd immunity as of now.

"For the herd immunity to develop, at least 80 per cent of the population should be protected. It simply means either they have tested positive and have developed antibodies or they are vaccinated. This is a vast figure and hence herd immunity is out question as of now," she explained. However president of People's Health Organisation Dr Ishwar Gilada said that the speed with which the coronavirus is spreading across the

country in the second wave, there is a possibility that the country may be closer to the herd immunity.

"The recent antibody surveillance data from several cities showed that 40-50% people were infected in the samples studied from December 2020 onwards. To have a herd immunity, 50-60% people should be infected. If we look at the trend of infection in the current wave, entire families are testing positive, unlike earlier. The R-figure, which was 1 in the first wave is more than 2 which means a patient is transmitting the virus it more than two people and this chain continues till a large number of people have been vaccinated, or till people are already immune to this virus due to previous infection," he said.

Purvanchal Expressway to be extended to Bihar from Ghazipur

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Purvanchal Expressway, scripting silent transformation of the economy of Uttar Pradesh, is proposed to be extended to Bihar from Ghazipur. UP is building four expressways, the 340-km Purvanchal Expressway, 296-km Bundelkhand Expressway, 91-km Gorakhpur Link Expressway and 594-km Ganga Expressway, to boost socio-economic development.

The Purvanchal Expressway starting from Chand Saray village located in Lucknow will pass through Barabanki, Amethi, Sultanpur, Ayodhya, Ambedkarnagar and Mau, before terminating at Hyderia village in Ghazipur. A link expressway for linking it with Ballia is also under construction. Of the four highway projects, the six-lane access-controlled Purvanchal Expressway, connecting eastern UP with Lucknow and Delhi, will be the first to become operational by May-end this year.

While the Yamuna Expressway, which came up in 2012, and the Agra-Lucknow Expressway that opened for traffic in 2017, started the trend, it is the four upcoming ones - the Purvanchal Expressway, Bundelkhand Expressway, Gorakhpur Link Expressway and the 594-km Ganga Expressway - that are scripting a silent transformation in the state, once notorious for its potholed road network.

Once these are complete, UP would have a total network of 1,788 km of expressways, the highest in the country. Currently, the total expressway network in India is around 1,822 km. No wonder, the state has earned the sobriquet of

'Expressway Pradesh'.

The four-lane Bundelkhand Expressway, linking it with Agra-Lucknow Expressway and ultimately to Delhi, is likely to be completed by March next year. It will connect the backward districts of the Bundelkhand region -- Chitrakoot, Banda, Mahoba, Hamirpur, Jalaun, Auraiya and Etawah. The grid will be completed with two more expressways, the Gorakhpur Link Expressway and Ganga Expressway.

The four-lane, Rs 5,876-crore Gorakhpur Link Expressway will connect Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Ambedkarnagar and Sant Kabir Nagar, and the scheduled date for completion the project is April 2022. So far 14 per cent work has been completed. The six-lane Ganga Expressway will connect Meerut with Prayagraj. The technical bids for the project have been floated and will be opened in May.

Except for the Ganga Expressway, the other three are EPC (engineering procurement construction) projects, where the state government funds the entire project cost. The UPEIDA has already raised Rs 22,450 crore from a consortium of public sector banks for the Purvanchal, Bundelkhand and Gorakhpur Link expressways.

After the projects become operational, the UPEIDA will give toll collection rights to a private company every year. The company has to share a portion of the revenue generated from toll with the agency. For instance, the private toll collection agency for the Agra-Lucknow Expressway shared Rs 402 crore with the UPEIDA from the revenue it earned from toll last fiscal.

KMCLU syllabus will be revised as per NEP: VC

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The curriculum of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Language University (KMCLU) will be revised according to the New Education Policy, Vice-Chancellor Prof Anil Kumar Shukla said on Tuesday.

A meeting was held at the language university under the chairmanship of Prof Shukla. The main objective was to bring the courses of the university in line with the New Education Policy and to offer language-related specialisation courses.

Addressing the teachers, Prof Shukla said: "This univer-

sity is still new and hence there is immense potential for positive changes. India has a rich history and culture and if the university inculcate this historical legacy in the curriculum, it will not only attract local but also foreign students." He said the language university has the energy of young teachers who must come forward to prepare short-term job-oriented courses suited to the demands of the digital age and make them accessible to the students through MOOC platforms.

He also said that the students today have many sources for acquiring knowledge and the

teachers have the responsibility to make their mark in this digital age. The VC said if the teachers motivate students to explore the syllabus instead of covering it, the real aim of education will be achieved.

"It is the responsibility of 21st century teachers to create an environment conducive to learning, and try to link education with Indian diaspora and societal knowledge," he added.

He asked all the deans to make the courses of their faculties in accordance with the New Education Policy so that students can be provided with multiple entry/exit benefits.

BJP will solve Gorkha issue after win: Shah

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In a significant statement Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said that the long-pending Gorkha problem would be solved after the BJP came to power in Bengal.

Saying that the Indian Constitution had "vast" possibilities Shah told a public rally that all problems could be solved within the frame work of it.

"It is a promise being made by me that a permanent political solution to the Gorkha problem will be reached once there is a double-engine government of the BJP in place ... once there is a BJP Government in Bengal with the one in the Centre you will not have to resort to agitations

anymore," the Home Minister said without however mentioning the kind of problem he was referring to.

On the implementation of the National Register for Citizens he said that though it was not immediately being considered by the Centre it would never in future affect the Gorkhas upon its implementation.

"The Government is not thinking a NRC for now... But even if in future it is done Gorkhas will not have to worry about it because they are as good a citizen of this country as I am... They are the pride of India," he said.

Attacking Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for putting a

BENGAL POLLS

"full stop" on the developmental works in Darjeeling, he said "no development work is done here ... only the TMC leaders use this place for holidaying." Saying that the BJP Government would give "amnesty" to all those against whom criminal cases had been lodged by the TMC Government Shah said that "by lodging criminal cases against some of the Gorkha leaders Didi has tried to ruin the cordial relationship between the BJP and Gorkhas ... but that plan will never succeed."

Shah on Tuesday held a number of rallies in North Bengal including Islampur and Dhupguri.

NABARD core biz operations in UP reach new high

Lucknow (PNS): The core business operations of NABARD in the state during 2020-21 reached a new high with it providing financial accommodations worth Rs 14,729 crore to Uttar Pradesh through banks and state government departments, according to an official communique.

This financial assistance during 2020-21 included Rs 9,139 crore refinance released to commercial banks, regional rural banks & cooperative banks and micro-finance institutions (MFIs) for financing to agriculture allied and off-farm sectors in the state by way of short and long-term refinance support.

Pak intruder crosses IB in J&K, held

New Delhi: The Border Security Force (BSF) on Tuesday apprehended a Pakistani national who crossed the International Border (IB) near RS Pura sector in Jammu and Kashmir.

The 40-year-old, who identified himself as Shabbir during preliminary inquiry, was held while he was making a desperate attempt to cross the fence. "BSF troopers observed the suspicious movement of the Pakistani national who had crossed the IB near BP No 942. He was warned to stop but did not pay any attention," the BSF said in a statement.

Shabbir was subsequently fired upon due to which he sustained a minor injury.

The BSF troopers later apprehended Shabbir and handed him over to the police.

The BSF is responsible for guarding the 3,323 km India-Pakistan and 4,096 km India-Bangladesh borders. **IAN**



Ambulances lined up outside Bhainsakund crematorium on Tuesday with last rites being performed throughout the day. There has been a deluge of bodies in the last few days amidst increased Covid-19 cases and deaths

Pioneer

Night curfew causing losses to liquor traders in city

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Night curfew in the city is causing losses to the liquor sellers these days.

"Since last March 20, when the lockdown was imposed following the spread of coronavirus, we are passing through rough weather in the liquor business. The business picked steam in the July-August when the unlock phase started. But we are back to the square one," Liquor Sellers Welfare Association General Secretary KL Maurya said.

He said the Excise Department was the highest revenue earner and the liquor sellers contribute to the revenue earning but due to the coronavirus scare, we suffered loss. A number of the shop owners could not do business as their shops fell in the con-

tainment zone. But the government has not refunded their licence fee as yet," he said.

Maurya said the liquor sellers were bracing themselves to overcome the onslaught of nature when another onslaught befell again in March and night curfew was imposed.

He said the liquor sellers were facing loss of about 10 per cent due to the night curfew. "We have a loss of one hour per day as the curfew is effective from 9 pm every day," he said.

Maurya added that the worst hit were the model shop owners where the customers had stopped visiting in the evening. "Earlier, there was a huge rush of customers."

On condition of anonymity, some shop owners in Ashiyana, Indira Nagar, Gomti Nagar, Mahanagar and other

parts of the city said the visit of customers to the shops start thinning from 8 pm every day. "The cops start patrolling the area to ensure that the shops close by 9 pm and this scares the liquor customers also," the shop owners said.

But the liquor sellers will not petition the state government to give them reprieve as of now. "This is nature's fury that we all are facing. To prevent the spread of coronavirus, curfew and other preventive measures are necessary as these are the only way to save the humans," a liquor seller said.

He said other businessmen were facing similar problems these days.

"We hope that the situation will be under control soon and we will be doing good business in a normal way in the days to come," he said.

Case of fraud against 11 for tampering with passports

Lucknow (PNS): Senior superintendent, Regional passport office, Sandeep Shukla lodged a case of fraud against 11 people for tampering with passports which were found to be suspected during checking at Canada High Commission recently.

In his complaint, Shukla said the Canada High Commission found 39 passports tampered with during checking and sent the same back to India for further verification. "Out of these 39 passports, 11 had been issued by the Regional Passport Office in Lucknow, so they were sent there. During checking, it surfaced that these passports had

different information to what mentioned in the office's digital records."

"The photographs in the passports also did not match with those in the computer records and it seemed that they were tampered with," Shukla said.

He said the passports were issued in the names of Sameer Indravan Dani, Sonali Chetan Kumar, Chandra Kant Darshan Mehta, Karuna Darshan Mehta, Shreya Amol Seth, Raj Darshan Mehta, Amol Sripal Seth, Jayesh Nehal Seth, Roopa Devi Kisan Kumar Gohil, Kosha Darshan Mehta and Sahil Sameer Dani, all of Gujarat.

On Ramzan eve, Maha mosque turns into blood donation camp

IAN ■ BEED (MAHARASHTRA)

In an unusual but welcome step on the eve of the holy Ramzan month, a mosque in Maharashtra's Beed became the venue for a blood donation camp as the state grapples with a huge shortage of blood, an organiser said on Tuesday.

The blood donation camp was organised by the Students Islamic Organisation (SIO) of India at the Takiya Mosque in which hundreds of people voluntarily participated, Rafid Shahad, Maharashtra South SIO Zonal Secretary, said.

From the drive conducted all day on Monday, the SIO collected around 150 units of blood which will be handed over to the authorities, said SIO member Khizer Shaikh.

SIO South Maharashtra

Zonal President Salman Khan said that the organisation has carried out similar blood donation drives in the wake of the severe blood shortages experienced in Maharashtra since the past few weeks.

"We have conducted around a dozen similar camps in Mumbai, Thane, Latur, Jalna, Solapur, and Beed and collected around 500 units of blood. We have appealed to the Muslim community to come forward for the humanitarian cause on the Ramzan eve and they have responded in large numbers," he said.

Other SIO volunteers pointed out that during the holy month of fasting, Muslims around the world get into a spiritual and charitable mode and blood donation is one noble way.

SCHOOLSCAN

SCHOLARSHIP FOR CMS STUDENT

Pawani Chauhan, a student of City Montessori School, Gomti Nagar Campus I, has been offered admission with a scholarship of US\$ 48,000 by the prestigious Wilson College of USA for pursuing higher education. The scholarship has been offered to her for the entire study period of four years. Apart from this, Temple University and University of Connecticut (USA) have also offered her admission with scholarship.



Covid +ve cases cross 32K-mark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

There is no let up in the cases of COVID-19 as the positive cases continued increasing and crossed 32K-mark on Tuesday evening. As many as 1,376 more have tested positive, increasing the total number to 32,464. With three more deaths during the last 24 hours, the death toll increased to 405. During the last 24 hours, 360 patients have been recovered and all of them in home isolation. The total number of patients cured in the district is 23,280 including 20,271 in home isolation and 3,009 in COVID-19 hospitals. The number of active cases has jumped up to 8,779 crossing the 8K mark.

In the first report of the day, 692 positive patients were found out of 2,382 reports received and this figure increased to 1,376 as per report provided by the Health department in the evening increasing the active cases to 8,779. Earlier, in view of finding hundreds of new positive cases, with 17 new hotspots, the number of active hotspots has increased to 418 with 13 green zones having been converted to red zones by a day ago. Out of total 3,857 hotspots, 3,439 are green zones and 418 are red zones.



Antigen testing being held at Varanasi Junction railway station on Tuesday Pioneer

In the meantime, the District Magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma has constituted 104 police teams including zonal and sector magistrates in all 26 police stations of urban and rural areas of the district for effective control of the rising outbreaks of infection of COVID-19. In this way, four teams have been deployed in each police station area and three police personnel including 2-2 sector magistrates and one sub-inspector and 2-2 constables in each team. He has directed the team members to visit the market area, shopping complex, malls, restaurants, hotels,

etc. The Regional Magistrate, Deputy District Magistrate and Assistant Commissioner of Police, Police Regional Officer will be the supervisory officers of their respective areas. If any kind of negligence or indifference was made during the duty, the action will be ensured against the concerned under the relevant sections, the DM said. The teams constituted will travel jointly to their assigned police station every day to ensure the compliance of the directives. He informed that the vaccines were administered at as many as 32 centres including

Urban PHC Konia, Urban PHC Lallapura, Urban PHC Jaitpura, Urban PHC Ashfaq Nagar, Urban PHC Bajardiha, Urban PHC Pandeypur, Urban PHC Rajghat, Urban PHC Sadar Bazar, Urban PHC Madanpura, Urban PHC Anandamai, Urban PHC Townhall, Urban PHC Cantonment, Urban PHC Manduwadih, Urban PHC Chowkaghat, Urban PHC Durgakund, Urban PHC Bhelupur, Urban PHC Adampur, Urban PHC Big Bazaar, Urban PHC Benia, Urban PHC Orderly Market, Urban PHC Sewa Sadan, Urban PHC Shivpur, Urban PHC Madhopur, Urban PHC Sikraul, CHC Arajline, CHC Cholapur, PHC Baragaon, PHC Chiragaon, PHC Pindra, PHC Harhua, PHC Sevapuri and PHC Kashi Vidyapeeth.

Apart from this, the vaccination is being made for 24 hours at Cantt railway station, from 9 am to 4 pm at bus station in Cantt and from 7 am to 10 pm at airport in Babatpur, the DM informed adding, the vaccination was made from 9 am to 3 pm at ESIC Hospital, SSH, BHU and Swami Vivekanand Hospital in Bhelupur. The mobile teams also vaccinated from 9 am to 3 pm.

1,704 more test positive in Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

In Prayagraj, the number of people suffering from corona infection is increasing day by day. On Monday evening, 76 more new infections were detected than on Sunday. According to Health department data, the number of infected people stood at 1,704 on Monday. This was confirmed by Dr Prabhakar Rai, CMO. He said that nine people have also died of the deadly virus.

According to the corona's Nodal Officer, Dr Rishi Sahai, a total of 11,492 people were examined for corona. Of them, as many as 1,704 have been found infected. Apart from this, nine people have died.

Two people died in the railway hospital. Apart from this, there have also been deaths in Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital and Sainik Hospital located in the Cantt area. While 290 people have become infection-free. In this, 22 people were discharged after their corona report came negative, while home isolation of 268 people has been completed.

According to Health department data, there are 167 patients admitted in Beli Hospital, 336 in SRN and 146 in private hospitals. Apart from this, patients are also admitted in Railway Hospital and Kalindipuram.

A large number of employ-



People waiting in queue to test for COVID-19 at a Covid center in Prayagraj

Pioneer

ees, including teachers, health workers, advocates, came in the grip of corona on Monday. According to the Health department's report, it consists of AG account officers, teachers at Andawa, Pratappur, Holagarh, Saidabad, Karchhana, Chaka, Bahria, Soraon and Mauaima Primary School, Katra SBI manager, Department of Philosophy of Allahabad University, Professor of MNNT, senior assistant to the District Village Development Institute, assis-

tant professor Rajarshi Tandon Open University, assistant professor Agricultural University, Six High Court advocates, clerk, gynecologist CHC Karchhana, assistant engineer of PWD, junior engineer, assistant manager Bank of Baroda Kydganj, medical officer and staff nurse LT CHC Phulpur, teacher in Patanjali Rishikul, assistant officer of All India Radio, doctor residing near IIIT-A Jhalwa, Two junior doctors of SRN Hospital, BMM CHC Manda, eye surgeon

CHC Mauaima among others. In view of the increasing pace of corona, people are now reaching large number at health centres to get corona vaccine. 16,063 people were vaccinated under the 'Tika Utsav' held at 97 places on Monday. In this, 11,984 people were given the first dose of vaccine and 3,484 people were given the second dose of vaccine. According to vaccination incharge Dr RS Thakur, 545 people were also vaccinated in private hospitals.

Enthusiasm for vaccination seen

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In response to the call given by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, enthusiasm was seen among the people of his parliamentary constituency for vaccination on the penultimate day of Tika Utsav (Vaccination Festival) here on Tuesday. Thousands of people received vaccine doses at 65 centres apart from four others including PVVNL MD Office, Bhikharipur / Chief Engineer Office (Electricity Department), Superintendent Office (Electricity Department), Municipal Corporation Office and Medical Care Unit located in Siga. Besides, the vaccination was also done in the



Vaccination festival continues for third day in Varanasi on Tuesday Pioneer

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) in-charge Dr NP Singh said that on the second day of Tika Utsav on 75 ses-

sions including various centres, private hospitals were organised in which 7,555 beneficiaries were vaccinated. Out of this, the first dose was

given to 6,505 beneficiaries and the second dose to 1,050 beneficiaries. Out of this, first dose was given to 1,826 beneficiaries above 60 years and the second dose to 656 beneficiaries.

At the same time, 4,597 beneficiaries from 45 to 59 years were vaccinated for the first dose and 231 beneficiaries for the second dose. He appealed to the people who are above 45 should join this vaccine festival on the last day on Wednesday and make the Tika Utsav a historic success moment.

He also appealed to all that even after conducting this vaccination, people should not forget to use masks and sanitisers.

Acute shortage of Remdesivir injection, Favipiravir tablets

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

The Remdesivir injection and Favipiravir tablets seem to have vanished from the city-based medicine market with buyers kept on taking rounds of chemist shops to get the medicines.

Traders at Leader road dealing wholesale medicine market claimed that there was an acute shortage of Remdesivir injection and Favipiravir tablets. Its shortage has also left them worried who kept on writing to concerned pharmaceutical companies to

get it delivered at the earliest.

'It's my second day of visiting the Leader road wholesale medicine market but I failed to get the required Favipiravir tablets for my uncle who was tested positive for COVID-19 infection', said Amit, a resident of Civil Lines adding 'I had visited all medical and chemist shops but all in vain', he added. He also asserted that traders have pointed out acute shortage of the aforesaid drugs.

Prem Agrawal, Regional secretary, UP Chemist & Druggist Federation admitted

that there has been an acute shortage of Remdesivir injection and Favipiravir tablets in markets and we have been demanding from concerned pharmaceutical companies for its proper and undistributed supply.

He further added that apart from these duo drugs, there has also been acute shortage of pulse oximeter as well.

The duo drugs are in great demand since the cases of COVID-19 increases in the city. 'I have made calls to my relatives to arrange Remdesivir injection after seeing its acute

crisis in city', said Ashutosh who arrived Leader road medicine market to get the injection but medicine dealers have expressed their helplessness for the same', he added. Moreover, the demand for immunity booster drugs has gone up manifold in the market.

Nikhil Malang, organising secretary of Prayag Chemist Association (retail) said that there has been rising demand of ivermectin medicine, vitamin -c tablet, zinc tablet, as well as ayurvedic medicines like ashwagandha, giloy etc.

Chaitra Navratra begins with gaiety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Despite prevailing fear and threats of coronavirus pandemic, the people could not stop themselves from reaching the temples on the first day of Chaitra Navratra here on Tuesday, which is also known as Vasantik Navratra. Contrary to last year when there was nationwide lockdown and the temples remained closed on this occasion, this time as the temples remained opened with restrictions. Good rush was seen at Durgakund and some other places.

On this day, the devotees mainly throng Shailputri (near Alaipur) and Mukhnirmalika Gauri (Ghai Ghat) but in view increasing COVID-19 cases, these temples could not see much rush but as usual, long



Rush of devotees on the first day of Chaitra Navratra at Durgakund temple in Varanasi on Tuesday Pioneer

lines were seen at Durga Mandir at Durga Kund. Though most of the temples allowed the devotees wearing

the masks, at many places social distance could not be followed. Despite scorching heat, the devotees waited for

a long time to enter the temple premises.

Meanwhile, as per the tradition, at Vishwanath temple in Banaras Hindu University (BHU) Kalash was installed by the Vice-Chancellor Prof VK Shukla and with this Durgasaptshati Path also began.

The function was also attended by several senior university officers. Earlier, in the wee hours the convener of Namami Gange Rajesh Shukla and others offered prayer to Bhagwan Suryanarayan (Lord Sun) to mark the beginning of Nav Savatsar.

Following COVID-19 guidelines at Manikarnika Ghat, they prayed to the Almighty to help the people get relief from the pandemic.

OPD functioning only in Colvin Hospital

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

The spread of coronavirus has adversely affected the medical system of government hospitals in Prayagraj. OPD is being shut down due to government and private hospitals being Covid hospitals. Due to this, the load of the entire district has come on Colvin Hospital. Now normal patients are being seen in this only hospital while there is already a huge shortage of doctors and

medical resources here.

Due to the continuous increase of Covid infection, OPD was closed there with making Beli Hospital as Covid hospital a few days ago. Now the same situation happened with SRN Hospital. OPD operations in SRN have also stopped on Monday. That is, now other patients are not being seen in these hospitals. That is why people from all over the district have to come to Colvin Hospital.

People will be compelled to come to Colvin Hospital, because now OPD is going on in this same hospital. If you come to this hospital with a patient, take complete protection from the corona. Do not remove the mask from the nose and mouth at all. Keep the sanitiser nearby and keep your hands clean from it. Do not touch the chair, the railings of the stairs, the barricade railings of the registration counters and stand in a circle made for

physical distance, added CMS of Colvin Hospital Dr Sushma Srivastava.

The Chief Medical Superintendent of Colvin Hospital, Dr. Sushma Srivastava, further said that the load is high, doctors are less. Many staff are home quarantine infected with the coronavirus. People are requested to come to the hospital only if it is very important. Medico legal also has a big problem, she added.

Only devotees with masks allowed to participate in Navratra puja

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

With the beginning of Chaitra Navratra and the recent surge in COVID-19 cases, management committees of the city's prominent temples have mandated that only devotees with face masks were allowed to participate in the Chaitra Navratra puja, to be organised at Mata Kalyani Devi, Maa Alopi Devi Shakti Peeth and Maa Lalita Devi temple premises till April 21.

Temple committees have also made special arrangements for live darshan on the pages of its social networking sites and via a group named, 'Maa Kalyani Bhaktjan group' on Facebook. In the times of Covid, this will prove helpful for the devotees. Besides, city police have also geared up to ensure strict compliance with COVID-19 protocol and have issued guidelines for the same.

Chief priest, Maa Kalyani Devi temple, Pt. Shyam Ji Pathak told that 'We would ensure that the devotees standing in the queue must keep a distance of at least two yards between each other and are wearing a mask. He added that as a preventive measure, devotees will not be allowed to assemble in groups and roam



Devotees waiting in queue for offering prayer on the occasion of first day of Nine days Chaitra Navratra at Alopi Devi temple in Prayagraj Pioneer

aimlessly in the temple premises.'

Pathak further informed that the management committee would depute volunteers that devotees coming to the temple should stand on circles being drawn on the temple floors and they would be allowed to enter into the temple on their turn only. He, however, made it clear that no cultural programmes, Katha (religious discourses) and Bhandara will be organised. Pathak, meanwhile, said that devotees can bring prasada and flowers from outside shops to offer goddess. The temple management committees have also decided to sanitise the temple premises within short intervals and posters and boards creating Covid awareness have also been installed on temple premises. Priests said that the

facility of sanitisers must be provided at every 50 metres on the temple premises. Moreover, devotees in neighbouring districts or towns would be preferred to take darshan and aarti of the goddess through online mode. A senior police official said that social distancing would be strictly maintained at the temple and no one without a mask would be allowed to enter into temples.

12,448 employees appointed to ensure smooth polling

VARANASI (PNS): A total of 12,448 polling employees have been appointed to ensure the smooth polling at as many as 2,592 polling booths for the members of zila panchayat, gram pradhan, members of gram panchayat and members of kshetra panchayat. The polling in Varanasi is scheduled to be held on April 19 under the second phase of three-tier Panchayat polls. The counting will be held on May 2.

After the end of nomination process, the district administration has started making preparations to ensure the smooth polling and in this order, as many as 2,592 polling booths have been made including 433, 378, 317, 308, 306, 305, 291 and 254 in Aarajiline, Pindra, Cholapur, Badagaon, Chiragaon, Kashi Vidyapeeth, Sevapuri and Harahua block respectively.

To conduct the smooth and free & fair election for the members of zila panchayat, gram pradhan, members of

gram panchayat and members of kshetra panchayat, a total of 12,448 personnel have been appointed including 2,080, 1,816, 1,520, 1,480, 1,464, 1,400, 1,224 and 1,220 in Aarajiline, Pindra, Cholapur, Badagaon, Chiragaon, Kashi Vidyapeeth, Sevapuri and Harahua block respectively.

The employees on polling duty were imparted training for three days at Udai Pratap College. The polling parties will depart for the polling booths from the respective block in the morning on April 18.

It is mentioned that there is a total of 17,53,588 voters who will exercise their franchises including the maximum 2,90,650 voters in Aarajiline Development Block and the minimum 1,65,187 voters in Harahua block. Besides, 2,50,170, 2,19,550, 2,12,963, 2,08,750, 2,07,482 and 1,98,650 electorate will cast votes in Pindra, Cholapur, Badagaon, Sevapuri, Kashi Vidyapeeth and Chiragaon block respectively.

tively.

A total of 10,749 candidates are in election fray including 554 for the members of zila panchayat, 4,338 candidates of gram pradhan and 4,530 candidates for the members of kshetra panchayat. As many as 4,772 candidates have been elected unopposed as they were only candidates who submitted the nomination papers for the various seats. A total of 17,416 nomination papers were submitted for the gram pradhan and members of gram panchayat, kshetra panchayat & zila panchayat and of them, as many as 1,623 candidates withdrew nomination papers. The election is to be conducted for the 40 members of zila panchayat, 694 seats of gram pradhan in eight blocks and 1,007 seats of members of kshetra panchayat.

The election in the district is scheduled on April 19 under the second phase of three-tier Panchayat polls. The voting will take place from 7 am to 6 pm

while the counting will be held on May 2 from 8 am onwards. The District Electoral Officer Kaushal Raj Sharma has declared a public holiday on the polling day.

302 POLLING PERSONNEL REMAINED ABSENT: As many as 302 polling personnel remained absent during the training and so, taking a serious note of it, the Chief Development Officer (CDO) Madhusudan Hulgi directed the heads of departments to withhold one day salary of these employees.

During the training programme for the polling personnel at Udai Pratap College on Monday, as many as 302 personnel including 59 presiding officers, 84 polling officers-I, 95 polling officers-II and 64 polling officers-III remained absent. The CDO took it seriously and directed the heads of concerned departments to withhold the salary of one day of these employees for being absent from the duty.

Absence of Covid help desk at Jhakarkati bus station annoys DC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Dr Raj Shekhar expressed concern over the absence of Covid help desk at Jhakarkati bus station. The divisional commissioner said it was shocking that when on an average 20,000 to 25,000 people travelled to various destinations in about 1,000 buses daily from this station, the absence of Covid help desk was gross negligence that demanded strict action. He then issued show-cause notice to the ARM seeking explanation as to why disciplinary action should not be taken against him.

The divisional commissioner made a surprise inspection of the Jhakarkati bus station on Tuesday, as in view of the alarming increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, the enforcement of "Covid Appropriate Behaviour (CAB)" at all places has become all the more important. He said the government of India and the UP state government had issued various important directions for wearing masks and maintaining social distance at all public places especially where more people assembled like important offices, bus stations, airports, hospitals, parks etc.

He said it was shocking that people were coolly travelling without masks and did not maintain social distancing in the buses. He said over 30 per cent of the people did not have a mask and a big number wore it over the chin. He said the public address system was not functioning and no announcement was being



Kanpur Divisional Commissioner, Dr Raj Shekhar carried out a surprise inspection at Jhakarkati Bus station on Tuesday.

made for COVID-19 awareness which was in fact mandatory.

He directed the RM to install at least 8-10 additional loud speakers in the next three days to ensure clear announcement so that the message could reach maximum number of passengers. He said once done it should be reported to the commissioner on a priority basis.

The ARM informed the divisional commissioner that there were only two persons on Covid duty and as such there was no round the clock duty. The divisional commissioner directed him that at least six checking staff and two or three Covid staff should be on night duty.

The conductors informed the divisional commissioner that hand sanitiser was not made available to them by the department. The divisional

commissioner issued a show-cause notice to RM, UPSRTC Kanpur for this negligence and directed him to ensure that all conductors got hand sanitiser spray for the use of passengers in all the buses and for all trips in the next 48 hours.

A traveler complained that cotton masks were being sold at Rs 40 and N95 masks for Rs 90 which was too high.

The divisional commissioner directed the ARM to call a meeting of all the shop owners and fix the nominal prices of masks and also display the prices at prominent places in the shops for the information of passengers.

ELECTION MEETING: Meanwhile, the divisional commissioner, addressing a top level meeting of officials at the Commissionerate, directed them to ensure that thermal scanners were available at all

the polling centres and booths. He said the onus of availability of thermal scanner rested on zila parishad adhikari and he was answerable as well. He said in view of the increasing graph of COVID-19 it had been decided in principle that prior permission would be needed for holding any event or rally.

He said no fresh sanction for any event should be given come what may. He directed the district excise official to ensure that a special drive was carried out to identify parties trying to influence voters by distributing free liquor or any kind of drug. He said special monitoring had to be done till March 14, 2021. He said at all the polling centres there should be proper arrangements for water, electricity, clean toilets and other infrastructural needs and all this had to be counter-checked by the

ADM (FR). He said in view of the scorching heat, it had been decided to provide safe potable drinking water at all the booths.

The divisional commissioner said when voters stood in the queue to exercise their franchise then the officials on duty needed to strictly ensure that the Covid protocol was strictly followed. He said both face masks and social distancing were mandatory. He said the voters should be apprised of the benefits of masks and social distancing and forced to follow the norms.

He said at the entry and exit points there should be an adequate number of hand sanitisers and they must be used. He said special spray teams should spray the area with sodium hypochlorite. He said the staff on election duty, including the police personnel, should be provided with fresh and hygienic food and there should be arrangement for rest as well.

He said the fire brigade and 108 ambulance service should remain vigilant for any eventuality.

Dr Shekhar said the camps set up around the booths should be at a specific distance and there should be no crowd at the booths and this was the duty of the police personnel. He said for the safe return, proper vehicles and at least four edible shops should be set up at a specific distance. He said the control rooms must be active round the clock and remain vigilant as well.

Others present in the meeting were District Magistrate Alok Tiwari, ADM (FR), SP (City), and other officials concerned.

Navratri Mela begins

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

Navratri Mela began amidst the cloud of Coronavirus on Tuesday morning. On its first day Divisional Commissioner Yogeshwar Ram Mishra, DIG J Ravindar Kumar, District Magistrate Praveen Kumar Laxkar and SP Ajay Kumar Singh visited the mela area, inspected the arrangements there and directed the personnel to ensure that the Corona-prevention guidelines were followed.

Meanwhile MLA Ratnakar Mishra came forward to establish coordination between the pilgrims and the administration. The priests too cooperated and worked hard to help the administration. The devotees were seen wearing masks on the occasion.

An earlier report said that DM Praveen Kumar Laxkar and Superintendent of Police Ajay Kumar Singh directed the personnel deployed in Navratri Mela area to discharge



DC Yogeshwar Ram Mishra inspecting the mela area on Tuesday along with DIG, DM and SP

their duties with dedication and by following the Covid-19 prevention-related guidelines. While reviewing the preparations at a school in Lohiya Talab on Monday the officers made it clear that from 9.00 pm to 6.00 am no devotee would be allowed to perform the rituals. The personnel were directed to leave the place of deployment only after the arrival of the

reliever. It was directed too that no personnel should use the mobile phone unnecessarily during the duty hours. The officers directed the personnel to be in regular touch with sector officers of the area and to have the duty card positively. It was also directed that nobody would be allowed in temple premises without a Corona negative test report.

DM's directive to officials

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

In view of the Coronavirus cases in the district DM Praveen Kumar Laxkar direct-

traders too to use the mask positively and make the customers aware to follow the Covid-19 prevention guidelines. Such directions were given



DM Praveen Kumar Laxkar holding the meeting at Collectorate on Monday

ed the officials to take the matter seriously and take necessary precautionary measures. On the occasion he appealed to

by the DM in the meetings of officials and traders separately in the Collectorate on Monday. Addressing the meet-

ing he directed the Health department to ensure the testing of each outsider who came to the district. He said the details of each person after testing, including the address and contact, should be kept. He directed the EOs of Nagar Palika and panchayat to ensure announcement of containment zones as per requirement without delay along with enforcement of norms. He made it clear that at each step locals should be taken into confidence to check the pandemic. He directed the officials of local bodies to ensure sanitation, if required, besides cleanliness in the area.

DM inspects Tika Utsav in hospitals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

District Magistrate Alok Tiwari along with Covid nodal officer, KESCo official, CMO and a few other health officials made a surprise inspection of Regency Hospital in Govind Nagar on Tuesday.

The purpose of the visit was to ensure that the Tika Utsav was being held as per the protocol at all the private hospitals as well.

The district magistrate interacted with the CMS of

the hospital and took the feedback of the number of people vaccinated and the staff on duty. He said during the camp the Covid protocol had to be maintained strictly. He directed the staff to ensure that the people who turned up for vaccination were not made to wait for too long. He viewed the seating and other arrangements at the centre. He, however, expressed satisfaction over the arrangements made at the Regency. He then took feedback from the people who had come for the vaccination.

The district magistrate and the team then made a surprise raid at the Jageshwar Hospital, which is run by Kanpur Nagar Nigam and is close by in Govind Nagar. The hospital had made elaborate and proper arrangements for the Tika Utsav. He appealed to the people that this drive was being carried out on the initiative of the prime minister and the chief minister who were concerned over the spread of COVID-19 and said this year the spread was rapid and in huge numbers and

this engendered the need for strictly maintaining social distancing.

The KESCo officials took feedback of the power supply in the hospitals especially when the Tika Utsav was being carried out in full swing.

Tiwari said special care had to be taken both at the government and the private hospitals where the vaccination was being carried out. He said all those who were 45 plus must get themselves vaccinated.

Labour commissioner is panchayat poll observer

KANPUR (PNS): ADM (FR) VP Pandey, on Tuesday, said that in an effort to hold the three-tier panchayat elections in a free and transparent manner and peacefully, the State Election Commission had nominated Labour Commissioner Md Mustafa as observer. He said that in case people wanted to contact him they could contact him on his official mobile number (9455090382).

He also said that the observer would be available in his office between 10.00 am and 1.00 pm daily and would meet people.

He said that it had also been decided by the district magistrate to keep the liquor shops closed till April 15 till the end of the election. He said all retail and wholesale shops, including bhag shops, would also remain closed as per the government order. He said during the closure no benefit shall be extended to the shop owners. He said on all the days of the closure, the sale of narcotic material or liquor had been banned as per GO 608 E-2/13-2021-25-2021 as per Lucknow directive.

MYSTERY SHROUDS HOME GUARD JAWAN'S DEATH: Mystery shrouds the death of a homeguard jawan whose body was recovered near a country-made liquor shop in Virat Nagar in Naubasta police station area on Tuesday.

There were injury marks on the head and near the eyes of the deceased.

The homeguard jawan, identified as Anoop Shukla (45) lived with his nephew Shivam and wife Neelam in Deen Dayal Puram, Naubasta.

Neelam said as Anoop was deployed on panchayat election duty, he had gone to report at Dr Chiranjee Lal Rashtriya Inter College in H Block of Kidwai Nagar on Monday. She said they had a talk on the mobile phone around 9 pm and Anoop had informed her that he would return home soon.

Due to injury marks on his head, near eyes, nose and forehead, police suspect that he was killed in a road accident. However, the Anoop's family members suspect that he was murdered and his body was dumped at the spot.

Shekhar releases book on sugar & sugar derivatives

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Dr Raj Shekhar, while releasing a book titled 'Sugar and sugar derivatives -- changing consumer preferences', at a function held at the National Sugar Institute on Tuesday congratulated NSI Director Prof Narendra Mohan for creating certain basic awareness about which the masses were ignorant of.

He said the book was certainly a milestone in the Indian sugar industry and would provide a vivid description for the intelligentsia as to how to use sugar quality as per end use or application.

He then visited the institute



The Kanpur Divisional Commissioner, Dr Raj Shekhar releases a book on sugar derivatives authored by Director, NSI, Prof Narendra Mohan on Tuesday

and praised its technical expertise.

Later, explaining the content of the book, Prof Mohan said it encompassed the history of development of sugar

standards in India to facilitate trade and consumer protection. He said the book exhaustively covered the details of developments in production of specialty sugars, alternative sweet-

eners, including low calorie sugar, and traditional ones like jaggery etc. He said the book had been published by global giants Springer of Singapore.

He said the book also focused on the requirement of producing different kinds and qualities of sugars, keeping in view the market requirements. He said the common consumer was more quality conscious, the quality requirement of different sectors like beverages, pharma, confectionery and bakery was considered as bulk consumers and was different and typical.

The book has been co-authored by Dr Priyanka Singh, UP Council of Sugarcane Research, Shahjahanpur.

Lawyers pay tributes to Dr Ambedkar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Members of Adhivakta Kalyan Sangharsh Samiti garlanded the portrait of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar on the eve of his birth anniversary at the Lawyers' Association Lawn on Tuesday.

Addressing the gathering, Lawyers Association General Secretary Raghendra Pratap Singh said the Indian Constitution framed by Babasaheb BR Ambedkar was the best constitution of the world.

Convener of the Samiti, Ravindra Sharma, said Dr Ambedkar struggled for equality throughout his life, he was a known jurist, economist, politician and social reformer who worked hard to end social discrimination against weaker sections of society.

He said Dr Ambedkar's legacy as a socio-political



reformer was respected across the world and his ideology had played an important role in transforming the views towards India's socio-economic problems.

He said the Allahabad

High Court should declare April 14 a holiday in all the district courts of the state.

Former president of the Lawyers Association Avinash Bajpai, Ved Uttam, Mohd Quadir Khan, Vijay Sagar,

Mohd Tauhid, Sangeeta Dwivedi, Vijay Kumar, Kuldeep Sonkar, Anil Chaudhary, SG Hasan, Dinesh Ram, Pankaj Gautam, Ankur Goel and Sanjiv Kapoor were present.

Women railway staff get cash prize

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

Chairperson of North Eastern Railway Women's Welfare Organisation (NERWVO), Meena Tripathi, on Monday at the VVIP rest house near Golf Ground here boosted the morale of six railway women personnel of head-quarters and three each of Varanasi and Izzatnagar divisions by presenting them cash prize and gifts in connection with International Women's Day. Besides their own works these railway personnel had had played an important role in social and cultural programmes.

On the occasion NERWVO chairperson Meena



Tripathi said that in today's time women are ensuring their participation in every sphere of society. Referring to the leadership potential of women, she said they are also making excellent contribution in the devel-

opment and progress of Indian Railways. NERWVO vice-chairperson, secretary, joint secretary, treasurer, it's members and women railway personnel were present during the function.

120 employees given first dose

PNS ■ VARANASI

In view of increasing cases, Covid vaccination is being done continuously in the Divisional Hospital, Varanasi, in collaboration with the district administration under the leadership of Chief Medical Superintendent Dr MS Nabial. Under the Covid vaccination campaign going



on since March on Monday 120 employees working in various departments of Varanasi division were given the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine while its second dose was given to 11 employees. Along with seven employees in the health unit, Chhapra, and four in health unit

Prayagraj Rambag 50 general people were vaccinated. In this vaccination campaign, all the employees and general public were vaccinated following the regulations of Covid-19 and all were kept under the supervision of the medical team in the hospital for a certain period of time and sent home only after the health was confirmed to be normal. Apart from it under the direction of Divisional Railway Manager (DRM), VK Panjia, on Varanasi division a public awareness campaign is being run to prevent Covid infection. Keeping in mind the increasing cases an extensive public awareness campaign is being conducted by the railway administration for the safety of railway passengers and its employees. Under it extensive dissemination of the message of 'Dawai Bhi, Kadai Bhi' is being through posters in railway stations and offices of Varanasi division. It includes taking three precautions for protection from Covid wearing the mask correctly, washing hands frequently and keeping them clean and maintaining physical distancing. Apart from it related messages are being broadcast through public address system, TV and digital mediums for protection from Covid at stations and the rule of wearing masks in its premises is being strictly followed, PRO Ashok Kumar said. Moreover those not wearing masks are being fined.

Monsoon likely to be normal this yr: Skymet

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Skymet, a private weather forecasting agency, said on Tuesday the southwest monsoon in 2021 that will start from June is expected to be normal or above normal for the third consecutive year.

In its preliminary monsoon forecast for 2021, Skymet Weather said monsoon rain from June to September is likely to be 103 per cent of the long period average (LPA). In 2020 and 2019, the monsoon was above normal at 110% and 109% of LPA respectively. The last time India had three consecutive years of normal monsoon was between 1996 and 1998.

The LPA for June to September rainfall is estimated to be 880.6 mm, meaning that if the forecast comes true, the actual rainfall in the country will be around 907 millimeters.

Month-wise monsoon in June across the country will be 106 percent of LPA, which

will be 166.9 millimeters of rainfall. There are chances of 70 percent normal, 20 percent and 10 percent of above-normal rainfall in June.

The monsoon in July will be 97 percent of LPA, which will be 285.3 millimeters of rainfall. According to Skymet Weather, 75 % chances of normal, 10 % above normal, and 15 % below normal rainfall in July. Monsoon in August is expected to be 99 percent of LPA which will be 258.2 millimeters of rainfall across the country and monsoon in September is expected to be the best at 116 percent of LPA which will be 170.2 mm of rainfall.

Skymet Weather said the northern plains, along with few parts of the northeast region, are likely to be at risk of being rain deficient through the season. Also, interior parts of Karnataka could face scanty rains in the core monsoon months of July and August.

“The onset month of June and the withdrawal phase of September is assuring good countrywide rainfall distribution,” it said.

According to Skymet, “La Nina conditions have been prevailing in the Pacific Ocean since last year. It is however expected to remain neutral through the monsoon season. Occurrence of El Nino which normally corrupts the monsoon is ruled out.”

Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is neutral and is oscillating lightly on either side of the Zero lines. Its unlikely to harm the monsoon season. El Niño and the Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is a periodic fluctuation in sea surface temperature and the air pressure of the overlying atmosphere across the equatorial Pacific Ocean according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

ENSO has a major influ-



ence on weather and climate patterns such as heavy rains, floods, and drought. El Niño has a warming influence on global temperatures, while La Niña has the opposite effect. In

India, for example, El Nino is associated with drought or weak monsoon while La Nina is associated with strong monsoon and above-average rains, and colder winters.

Out of the 685 districts in the country, the monsoon was normal in almost 75 percent of them, while it was deficient and below normal in the remaining in 2020.

Sushil Chandra assumes charge as Chief Election Commissioner

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra took over the post of Chief Election Commissioner on Tuesday, after outgoing CEC Sunil Arora demitted office on Monday.

Chandra has been an Election Commissioner since February 15, 2019 and a member of the Delimitation Commission for delimitation of Jammu and Kashmir since February 18, 2020, the Election Commission said in a statement. Under him, the EC will



hold assembly polls in Goa, Manipur, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. The term of the assemblies of Goa, Manipur, Uttarakhand and Punjab ends on various dates in March next year. The term of the Uttar Pradesh assembly ends on May 14 next year.

According to the EC, as an Indian Revenue Service officer, Chandra held several posts in the Income Tax department for nearly 39 years. He had been the chairman of the Central Board of Direct Taxes from November 1, 2016 to February 14, 2019.

Chandra, a retired IAS officer, completed his tenure of nearly 29 months as CEC, having led the EC during the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections. He is also an ex-officio member of the Delimitation Commission since February 18, 2020 looking after the process in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Having held several posts in the Income Tax Department for nearly 39 years, Mr. Chandra was appointed the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) Chairman on November 1, 2016. He spent considerable time as Director of Investigation and Director General of Investigation, Mumbai and Gujarat, respectively followed by his stint as Member (Investigation), CBDT and thereafter assuming the post of Chairman of this apex body.

India, France discuss regional, global challenges

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and France on Tuesday reviewed the entire gamut of their bilateral relation including strategic ties during talks here between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian.

Besides growing economic, defence and strategic ties, the two leaders also discussed the regional as well as global challenges. The French Minister arrived here on Monday evening on a three-day visit to explore ways to further boost cooperation between the two countries, including in the Indo-Pacific region.

Incidentally, the talks were held days after the Quadrilateral countries including India, the US, Japan, and Australia participated in a naval drill led by the French navy in



the eastern Indian Ocean region last week.

The three-day exercise ‘La Perouse’ was a reflection of their growing strategic cooperation in the region.

The exercise witnessed complex and advanced naval operations including surface warfare, anti-air warfare and air defence exercises. The Indian Navy had said its participation demonstrated the shared values with friendly navies ensuring freedom of seas and commitment to an open, inclusive

Indo-Pacific and a rules-based international order.

Meanwhile, after the talks on Tuesday, Jaishankar said India and France will advance their shared post-COVID-19 agenda through “close collaboration”.

“A comfortable, substantive and productive discussion with FM @JY_LeDrian. India and France will advance their shared post-COVID agenda through close collaboration,” he tweeted.

French ambassador

Emmanuel Lenain described the meeting as “excellent”. “Excellent meeting b/w @JY_LeDrian @francediplo_EN & @DrSJaishankar @MEAIndia. The ministers discussed all aspects of the bilateral strategic partnership, regional & global challenges and cooperation at the #UNSC,” Lenain said in a tweet.

On Monday, the Ministry of External Affairs said the visit by the French foreign minister will pave the way for further strengthening of bilateral partnership across trade, defence, climate, migration and mobility, education and health sectors in the post-COVID-19 context.

The French embassy said Le Drian is undertaking the visit to strengthen strategic ties between France and India, boost cooperation in several

fields, particularly the Indo-Pacific.

The defence and security ties between India and France are on an upswing in the last few years. India had signed an inter-governmental agreement with France in September 2016 for procurement of 36 Rafale fighter jets at a cost of around Rs 58,000 crore. Dassault Aviation, the manufacturer of Rafale jets, has delivered 14 aircraft to the IAF so far.

visit came a week after a three-part investigative series by French media outlet, Mediapart revealed, based on French anti-corruption agency audit, how French aircraft manufacturer Dassault Aviation had paid €1 million to an Indian company owned by a middleman, Sushen Gupta, in connection with the €7.87 billion Rafale deal between India and France in 2016.

In first, NCDC secures Euro 68.87 mn loan from Deutsche bank

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

At a time when Covid-19 induced Covid-19 crisis has made lending a challenging proposition, the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) has secured a Euro 68.87 million (nearly ₹600 crore) loan from Deutsche Bank, Germany’s largest bank, for onward lending to cooperative societies in the country.

An agreement was inked

between the NCDC, a development finance statutory institution under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare, and the German Bank in this regard in the presence of Union Agriculture Minister, Narendra Singh Tomar here on Tuesday.

On the occasion, a pact was also signed between the Kolkata-based Indian Chamber of Commerce and the NCDC, according to which India Inc will help boost farmers’ link-

ages with markets and sell produce in the private sector.

Tomar said that Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given a new vision to India’s agrarian landscape and to her economic relations with Germany. He added that the Farmer

Producer Organizations (FPOs) being set up in the country would be able to access easier credit and market through the NCDC agreements with ICC and Deutsche Bank. “This will help

fill gaps and challenges being faced by the farmers and ultimately boost their income to make them self-reliant.”

This is for the first time that one of the largest European banks is lending to the NCDC. In a statement, Kaushik Shaparia, CEO & Country Head, Deutsche Bank AG, said that he looked forward to a robust relationship with NCDC in the agri space.

While Agriculture Secretary Sanjay Agarwal

talked about financial steps taken in recent years to develop markets and boost farmers’ income, NCDC MD Sundeeep Nayak said that the financing would help NCDC to assist farmers to make a successful pivot towards sustainable, climate-smart agriculture. “Right from our founding as an organisation since 1963 for co-operatives, we have always strived to support farmers in their journey to achieve sustainable livelihoods,” said the MD.

Cooperatives are not a new phenomenon for Germany. In fact, today, Germany’s 7,500 cooperative enterprises have more than 20 million members. India’s cooperatives too figure among the world’s top rankings. 94 per cent of Indian farmers are members of at least one cooperative.

Deutsche Bank’s initiative in India is just one of the many key business interests shown by German companies in India over the years. Today,

more than 1700 German companies are active in India, providing around 4, 00,000 direct and indirect jobs. Germany is India’s largest trading partner in Europe and among India’s top ten global trade partners, said Shaparia.

Aditya Bagri, Co Chair of Indian Chamber of Commerce Committee on Agribusiness and Food Processing in a statement said that the ICC-NCDC MoU, would have a focus on exports promotion by FPOs.

KVIC chairman Saxena all set to take on activist Patkar in West Bengal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

KVIC chairman Vinai Kumar Saxena is all set to take on activist Medha Patkar in West Bengal where she has been addressing a series of “Kisan Panchayats”.

Saxena will be holding parallel dialogues with the locals. Saxena and Patkar are locked in the legal battle for over 20 years.

Saxena alleged that it was because of Patkar’s agitations in Singur in 2007 that industrial development in West Bengal stopped and caused a huge loss of employment and livelihood in the state. And again, by spreading falsehood and instigating farmers, Patkar was attempting to deprive them of the benefits of the farm bills enacted by the Central Government, he said.

Citing the FIR registered against Patkar and her aides by

Delhi Police in connection with the January 26 violence in Delhi, Saxena said Patkar has a history of provoking violence in the guise of protests.

“Patkar was the main conspirator of the violence in Singur. Similarly, in the Narmada valley, she instigated farmers to attack police and government officials on a number of occasions.

It was Patkar, who gave false testimony against India in the USA, which led to the withdrawal of the World Bank support to the Sardar Sarovar Dam. Her anti-dam protests in Madhya Pradesh led to the sufferings of lakhs of farmers due to the non-availability of Narmada water for over 20 years in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Industrial growth in Madhya Pradesh was severely hampered due to power shortage arising out of delay in com-

missioning of hydro-power projects on River Narmada,” Saxena said.

Saxena, who has ly dragged Patkar to courts in several criminal cases said all agitations staged by Patkar were guided by her foreign masters with the sole objective of stalling the pace of development in India.

“Be it her anti-dam protests in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan or her agitation in West Bengal against the TATA Nano project in Singur, the motive has been clear – stalling the development projects by misleading the local tribals and villagers. Medha Patkar’s foreign connections are already in the public domain and her presence in West Bengal is an indication of further unrest and support to the anti-India forces that do not want any development in the state,” he said.

‘Problem not of Covid jab crisis but of planning’



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Tuesday maintained that there was no vaccine shortage given that over 1.67 crore Covid-19 vaccine doses were still available with States and UTs and the main problem was that of better planning.

Addressing a press conference here, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said

so far states and UTs have received 13,10,90,370 vaccine doses, out of which the total consumption, including wastage, has been 11,43,69,677.

As per 11 am data, unutilised doses available with states and union territories for administration is 1,67,20,693. From now till April end, 2,01,22,960 doses are in supply pipeline to states and UTs,” he said.

“This clearly shows that the problem is of lack of better planning, not of vaccine doses shortage. We have made available vaccine doses to states and UTs from time to time and as we told you earlier that to bigger states we give a supply of four days at once and on the fourth and fifth day we replenish the supply. For smaller states, at once we supply 7-8 days vaccine doses and on the seventh or eighth day their supply is replenished,” he added.

Bhushan said each state government should find out at cold chain points how many unutilised doses are lying unused. If necessary, then from one cold chain point to another the doses have to be reapportioned based on the consumption patterns.

“In any state, the case might be that in one district more consumption is taking place while in another there is less consumption. Our request to state governments to ascer-

tain where the doses can be reapportioned from,” he added.

Bhushan also said Kerala has zero wastage of vaccine doses while on the other hand there are states which are registering 8-9 percent wastage. Giving details of the coronavirus situation in the country, Bhushan said the previous highest surge has already been crossed and the trend is going upward and that is a cause for worry and that is something they continuously share with the states and UTs and try to help them tackle the pandemic in a more effective manner.

Amid reports of shortage of remdesivir, he said the drug is to be given only to hospitalized, serious patients and those on oxygen support, and there is no question of its use in the home setting and it is not to be procured from chemist shops.

He also added that Ayush products can be embraced for boosting immunity.

NHAI makes deployment of NSV must to improve road quality

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central road making agency, National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) on Tuesday said it has made deployment of Network Survey Vehicle (NSV) mandatory to ensure a better quality of roads. The NSV uses a high-resolution camera to capture images of highways and has several other features.

“In line with its commitment to provide better roads to commuters, NHAI has decided to deploy Network Survey

Vehicle (NSV) to enhance the quality of the National Highways. Carrying out road condition survey using NSV on the National Highways has been made mandatory at the time of certifying completion of the project and every six months thereafter,” NHAI said in a statement.

The provision has also been included as a part of the standard bidding document of consultancy services. “The deployment will help in enhancing the overall quality of the highways as NSV uses the

latest survey techniques such as a high-resolution digital camera for 3,600 imagery, record images/videos at regular intervals, laser road profilometer and other related technology for the measurement of distresses in road surface,” it said.

The statement said NSV will also help to collate data to analyse the road condition including measurement of the road surface, surface cracking, potholes and patches. Apart from this, NSV will also provide data insights relating to

side drains, road furniture, etc.

The data collected through NSV survey shall be uploaded on NHAI’s Artificial Intelligence-based portal Data Lake, where it will be analysed by Road Asset Management Cell (RAMS Cell) to assess the condition/roughness of the road to prioritise for the maintenance.

The data will help in maintaining up-to-date asset inventory and road assets condition status, the statement said. Apart from delivering vital information on road network planning,

providing relevant information on other aspects such as the development of road safety measures, etc. It will also assist in developing Highway maintenance strategies, analysis of maintenance and selection of optimal maintenance regime, it said.

The data collected through NSV surveys will highlight deficiencies in road conditions, prompting BOT (build, operate, transfer) operators/NHAI officials to take corrective steps to bring the road condition to the desired

level, NHAI said. This will further result in better upkeep of National Highways, leading to more comfort and better travel experience for Highways users, it added.

The data collected through NSV survey shall be uploaded on NHAI's Artificial Intelligence-based portal Data Lake, where it will be analysed by Road Asset Management Cell (RAMS Cell) to assess the condition/roughness of the road to prioritise for maintenance





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PAPER WITH PASSION

Double mutant strikes

More genomic testing on the virus must be done; the new strains are pushing India to the brink

A few weeks ago, in a press release the Government announced that a wholly new strain — which it dubbed the “double mutant” — had emerged in India. This was so called because not one major mutation but two mutations to the spike protein that allows the COVID-19 virus to bind to cells had been found. Few further details have emerged since then but epidemiologists believe that this variation could potentially be much more infectious, just like the strains from Brazil, South Africa and the UK have proved to be. And in the first two weeks of April, it is almost certain; albeit until enough genomic testing of the strains infecting Indians is conducted, one cannot positively state this; that the new strains, possibly the “double mutant” strain itself is behind the exponential rise in Coronavirus cases across the country. In fact, India now has the dubious distinction of being the second worst-hit nation in the world as the climbing numbers have relegated Brazil to the third place in the global Corona rankings. ‘The Attack of the Double Mutant’ seems like an apt name for a 1950s campy Hollywood movie but, make no mistake, it appears to be very real right now. And one cannot rest on the fact that these new mutations of the virus that first emerged in Wuhan, China, are less deadly than the original. The fact is that a lower fatality rate is negated when absolute numbers are



extremely high, like they are right now. As a result, not only are the cases hitting highs like never before, so are the fatalities.

What should be extremely concerning to the health authorities and the Governments at both the Centre and the States is that the vaccines being administered to millions of Indians every week have not yet been thoroughly tested for their efficacy against the new strains, particularly the “double mutant”. We still are unsure whether Covishield or Covaxin, or even the recently approved Sputnik V or other vaccines approved for usage elsewhere in the world, such as the mRNA-based Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, will be effective against the new strain, either in reducing its virulence or the seriousness of the disease. Despite stories emerging of crematoriums running at capacity and their equipment failing or melting, life appears to continue apace in India. In fact, the celebrations at Haridwar for the Kumbh Mela are a sign that many Indians would rather put their faith in divine intervention rather than the Government. And with the Government leaders campaigning full-time in West Bengal and elsewhere, who can blame only the religious devotees? India is witnessing a record number of new cases daily, but is yet to exceed the 1,290 daily deaths recorded on September 15, 2020. However, at the current pace, that might only be a matter of time before we see that happening. Particularly, once the Kumbh Mela gets over and the devotees head back home, spreading the pernicious virus across the length and breadth of India.

PICTALK



Migrants await their turn to board home-bound trains amid the spike in COVID-19 cases, in Mumbai

PTI

Show some poise

The Cooch Behar tragedy underscores the need for all stakeholders to exercise restraint in words and actions

It is the Election Commission's (EC) responsibility to conduct “free and fair” elections; however, its role often comes under the scanner of the parties in the poll fray; it is accused of being biased, undemocratic and selective in cracking down on the violators of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). Not only this, the “impartiality” of the apex poll body is questioned every now and then, right from the first stage of setting up the voting dates. The Opposition accuses it of “dancing to the tune” of the regime at the Centre and “managing” the election dates that best suit the ruling party. Even after the results, the losing parties and candidates cry foul that the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were rigged. Most of these charges against the credibility of an independent, constitutional body are unfounded and only part of the politics of subterfuge. Unfortunately, however, such manoeuvres have become the hallmark of elections these days. The happenings in West Bengal, where the EC has slapped a 24-hour campaign ban



on Chief Minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee for “instigating the voters” and making “highly insinuating and provocative remarks”, are no exception.

The poll panel's order drew sharp reactions not only from the TMC but also from the Congress and the CPM — all these parties are in the Opposition at the Centre — with Mamata sitting on a dharna at the Gandhi Murti in Kolkata. It appears that Didi is playing all her cards — from wheelchair politics to dharna politics — to prevent the BJP from wresting power from the TMC in its bastion. Citing similar reasons, the EC has banned the BJP's Rahul Sinha from campaigning for 48 hours for his remark that the Central forces should have shot more people in Sitalkuchi. It also issued notices to Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh for his controversial remarks. There should be a detailed inquiry into what instigated a mob to threateningly advance towards the CISF personnel on poll duty in Cooch Behar that subsequently led to four civilian deaths. Earlier, Mamata had asked the State's people to gherao the Central forces. While the EC is working to the best of its ability, the politicians must also stop instigating people or making comments that potentially could disturb law and order in the politically-sensitive State. No matter who wins or loses the battle for Bengal, democracy must not be made to bleed.

India's role in Myanmar crisis

The situation in our strife-torn neighbourhood is turning worse, with the military trying every trick in the book to cling to power



RAVINDER PAL SINGH

As a result of the Myanmar military's (Tatmadaw's) takeover of the political power and arrest of the elected representatives on February 1 this year, the people of Myanmar came out in thousands to demonstrate against the coup. The military claims that it took over the power under the State of Emergency clause of the 2008 Constitution (written by the military itself) because of an alleged electoral fraud. However, the Election Commission had declared the November 2020 elections as free and largely fair.

The court of public opinion pronounced its verdict through spontaneous demonstrations that have since early February claimed nearly 500 lives. People's anger reveals that the military's allegations are a mere pretext to take over the power to protect the illegitimate businesses of their family members, threatened by the Aung San Suu Kyi-led National League of Democracy's (NLD) overwhelming success in the polls.

Though there were no cases of public unrest or breakdown in law and order to justify the Emergency and the military's takeover, the military chief, Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing, arrested the President and replaced him with his puppet Vice-President, who promptly declared Emergency for the military to take power. The elected representatives were prevented from taking the oath of office on February 1. Clearly, the coup by Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing and other Generals was not against Suu Kyi but against the people of Myanmar.

The coup's consequences have since played out via public protests and random shootings by troops who have been given a free hand to terrorise and coerce the population to surrender their basic rights. The seeds of the Tatmadaw gaining political clout in Myanmar stem from the first military coup in 1962. Following socio-political changes over the years, the Generals chose to allow elections under the 2008 Constitution. It



had nearly 35 provisions that allowed the military to hold primacy in political decision-making at the Central and provincial Government levels.

As large swathes of Myanmar's territory were inhabited by around 18 major ethnic communities, with approximately 35 per cent of the population, the majority Barmar population inhabited the central fertile basins of the Irrawaddy and Salween rivers. The minorities since the 1960s raised their own Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) for self-protection, which gave the Tatmadaw the rationale to hold the centre stage of national integrity. The 2008 Constitution gave it political powers by holding 25 per cent of the seats in both national and regional/State Parliaments by the nominees of the Army chief, Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing. In time, the Tatmadaw came to represent private business interests of the Generals and Colonels, not of the Myanmar people.

Moving to the events that unfolded rather quickly after the coup, the elected legislators on the military's target fled the country. A group of legislators went underground and organised itself as the CRPH, or the



WHAT SHOULD AND COULD INDIA DO? EVEN IF THE GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN A POLITIQUE APPROACH, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA AND THE FREE PRESS HAS TO STEP UP TO RESTORE DEMOCRATIC PEACE AND HUMANITARIAN RELIEF TO THE TROUBLED REFUGEES FLEEING MYANMAR

Committee Representing Pyidaungsi Hluttaw (Parliament). The military, to control the civilian protests, has generally followed the strategy of closing down

mobile phone communications and the internet, declaration of Emergency and martial law to arrest protesters without trial, and shock and awe by random killings of protesters. Of late, a change has been noticed in its strategy. It has started bombings ethnic villages to provoke reactions from the main EAOs. This would aim to justify the military's intervention as the protector of the majority Barmars.

What are the options for civil society in Myanmar, with its elected leaders and the EAOs being attacked by the Tatmadaw? Its main argument to retain military control is that the EAOs want to splinter Myanmar into ethno-territorial identities.

Interviewed by the *Al Jazeera* on March 27, NLD legislator Sarsa (now in hiding) sought global help in providing alternative strategies to put Myanmar back on the path of lasting democratic peace and stability. UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews, however, was unable to offer

any alternative solution. A similar expression of helplessness and outrage has been made by the UN Secretary, the US President, the EU and the Asean countries.

The international community needs to take the ongoing violence in Myanmar not as a conflict resolution issue fit for negotiations, but as a problem of the flawed Constitution. This flaw is a deliberate design by the Myanmar Generals to permanently snatch their people's sovereign rights at the point of their weapons.

So, what should and could India do as a neighbour, as a democracy and as a member of the UN Security Council? Even if the Government has taken a politique approach, the people of India and the free press has to step up to restore democratic peace and humanitarian relief to the troubled refugees fleeing Myanmar.

(The writer is a military veteran, who is a former Senior Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses, New Delhi, and Ford Fellow at the School of Public Affairs, University of Maryland. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Jawans took the right decision



This refers to the editorial ‘No golden rule’ (April 13). I concur with the editorial view that security personnel at the polling booth had no other practical option to control the advance of a mob of 200-300 people except to fire to kill. In self-defence, security personnel shoot to kill as the last resort. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her cohorts have described it as “genocide” and have gone to the extent of saying that it could have been avoided by firing below the waist or at legs. One can only laugh at such nonsensical suggestions which are far

from practicality.

The editorial has verily repudiated their contention, saying that the action was called for as any use of mild force would have further provoked the mob instead of acting as a deterrent. The security officers are not at all at fault as is being told by Mamata and the TMC. She has preferred to keep mum on the murder of an 18-year-old boy, a BJP worker, by the TMC goons the same day, who was exercising his franchise for the first time. The Election Commission had rightly announced elections in Bengal in eight phases, which was opposed by Didi vehemently. Had these elections been held in three or four phases, the TMC would have carried out a bloodbath on Bengal's roads. It is because of this reason the Election Commission has proved itself to be a *bete noire* of Didi. It seems that the conduct of elections in a peaceful manner doesn't suit Mamata and her party as she wants to create ruckus, violence and anarchy to win elections.

Sagar Singh | Muzaffarnagar

workers are fleeing the city fearing a complete lockdown. After the complaints about the shortage of vaccines, it is expected that the equilibrium will be brought in by the weekend but the States are lacking in implementation. Soon after a lockdown was imposed across India in March 2020, the country saw an unprecedented humanitarian crisis with over 10 million migrant workers returning to their hometowns.

A year later, a similar story is unfolding in Maharashtra. The State Government and the Centre must take care that such a situation is not repeated and make adequate arrangements for migrant workers. The people are not ready for another lockdown.

OK Ramanathan | Coimbatore

ENSURE THAT NO MIGRATION TAKES PLACE

Sir — As the new variants are taking a heavy toll on human lives and the active cases are on the rise, people in metro cities like Mumbai are panicking and the migrant

THINGS CAN GO WRONG

Sir — The Japanese Government is going to release radioactive water used to cool the damaged Fukushima reactors into the

ocean. The water will be “cleaned” of the most dangerous radioactive materials. No, this is not the plot of the latest Godzilla movie, this is real life.

The powerful filter system is of course safe, although so was the reactor. Things can go wrong and a polluted, radioactive ocean would be another disaster. The other issue is that if the filter works perfectly, where will the Japanese Government store the highly reactive material for the next few years? There are so many worries about this development and the possible damage to our planet. A better solution must be found. The safety and security of all should be accorded the top priority.

Dennis Fitzgerald | Australia

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

Tributes to those martyred in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Their courage, heroism and sacrifice give strength to every Indian.

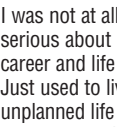


Prime Minister — Narendra Modi



Once again I am calling upon the Taliban to give up fighting and enmity, and observe permanent ceasefire which is the demand of the people of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan President — Ashraf Ghani



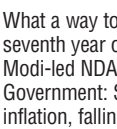
I was not at all serious about my career and life plans. Just used to live an unplanned life till the time I stepped into the reality TV show *Bigg Boss*.

Actor — Arshi Khan



I want to be a bowler who takes responsibility for his side. Instead of being a burden, I consider this a privilege.

Cricketer — Harshad Patel



What a way to end the seventh year of the Modi-led NDA Government: Surging inflation, falling industrial output, declining rupee and plunging stock market.

Congress leader — P Chidambaram

FIRST COLUMN

TOWARDS GREEN LIVELIHOODS

One has to manage it with the strength gained from hindsight, verifiable data and the foresight of a savant



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Basic human nature has not changed over the thousands of years that mankind has inhabited this planet. What has kept changing is its mode of expression. The primitive man first fought with bare hands, then with clubs, which was followed by sharp weapons like the spear and then came the catapult and the propulsion of stones. Firepower entered the scene and in came ammunition. Gradually, warfare moved from the land and sea to include the sky. The methods and the levels kept changing but the basics were the same. Typically, the methods of cooking and living changed, too. Distances shrank and time multiplied with the use of technology. Yet, basic emotions remained constant. The tribal world is a good example globally, of not just human nature remaining consistent but also their basic good sense remaining constant. This was in the preservation of the ecosystem and never taking more from it than was necessary for self-preservation and basic happiness. Rhythmic matching with nature enabled them to survive for multiple millennia without having to worry about sustainability.



Then there was the issue of civility. Consider how a community takes care of the old, infants, women and the infirm. Add to it the concern of the right to dignified transition from one phase of a life cycle to another. Perhaps these principles are so simple that almost all civil Governments seem to have responded in default. The time has come to change it and learn from the tribals. Indeed, tribes have paid heavily, in many places, where their pristine context and approach was ravaged by the so-called civilisation. These facts require a revision of the vantage point of perception. With Christopher Columbus pioneering the route to the Indies in 1492, it began the process which altered the character of the indigenous population by many interventions. Colonisation altered the character of the ecosystems they ventured into. Findings hold that this ushered in new vegetation which preserved heat. It trapped carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and this ushered in the 'little ice age.' Clearly, the future is sustainable when resources are preserved, added to and when life is assured, unimpeded. The future is assured when skills are there to assure livelihoods. The tribes represent a philosophy and value system which awaits deeper scholastic exploration to see, in how many ways, their learnings have value for mankind. A background in anthropology, history, systems dynamics and management links up that learning with observations in the field. These are, in turn, rooted in the academia and consulting world.

Building upon the classical backdrop of observations from Sanskrit literature, one can comment on tribal ways of maintaining livelihoods, health and well-being. This would also cover traditional means of livelihoods in the Third World. Making a case study of pockets in Asia, one can also establish how traditional modes of production and means of marketing are in high synergy with resource-based renewal and adequacy of economic well-being. Unfortunately, in many ways, Euro-centric modes of production originating from developed countries have jeopardised the full range of the natural resource base of this planet. Time is running out for including in the developmental model the option of strengthening the traditional modes of livelihood and production. This would imply strengthening of the conventional ways of harnessing produce; upscaling the time-tested approaches of nurturing livelihoods; reinforcing conventional role of markets as an economic force. A model of development to optimise on resources and happiness is feasible.

Without a clarity on the causative factors, the creation of a sustainable future may become a gamble. One has to manage it with the strength gained from hindsight, verifiable data and the foresight of a savant. (The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal.)

Direct payments: Why is it an issue in Punjab?

The State should amend the Agricultural Produce and Livestock Markets Act, 2017, to make payment to farmers actually direct and not through the commission agents



SUKHPAL SINGH

The issue of direct payments to farmers for their produce, as it happens in most other States, would be a non-issue to begin with, if it was not in the context of Punjab. Any buyer has the right to pay the way s/he wishes and the seller agrees, including the latter having the right to receive payment directly from the buyer. It is, in fact, laughable to learn that in Punjab, the payment for farm produce even by the Government agencies like the Food Corporation of India (FCI) has been made in the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) *mandi* system through the *kacha arhatiya* (commission agent). The Government of India (GOI) had been requesting the State to streamline its procurement and payment procedures in line with the Centre's guidelines of direct online payment to farmers and in compliance with the Public Finance Management System (PFMS), since 2018. The State had time and again sought extensions for various reasons. The FCI would like to remove the *arhatiya* from the acquisition process to lower its costs of procurement. For instance, for the first time, the Cotton Corporation of India Limited (CCI) was able to make direct payments to cotton farmers during the last kharif season without paying a commission to *arhatiyas* in Punjab, after the new farm Acts came into force, before being put on hold by the top court.

Even the Punjab Government had, until now, not allowed the central agencies to pay directly to farmers, irrespective of the party in power. The previous Government in Punjab, through the 2013 amendment to the APMC Act, had made it optional for growers to receive payments directly when farmer unions demanded it. But the farmer had to give this in writing at least 45 days before the start of the procurement season for paddy or wheat, if s/he wanted payment directly. However, this amendment did not deal with payments for other agri produce and left it to the farmer giving an oral option at the time of auction. But in 2017, the State Government amended the APMC Act to provide for these farmer payments to be indirect, through the *arhatiyas*, wherein the agent gets the payment for the farmer's produce and deposits it in the grower's account.

Interlocking: The *arhatiya* associations claim that they lend without a collateral and recover their payments from sale proceeds paid by the FCI to them for the farmer's produce. However, they realise that they would not be able to interlock the farm inputs, credit and produce markets anymore, as they have in the past, if payments for produce are made directly to the farmers. But, the *arhatiyas* only get a licence to facilitate purchase and sale of agricultural produce (called *kacha arhatiya*), and their other business i.e. money lending to farmers is informal and illegal. They interlock this credit market with produce payments when public agencies procure at the Minimum Support Prices (MSP) and recover their payments. They also charge interest ranging from 18-36 per cent on such loans, depending on the credit rating of the farmers. The *arhatiya* also charges interest on interest on the unpaid loan besides on the outstanding principal after every season. Thus, there are multiple methods of exploitation of the farmer by the *arhatiya*.

However, this interlinkage is problematic mainly for the small and marginal farmers, as large growers are able to avoid it. Though farmers have Kisan



THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA HAD BEEN REQUESTING THE STATE TO STREAMLINE ITS PROCUREMENT AND PAYMENT PROCEDURES IN LINE WITH THE CENTRE'S GUIDELINES OF DIRECT ONLINE PAYMENT TO FARMERS AND IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE PUBLIC FINANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, SINCE 2018. THE STATE HAD TIME AND AGAIN SOUGHT EXTENSIONS FOR VARIOUS REASONS

The writer is a professor at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. The views expressed are personal.



Credit Cards (KCCs) or Cash Credit Limit (CCL) from banks and the Primary Agricultural Credit Society (PACS), but when they are not able to repay the crop loans at the end of the season, it is the *arhatiya* who steps in and lends to farmers to prevent them from defaulting for the next season. The farmers then borrow again from the bank/PACS after the repayment to the bank/PACS and repay the loan to the *arhatiya*. Thus, the *arhatiya* helps farmers from turning into defaulters. The *arhatiyas* lend for even non-agricultural and social purposes and their cash credit limits for farmers is more open-ended unlike that of the banks.

Although there are *arhatiyas* in Punjab's fruit and vegetable *mandis* too, and they give five per cent commission compared with 2.5 per cent in grain markets, there is no MSP or public procurement for the crop produce sold in these *mandis*. Therefore, interlocking is not that widely prevalent in these markets as the *arhatiya's* risk in lending would be higher in the case of sales made without public purchase. The *arhatiya* associations in the past have asked their members not to lend to basmati paddy growers as that would be risky without the guarantee of repayment backed by public procurement at the MSP.

Leasee farmers: The grower unions, *arhatiya* unions and the State Government also claim that since there is large-scale leasing of land for farming for wheat and paddy (40-50 per cent land is leased informally), it would be difficult for leasee farmers to produce land records to sell at the MSP and claim payments. The State Government

also argues that the payment for the produce through the *arhatiya* is a legal mechanism under the APMC Act of Punjab. The Centre suggested that the State could follow the model of neighbouring Haryana where the details of tenants/share croppers can be uploaded on a portal with the disclaimer that this would not be a legal document for claiming ownership through tenancy. One of the reasons, other than the timing of the decision, for farmers and their unions not wanting direct payments is that they fear the bank would deduct outstanding or default loans from such payments.

The role of the State: This business of money lending is facilitated by the MSP and procurement of grain policy from the APMC markets. This enables the *arhatiyas* to lend without risk as their dues are recovered from the payments made by the buyers, including the FCI, to the *arhatiyas* and not the farmers. The norms for farm lending under priority sector lending (PSL) policies have been tweaked so that lending to agriculture is no longer about crops and farms alone; they include loans for agribusiness activities like cold storages, food processing and the like. Also, if banks can't lend to meet the target of the PSL, they can deposit the money in the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund and also buy priority sector loan accounts from other banks that have exceeded their targets.

Since the State has not conducted elections to the APMC bodies for decades, the *arhatiyas* are able to dominate the APMCs as the elected representative appointments are

made by nomination.

Solutions: If the *arhatiya* system is to end, Punjab needs to make arrangements for the direct purchase of produce from farmers and ensure payment to them through their own collective agencies, like PACS, co-operatives and producer companies as is being done in some of the other States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha for public procurement of foodgrains. Haryana has given temporary APMC *mandi* commission agent licences to 380 FPOs and PDS ration depot holders this season in view of a strike by *arhatiya* in protest against the direct payment policy where 75 per cent of farmers have opted for it.

Unless small farmers are provided institutional finance access adequately and enabled to use the warehouse receipt system under which growers can obtain bank credit against their produce, they can't avoid the interlocked transactions by the *arhatiya*.

To resolve the issue of lack of land records with a large number of leasee farmers, Punjab should finalise the draft pro-corporate land leasing Bill with adequate amendments for making it pro-small farmer and make it into a law. Further, the State should amend the Agricultural Produce and Livestock Markets Act, 2017, to make direct payment to farmers actually direct and, not direct through the *arhatiya*! For the time being, as is reported to have been agreed between the State and the Centre, a verification of seller farmer as a producer of the crop by a revenue clerk or sarpanch would suffice.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

NOT FOUR BUT EIGHT PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE BEEN SHOT DEAD IN SITALKUCHI. —BJP LEADER RAHUL SINHA



THEIR LEADERS SAID EIGHT AND NOT FOUR PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE BEEN KILLED. THESE ARE THE LEADERS OF OUR COUNTRY. —WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE



How resilient is our digital world is the big question

The COVID-19 pandemic shows that digital connectivity is critical to societal resilience and business continuity in the times of crisis

Technology is now all around us. The digital transformation we have seen over the last few years has increased the emphasis on always being online. For instance, in 2015, 7.5 per cent of the Indian population was connected to the internet but by 2019, this percentage increased to 34 per cent, according to the World Bank data. Indian mobile users consume 8.3 gigabytes of data each month on an average and India is digitising faster than any other country.

Digital transformation has opened the doors to alleviating poverty, creating opportunities and monitoring and improving emergency response. But it has also added a new layer of vulnerability. A single disaster caused by natural hazards could lead to serious damage to critical information systems and trigger the failure of entire networks. Not only our banks, air-



ABHILASH PANDA

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ports and transport infrastructure are networked but increasingly energy, education, security, health and protective assets are intertwined through the cyber domain, too. The remotely-managed floodgates, early warning systems, waste management, social sites for crowdsourcing, safety information and space technology for conducting damage assessment, among others, are now part of a connected system.

The COVID-19 pandemic shows that digital connectivity is critical to societal resilience and business continuity in times of crisis. For digital infrastructure providers in developed and emerging markets, higher demand for connectivity may be counterbalanced by frequent negative shocks. For instance, take hurricane Harvey. Back in 2017 when the storm made landfall in Texas and caused more than a 100 deaths and

\$125 billion in damages, hospitals were quickly overwhelmed. They lacked the essential resources to treat patients and many had to evacuate due to flooding. While relocating patients, the staff had to leave the records behind, with limited ways to access them from afar. The shift to different hospitals severely reduced operational capacity as doctors scrambled to piece together critical data. The efficiency and effectiveness of patient care undoubtedly took a hit as a result. The 2019 cyclone Fani that struck the coastal state of Odisha, ripped apart the telecom infrastructure, with direct losses amounting to more than \$70 million. In the aftermath of the 2011 Queensland floods, over 50 per cent of the organisations reported that they had experienced disruption in their business operations to different degrees as server rooms were



affected by inundation.

Cyber security threats are another major risk, which have already taken a toll on a few notable occasions. The 2015 cyberattack in Ukraine, which affected the electricity supply, and the 2017 Wannacry and NotPetyransomware, which heavily disrupted critical infrastructure services across Europe, are just a few instances.

The correlation of such complex events with the risk of malicious hazards, such as cyberattacks, may exacerbate the most vital of societal func-

tions including the authorities' capacity to mitigate the impact of these cascading events. In effect, cascading events make it difficult to estimate the extent of any single induced disruption, as many intervening variables may affect the outcome.

Such risks are compounded by the fact that many of the small and medium-sized companies on which much of the national economy relies are likely to come with their own cyber security-related vulnerabilities. Multiple studies indicate that Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are identified as a clear target of cyberattacks and they are less able to withstand them. A 2019 study by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) identified that 43 per cent of SMEs are the target of cyberattacks. The current ambition to digitise as soon as possible as part of the SME recov-

ery and response to COVID-19 has increased the occurrence of cyberattacks. A 2020 McKinsey study estimates that spear-phishing attacks have increased seven-fold since the beginning of the pandemic.

To increase the resilience of digital infrastructure investments, it is necessary to monitor and measure their vulnerability, sensitivity, interdependency and exposure to risk. This shift requires investors, operators and decision-makers to make sure that disaster and climate risks are considered in the location, design, construction and operation of planned infrastructure investments.

For digital infrastructure to be classified as "sustainable," regulators need to include natural hazards as a key criterion as well as have a clear definition of resilience. For that, there is a need to explicitly require institutional investors and asset

managers, as well as infrastructure developers, to integrate disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and resilience into their decisions.

With trillions of dollars ready to be injected into the recovery from COVID-19, it is now the right time for the Government and the private sector to consider how best these investments can be resilient, green and equitable. In our rush to recover from COVID-19, we must not miss a golden opportunity to reduce the existing levels of risk and to avoid creating new ones. Sustainability and resilience are two sides of the same coin. Unsustainable infrastructure undermines the resilience of those who are dependent on its smooth functioning. It is time we address these critical issues and ask ourselves: Are we investing in resilience or obsolescence?

Indirect tax mop-up exceeds target

Grows 12% in FY21 at ₹10.71 lakh cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The net indirect tax collection in 2020-21 grew 12.3 per cent annually to ₹10.71 lakh crore, thereby exceeding the target set in revised estimates, the Finance Ministry said on Tuesday.

The mop-up through indirect taxes, which include GST, Customs and excise duties, was ₹9.54 lakh crore in 2019-20. In the Revised Estimates

(RE) for 2020-21, the target was set at ₹9.89 lakh crore.

Net collections from Goods and Services Tax (GST) stood at ₹5.48 lakh crore during 2020-21, an eight per cent drop compared to Rs 5.99 lakh crore in the previous fiscal year.

This include revenues from Central GST, Integrated GST and compensation cess.

Customs revenue during 2020-21 came in at ₹1.32 lakh crore, a 21 per cent growth over ₹1.09 lakh crore collected in 2019-20.

Net collections from central excise and service tax

(arrears) stood at ₹3.91 lakh crore, up 59.2 per cent over ₹2.45 lakh crore mopped up in 2019-20.

“The provisional figures for indirect tax collections (GST and non-GST) for Financial Year 2020-21 show that net revenue collections are at ₹10.71 lakh crore as compared to ₹ 9.54 lakh crore for Financial Year 2019-20, thereby registering a growth of 12.3 per cent,” a finance ministry statement said.

It said during the last fiscal year, GST collections were severely affected in the first half on account of COVID-19.

Indian economy may clock double-digit growth in 2021: Moody’s

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The second wave of Covid-19 infections presents a risk to India’s growth forecast as the reimposition of measures to curb the spread of the virus will hit economic activity, but a double-digit GDP growth is likely in 2021 given the low level of activity last year, Moody’s said on Tuesday.

Moody’s expects that given the focus on ‘micro-containment zones’ to deal with the current wave of infections, as opposed to a nationwide lockdown, the impact on economic activity would be less severe than that seen in 2020.

“India’s very low coronavirus death count (only about

1,70,179 deaths have been recorded as of April 12) and relatively very young population also help mitigate risks. GDP is still likely to grow in double digits in 2021 given the low level of activity in 2020,” Moody’s Investors Service said.

In its commentary on India, Moody’s said the countermeasures to combat the second wave – some of which are due to remain in place at least until the end of April – risk weakening the economic recovery.

However, the targeted nature of containment measures and rapid progress on vaccinating the population will mitigate the credit-negative impact.

Sensex rallies over 660 pts as bulls return; financials, auto stocks shine

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets regained footing on Tuesday after the previous session’s massive selloff, tracking renewed buying interest in financial, bank and auto counters amid firm global cues.

Participants also cheered the government’s decision to fast-track approval for foreign-produced Covid-19 vaccines. Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine has received emergency use authorisation in India, paving the way for the third coronavirus vaccine in the country.

However, the Covid-19 situation remains worrisome and will determine market trajectory in the near term, traders

said.

Building on a positive start, the 30-share BSE Sensex gained momentum in late-afternoon trade to close 660.68 points or 1.38 per cent higher at 48,544.06.

On similar lines, the broader NSE Nifty surged 194 points or 1.36 per cent to finish at 14,504.80. M&M was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying 8.02 per cent, followed by Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, Maruti, IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank, ONGC and Axis Bank.

On the other hand, TCS was the biggest laggard, slumping 4.21 per cent, a day after reporting its March quarter results.

Ordered probe of WhatsApp policy on competition aspect: CCI to HC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The new privacy policy of WhatsApp would lead to excessive data collection and “stalking” of consumers for targeted advertising to bring in more users and is therefore, an alleged abuse of dominant position, competition regulator CCI told the Delhi High Court on Tuesday.

The submission was made before Justice Navin Chawla by senior advocate Aman Lekhi on behalf of the Competition Commission of

India (CCI) in defence of its order directing an investigation into the new privacy policy of messaging platform WhatsApp.

The CCI was looking into the competition aspect and not the alleged violation of individuals’ privacy which was being looked into by the Supreme Court, Lekhi said.

“There is no question of jurisdictional error,” he said and added that WhatsApp and Facebook’s pleas challenging the CCI’s decision were “incompetent and misconceived”.

As eco recovers, 59% firms in India plan salary hike: Survey

PTI ■ MUMBAI

As the economy moves to a recovery path after a sharp decline last year amid the pandemic, a study has shown that 59% of companies in India are intending to give salary increments to their employees in 2021. According to staffing company Genius Consultants’ 10th Hiring, Attrition and

Compensation Trend 2021-22, with this impressive growth rate, the market is expected to be stable, and the companies will also relook at their business continuity strategy along with strengthening the workforce. This year, the increment scenario seems “welcoming with 59% of companies saying that increment is on the cards, which will range between 5-10 per cent.”

Govt begins process for inviting financial bids for Air India sale

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Govt has initiated the process for inviting financial bids for the sale of national carrier Air India and the deal is likely to conclude by September, sources said.Salt-to-software conglomerate Tata Group was among the “multiple” entities that had put in preliminary bids for buying loss-making Air India in Dec last year.The sources said that after analysing the preliminary bids, eligible bidders were given access to the Virtual Data Room of Air India, following which investors’ queries were answered.The transaction has now moved to the financial bids stage, the sources said, adding that the deal is expected to conclude by Sept.

DDA host online meeting

Delhi Development Authority held its meeting on 13.04.2021 through video conferencing under the chairmanship of Anil Bajjal, Hon’ble Lt. Governor, Delhi/Chairman, DDA attended by Anurag Jain, IAS, Vice Chairman, DDA and other members of the Authority.

Following major decisions were taken: Master Plan for Delhi 2041: The Authority has given preliminary approval for draft Master Plan for Delhi 2041. The draft will now be placed in public domain for inviting objections/suggestions from the public. Master Plan for Delhi prepared by Delhi Development Authority is a statutory document that facilitates Delhi’s development by assessing the present condition and guiding .

SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE
NIFTY 50	14364.90	14528.90	14274.90	14504.80	194.00
M&M	754.00	817.00	750.00	816.00	58.50
BAJAJFINSV	9200.00	9847.50	9190.05	9760.00	602.85
TATAMOTORS	287.25	304.55	280.55	302.00	15.45
BAIFINANCE	4335.10	4774.90	4514.05	4730.00	219.00
MARUTI	6520.00	6845.40	6468.80	6825.00	304.15
HDFC	2422.40	2523.10	2412.25	2522.00	102.40
JSWSTEEL	607.00	632.80	604.00	629.00	24.85
ONGC	98.05	102.50	98.05	102.00	3.95
ICICIBANK	541.00	563.80	537.85	559.60	21.05
POWERGRID	205.15	209.40	202.45	209.00	7.85
INDUSINDBK	850.00	881.00	844.50	876.95	32.55
AXISBANK	655.60	664.85	660.00	660.00	24.40
SBIN	332.00	342.25	330.50	341.25	12.40
HINDALCO	336.20	350.30	336.20	348.60	12.40
TATASTEEL	862.00	881.60	849.05	878.95	27.40
HEROMOTOCO	2799.00	2879.00	2773.25	2868.00	81.90
COALINDIA	124.80	128.45	124.80	128.30	3.60
EICHERMOT	2427.20	2504.95	2420.20	2497.05	69.85
SBILIFE	58.45	900.75	574.75	897.15	24.70
BHARTIARTL	526.40	540.00	523.10	536.85	14.40
HDFCLIFE	681.95	710.70	685.00	709.50	18.20
UPL	594.00	618.50	589.00	624.25	14.70
HDFCBANK	1368.00	1406.45	1361.00	1401.00	33.95
IT	1347.25	1382.00	1347.25	1376.55	31.40
IOC	87.20	89.25	87.10	88.95	1.95
KOTAKBANK	1745.80	1786.05	1723.45	1777.00	34.50
TITAN	1528.60	1553.30	1516.65	1540.00	29.55
NTPC	99.60	101.15	99.25	100.85	1.80
BAJAJ-AUTO	3569.00	3623.70	3515.20	3605.00	64.00
SHREECEM	30200.00	30699.90	30110.00	30420.95	539.90
ITC	20.20	20.70	20.20	20.65	3.35
SUNPHARMA	624.00	635.55	616.10	628.45	9.10
ULTRACEMCO	655.00	665.45	650.60	660.00	93.60
BPCIL	405.00	412.50	402.20	409.40	8.20
TATACONSUM	667.00	677.90	656.00	663.80	5.45
RELIANCE	1924.00	1940.60	1917.65	1932.30	21.15
GRASIM	1372.80	1406.70	1370.60	1389.55	12.95
HINDUNILVR	2470.00	2505.90	2448.80	2467.00	5.20
ASIANPAINT	2600.00	2626.00	2563.90	2574.50	27.70
CPIA	921.95	932.60	878.30	889.00	-13.40
ADANIPORTS	750.00	755.75	701.35	731.00	-11.55
INFY	1433.00	1435.25	1375.00	1402.85	-22.90
NESTLEIND	17587.00	17599.95	17401.00	17210.00	-291.70
DIVISLAB	3847.00	3850.00	3702.00	3716.00	-43.65
BRITANNIA	3814.10	3847.00	3729.05	3748.00	-64.75
HCLTECH	1012.50	1020.80	972.20	988.30	-21.10
WIPRO	432.00	437.55	412.60	421.75	-10.85
TECHM	1045.00	1050.25	983.00	1005.00	-34.85
TCS	3214.00	3214.00	3073.05	3120.00	-126.55
DRREDDY	5144.70	5144.70	4751.10	4799.45	-197.50

SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE
NIFTY NEXT 50	33800.55	34197.15	33592.45	34063.50	349.55
PEL	1632.90	1728.00	1632.90	1711.90	81.80
MOTHERSUMI	200.70	212.70	200.70	210.60	9.90
GAIL	134.00	139.00	133.90	136.80	5.85
MRF	7950.00	8310.00	7990.00	8265.00	3422.15
DLF	248.50	258.50	246.10	252.20	8.60
MARICO	407.00	424.00	407.00	421.30	13.90
HAVELLS	993.50	1029.00	980.65	1027.50	33.80
PNB	34.00	35.30	33.65	35.05	1.10
ICICIPRULI	444.00	460.65	442.05	458.00	14.30
PGHH	13153.75	13649.25	13075.00	13582.00	402.30
NMDC	135.20	139.00	133.15	138.00	3.75
ADANIENET	1077.00	1116.30	1051.05	1102.00	27.60
HINDPETRO	225.60	232.65	225.60	231.70	5.30
SIEMENS	1731.00	1787.20	1721.00	1768.90	38.75
VEDL	213.30	219.50	212.10	217.90	4.70
MCDOWELL-N	520.05	526.00	510.55	525.30	9.65
ADANIGREEN	1085.40	1138.00	1035.15	1105.00	19.35
PETRONET	1084.15	1116.05	1082.00	1110.70	17.55
BOSCHLTD	13625.00	14039.45	13447.10	13879.75	197.80
GODREJCP	722.20	733.50	712.95	725.60	10.20
IGL	514.80	524.25	511.75	524.00	7.35
YESBANK	14.40	14.75	14.30	14.65	0.10
BAJAJHLDNG	3264.05	3415.95	3250.10	3324.45	44.50
JUBLFOOD	2715.10	2727.80	2660.70	2765.00	35.60
HDFCAMC	2842.00	2890.00	2827.00	2881.00	36.30
ICICIIG	1365.60	1389.00	1367.00	1367.55	16.50
MUTHOOTFIN	1185.00	1209.00	1169.15	1172.65	12.70
INDUSTOWER	241.00	247.35	241.00	242.20	2.30
BANDHANBNK	334.80	341.00	318.00	330.65	3.10
DABUR	555.20	565.70	554.30	559.45	4.70
TORNTPHARM	2583.00	2607.05	2544.05	2576.40	20.60
BIOCON	406.70	412.35	401.35	407.50	3.20
SBICARD	897.80	916.90	883.00	897.10	6.65
DMAT	2832.95	2885.00	2812.00	2830.00	15.10
INDIGO	1594.00	1639.60	1593.80	1600.00	6.20
AALKEM	2746.30	2840.00	2736.15	2750.05	4.50
BERGEPAINT	724.60	738.90	721.00	727.50	-0.70
ACC	1895.00	1904.95	1858.00	1881.60	-4.10
ABBOTINDIA	1505.00	1514.90	1492.80	1499.00	-50.70
LUPIN	1050.00	1058.70	1022.10	1041.00	-4.15
AMBUJACEM	305.00	309.05	298.50	302.90	-1.40
ADIPHARMA	917.10	925.00	889.50	914.45	-4.75
APOLLOHOSP	3032.35	3061.90	2950.10	2986.50	-18.25
COLPAL	1555.00	1588.95	1534.25	1537.10	-22.10
CADILAHG	512.00	513.30	478.50	492.00	-7.70
PIDILITIND	1850.00	1859.45	1791.25	1800.00	-49.30
ADANTRAN	897.10	913.70	878.00	899.00	-25.90
ITI	427.00	432.15	406.50	410.95	-151.80
NAUKRI	4780.00	4800.00	4520.00	4560.00	-191.10

BSE 500

Script	Open	High	Low	LTP	HINDUNIP
Security Name	Open	High	Low	LTP	EICHMIND
TATAMOTORS	287.70	304.50	280.55	302.70	DELTAECO
ADANIEXPORTS	749.80	755.40	701.85	731.10	IOC
ADANIENET	1075.00	1116.15	1051.40	1105.85	TTIAN
INFY	1433.00	1435.95	1375.00	1398.60	LTTS
BAIFINANCE	4525.00	4776.15	4515.00	4727.40	JBFLFOOD
DRREDDY	5200.00	5200.00	4750.00	4780.60	HINDCOPI
TCS	3230.00	3230.00	3074.55	3105.00	VEDL
SBIN	331.00	342.25	330.65	340.95	ZEEL
TATASTEEL	859.90	881.60	849.00	878.95	NATIONAL
JSWSTEEL	607.90	633.00	604.20	630.40	ESCRATS
CPIA	928.00	932.40	878.25	885.20	JAGRAN*
LICHSGFIN	382.75	395.05	381.05	394.20	IPCALAB
RELIANCE	1925.00	1940.15	1918.35	1931.90	ITI
TATAPOWER	92.75	96.30	91.60	95.80	DABUR
WIPRO	430.50	437.35	412.75	418.65	SRF
ADANIPOWER	89.10	94.90	88.30	90.35	INDIACIA
SAIL	85.00	91.70	85.00	90.70	HDFCLIFE
TATACHEM	750.50	767.50	739.10	758.85	INTELLEC
IDEA	8.80	8.99	8.80	8.95	NMDC
ICICIBANK	539.25	563.70	538.00	560.45	BIOCON
HDFCBANK	1369.00	1406.30	1360.75	1400.30	SOBHA
HSCL	42.00	43.65	41.80	43.35	ASTRAZEE
PNB	33.85	35.25	33.65	35.10	BAJAJ-AO
MMTC	753.00	817.10	753.00	811.65	ABCAPITA
ITC	205.00	209.60	205.60	208.70	JSWENERG
UPL	592.00	618.35	589.05	604.45	CONCOR
BAJAJFINSV	9150.00	9840.00	9150.00	9809.95	AMBUJAC
CADILAHC	514.90	514.90	478.55	488.55	POWERGR
INDUSINDBK	645.00	898.90	644.40	880.65	BRITANN
MAARUTI	6525.00	6882.10	6470.90	6818.45	SPIJETNE
CLICITECH	1015.00	1020.40	972.40	981.85	MGL
HEG	2025.00	2200.95	1983.05	2063.25	ACC
AXISBANK	62.00	66.70	63.00	66.25	AMARAJA
GRANIPR	58.05	65.55	58.05	61.60	MPHASIS
ADANITRAN	888.00	913.70	883.00	899.65	BALRAMC
GRASIM	1362.00	1406.00	1362.00	1392.35	IGL
ATGL	390.25	1068.85	390.00	1039.35	SHEREEC
INDUSTALST	99.00	41.150	384.45	409.50	MEGH
ADILAIPLATHAB	3344.00	3556.30	2913.00	2948.80	DIXON
HDFC	2420.00	2523.30	2410.50	2512.25	ASTRAL
SBICARD	895.10	920.00	883.90	897.90	RECITD
TECHM	1035.00	1050.00	983.00	1001.30	THYROC
SRRTRANSFIN	1306.00	1398.00	1306.00	1382.55	CUMMIN
INDUSTREE	2119.50	2171.00	1865.95	2048.30	FUJAS
IRBBLANK	190.10	195.30	186.95	193.50	GI
APOLLORYTE	205.90	218.00	203.00	215.65	PILIDIT
INDUSINDBK	334.00	341.00	318.55	331.85	KAJARIA
FEDERALBNK	70.50	77.85	70.50	77.00	IEX
CHOLAFIN	51.10	543.50	50.70	532.45	NTPC
ASHOKLEY	112.10	115.80	111.50	115.30	MANAPP
BANKBARODA	67.15	69.25	66.30	68.90	RAIN
IBULHSGFIN	171.10	173.40	166.55	171.95	BAJAJCON
LEUMARK	504.00	518.90	485.00	517.55	MARICO
GUJALKALKA	404.00	469.15	378.00	442.85	INDIAMA
SUNPHARMA	620.55	635.30	616.55	627.40	BATAINDA
BPCL	404.00	412.40	402.10	409.50	FORTIS
INDHALCO	335.65	350.30	335.65	348.75	WOCKPH
DLF	248.00	258.45	247.65	255.80	COALIND
MOTHERSUMI	200.50	212.65	200.00	211.50	SWOLAR
MM&FMIN	172.00	178.90	171.10	176.65	BALKRISI
NHCL	73.10	76.90	73.10	75.80	INDIGO
BANKINDIA	45.40	46.80	44.60	46.45	HDFCAM
DANKIN	67.70	73.40	66.20	71.55	INFIBEAM
BANKANGRE	1040.10	1137.15	1034.15	1113.35	CESC
COFORGE	3120.00	3147.00	2820.00	2889.25	PEL
HAVELLS	1003.00	1028.15	981.00	1023.75	BFC
L&T	88.80	95.00	88.80	94.75	GNFC
UNITRACEMCO	6506.30	6650.65	6506.60	6604.80	ICICIPR
DIVISLAB	3800.00	3848.55	3701.90	3720.25	BOSCHPL
GRDFIRSTB	50.80	54.40	50.80	54.05	GODREJP
TATAELXSI	1945.90	2949.70	2801.00	2825.70	UNIONBA
LT	318.10	318.10	314.10	3173.50	PETRON
LUPIN	1046.10	1057.40	1022.80	1037.15	DBL
TATACONSUM	654.00	677.95	654.00	663.35	SIEMENS
NANDAKRI	4770.00	4795.45	4522.45	4560.40	RCF
GAIL	133.15	139.90	133.15	138.85	SBLIFE
AUBANK	1070.00	1105.70	1035.05	1081.45	SOUTHBA
HINDMOTOCO	2795.00	2877.00	2775.00	2864.00	MUTHOON
PFIZER	4850.70	5150.00	4738.00	5072.40	TVSMOOT
ABFRL	130.00	180.75	117.00	179.60	ISEC
LAULUSLABS	419.50	448.50	410.35	439.65	CENTRAL
COBALTANKB	1730.00	1785.55	1725.00	1775.85	BARHART
MMRF	79300.00	83000.00	79000.00	82698.30	FRETAL
URCTC	1585.00	1624.05	1585.00	1612.15	TORNTPC
LAURUPHARMA	919.00	924.95	881.00	909.75	NESTLEIN
ONGC	98.05	102.50	98.05	102.05	FINOLEX
IOB	16.50	18.45	16.35	18.05	INDHOTEL
PEL	1640.00	1726.75	1639.55	1715.00	KPRMILL
CANBK	135.00	137.95	131.70	137.35	EXIDEIN
PVR	1075.85	1097.00	1044.80	1085.65	TATAMOT
INDUSTMETALI	870.00	915.90	855.00	903.05	VINATOR
JUSTDIAL	865.20	905.30	856.00	867.95	INDIANB
DMART	2822.20	2884.25	2812.05	2834.55	TATACOM
ASIANPAINT	2790.00	2625.50	2565.15	2571.50	NBCC
VOLITAS	962.00	969.75	942.00	959.35	RVNL
STAR	892.20	917.05	870.00	876.15	ICIGI
HARTIARTIL	523.50	538.40	523.30	536.00	TRIDENT
MAAHABANK	23.45	27.30	23.00	27.00	HINDZINC
INDAINDAIN	524.70	527.05	504.40	510.90	GMM
APOLLOPHOSP	3023.00	3058.30	2952.70	2986.50	BEMIL
DEEPAKIN	1596.90	1628.05	1592.30	1586.55	SUNTV

US calls for ‘pause’ on use of J&J vax

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US is recommending a “pause” in using the single-dose Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine to investigate reports of potentially dangerous blood clots.

In a joint statement Tuesday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration said they were investigating unusual clots that occurred 6 to 13 days after vaccination.

The clots occurred in veins that drain blood from the brain and occurred together with low platelets. All six cases were in women between the ages of 18 and 48; there was one death.

The reports appear similar to a rare, unusual type of clotting disorder that European authorities say is possibly linked to another COVID-19 vaccine not yet cleared in the U.S., from AstraZeneca.

More than 6.8 million doses of the J&J vaccine have been administered in the U.S., the vast majority with no or mild side effects.

Federally run mass vaccination sites will pause the use of the J&J shot, and states and other providers are expected to follow. The other two authorized vaccines, from Moderna and Pfizer, make up the vast

share of COVID-19 shots administered in the U.S. And are not affected by the pause.

“I’d like to stress these events appear to be extremely rare. However Covid-19 vaccine safety is a top priority,” FDA Acting Commissioner Janet Woodcock said at a news conference. “We expect it to be a matter of days for this pause.”

A CDC committee will meet Wednesday to discuss the cases and the FDA has also launched an investigation into the cause of the clots and low

Austria’s Health Min resigns, saying he’s overworked

Berlin: Austria’s Health Minister announced his resignation on Tuesday, saying that he couldn’t continue in the grueling job of helping lead the country’s coronavirus response because of persistent personal health problems caused by overwork.

Rudolf Anschober, 60, had been health minister since January 2020, when his Green party became the junior partner in a governing coalition under conservative Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. **AP**

platelet counts.

CDC’s Dr. Anne Schuchat said authorities have not seen similar clots after use of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, and that people should continue to get vaccinated with those shots.

The agencies are recommending that people who were given the J&J vaccine who are experiencing severe headache, abdominal pain, leg pain, or shortness of breath within three weeks after receiving the shot contact their health care provider.

J&J delays vax rollout in Europe

Berlin: Johnson & Johnson says it is delaying the rollout of its coronavirus vaccine in Europe amid a US probe into rare blood clots. The company announced the decision Tuesday after regulators in the United States said they were recommending a “pause” in administration of the single-dose shot to investigate reports of potentially dangerous blood clots.

“We have been reviewing these cases with European health authorities,” the company said. “We have made the decision to proactively delay the rollout of our vaccine in Europe.” **AP**

Iran to enrich uranium to highest level ever

AP ■ DUBAI, UAE

An Iranian nuclear negotiator says Tehran will begin enriching uranium to 60% purity after an attack on its Natanz nuclear facility, higher than the program ever has before.

Abbas Araghchi made the comment Tuesday in Vienna. He was quoted by the state-run IRNA news agency.

Iran had been enriching up to 20%. That is a short technical step to weapons-grade levels.

The International Atomic Energy Agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Press TV, the Iranian state television’s English-language arm, separately said that the



In this photo released by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, right, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov greet each other by touching elbows and wear face masks to curb the spread of COVID-19 prior to their talks in Tehran, Iran on Tuesday **AP**

IAEA had been informed of the move. It said the enrichment would begin as of Wednesday.

The broadcaster also quoted the negotiator as saying Iran would introduce another

1,000 centrifuges at Natanz, without elaborating.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP’s earlier story follows below. **DUBAI, United Arab**



Muslims pray during the first dawn prayers of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, around the Kaaba, the cubic building at the Grand Mosque, as they keep social distancing to help curb the spread of the coronavirus, in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia on Tuesday **AP**

WHO urges pause in market sale of captured live wild animals

AP ■ GENEVA

The United Nations’ health agency on Tuesday urged countries to suspend the sale of live animals captured from the wild in food markets as an emergency measure, saying wild animals are a leading source of emerging infectious diseases like the coronavirus. The World Health Organisation issued guidance saying that animals “are the source of more than 70 percent of all emerging infectious diseases in humans, many of which are caused by novel viruses.”

Taiwan launches shipbuilding programme amid China threats

Kaohsiung (Taiwan): Taiwan launched an amphibious transport ship Tuesday that’s the first from its new naval shipbuilding programme begun as China escalates its threats to use military force to annex the island it claims is its territory.

President Tsai Ing-wen presided over the launching ceremony at a shipyard in the southern port city of Kaohsiung for the first in the series of ships intended as a defense against any Chinese invasion.

The ship is “designed and built in accordance with the needs of national defense combat training,” Tsai said.

Emirates (AP) — Iran’s foreign minister warned Tuesday that a weekend attack on its main nuclear enrichment site at Natanz could hurt ongoing negotiations over its tattered atomic deal with world powers.

Those talks are aimed at finding a way for the United States to re-enter the agreement, the goal of which is to limit Iran’s enrichment of uranium in exchange relief on sanctions.

The U.S. has insisted it had nothing to do with Sunday’s sabotage at the Natanz nuclear facility. Instead, Israel is widely believed to have carried out the assault that damaged centrifuges, though it has not claimed it. But Mohammad Javad Zarif still issued a warning to Washington.

NATO warns Russia over forces near Ukraine

Brussels: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg expressed the Western military alliance’s “unwavering” support for Ukraine and warned Moscow on Tuesday not to push its troop buildup along Russia’s border with the neighbouring country.

“NATO stands with Ukraine,” Stoltenberg said during a news conference with Ukrainian Foreign Minister

GLOBE TROTTING

US TO LEAVE TROOPS IN AF BEYOND MAY, 9/11 NEW GOAL

Washington: President Joe Biden has decided to leave American troops in Afghanistan beyond the May 1 deadline negotiated with the Taliban by the Trump administration, and has set the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks as the new goal, US officials said.

5 MINERS DIE IN COAL MINE COLLAPSE IN AF

Kabul: A makeshift coal mine collapsed on Tuesday in northern Afghanistan, burying five miners and leaving four more missing, a provincial security official said. Jawed Basharat, a spokesman for the provincial police chief in northern Baghlan province said a rescue team is at the site.

Biden aims for bipartisanship but applies sly pressure

WASHINGTON (AP): President Joe Biden has begun publicly courting Republicans to back his sweeping infrastructure plan, but his reach across the aisle is intended just as much to keep Democrats in line as it is a first step in an uphill climb to any bipartisan deal.

Biden’s high-profile Oval Office meeting with a bipartisan group of lawmakers on Monday was just one piece of his effort to win over GOP lawmakers, White House aides said. But even if it doesn’t suc-

ceed, it could prove useful — boxing in Republicans while helping keep the widely disparate Democrats in line. Some moderate Democrats, notably Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, have urged an effort at bipartisanship to pass the \$2.3 trillion bill.

And while Biden has made clear, publicly and privately, that he wants Republican support, the White House is also preparing to go it alone, if necessary, to get the bill passed. That would leave the GOP in the politically unpopular posi-

tion of explaining why it objected to investments many Americans want.

“I’m prepared to negotiate as to the extent of my infrastructure project, as well as how we pay for it,” Biden said during Monday’s meeting with lawmakers. “Everyone acknowledges we need a significant increase in infrastructure.”

Biden dismissed the idea his outreach to Republicans is just for show, proclaiming, “I’m not big on window dressing, as you’ve observed.”

In fact, lawmakers left the White House meeting with the understanding that Biden was open to discussion and the president’s team was headed to Capitol Hill to meet with them or any other representatives, as soon as Tuesday.

“Those are all the exact words that I wanted to hear going into the meeting,” Republican Rep. Garret Graves of Louisiana, a member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said in an interview with The Associated Press.

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LOOK AT LOCKDOWN IN WORST-HIT DISTRICTS: HC

corridors of Covid hospitals/ centres, we direct the Government to acquire open places in the city areas of districts that are worst hit in the state to set up temporary level 1 hospital in a makeshift structure.”

The bench asked the state government to “arrange manpower on contract basis immediately to serve all those who are admitted to temporary level 1 Covid hospitals/centres.”

“We also direct for immediate purchase and supply of bipap machine and high flow cannula mask in ambulance to all the district hospitals and level 2 and level hospitals of the districts like Prayagraj, Lucknow, Varanasi, Kanpur, Gorakhpur where covid infection has got widely spread,” the bench said.

“We have been informed that a new Covid testing machine(COVAS) is not functioning for want of testing kit. We direct the state government to provide/arrange testing kits available for COBAS machine at Moti Lal Nehru Medical College, Prayagraj within twenty four hours,” the bench said.

The high court asked the state government to vigorously carry out the immunization programme in the state.

On medical needs of non-covid patients, the bench said, “We must not forget that people suffer from various other diseases and so they may need not only urgent medical help but incentive care admission as well.”

The bench directed the state government to buy more ICU beds for hospitals. “We must give priority to public health over elections and the Government is expected to streamline every department of public health and public care in the light of the observations made here in above” said the bench while fixing April 19 as the next date of hearing in the case.

During the course of hearing, some lawyers complained that health officials are not conducting COVID test properly to show less covid patients and that testing samples are kept waiting for more than twelve hours. The court directed District Magistrate as well as CMO of Prayagraj to be present on video conferencing during the course of hearing.

MAHARASHTRA BARS PUBLIC MOVEMENT

confectionaries, all types of food shops, public transports -including air planes trains, buses, taxis, auto rickshaws, banks e-commerce, petrol pumps, water supply services, electric and gas supply services and ATMs have been exempted from the restrictions.

Hotels and restaurants have been allowed to continue home delivery service, while restaurants and bars will remain open only for in-house guests.

As part of the restrictions, the State Government announced distribution of three kilograms of wheat, two kilograms of rice to poor people for one full month. It will give one-time assistance of ₹1,500 per month to each registered construction workers, authorised hawkers and licenced autorickshaw drivers.

The Maharashtra Government on Tuesday announced that films, TV serials and advertisement shoots will be halted in the State from Wednesday evening as part of the fresh guidelines to curb the coronavirus cases.

BN Tiwari, President of the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) said the state government’s decision has come as a “huge shock”.

“We should have been allowed to work. Films and TV shoots were underway with complete precautions, adhering to all Government guidelines. But the complete halt of shootings is a setback. We plan to write a letter to the CM, requesting him to allow us to shoot.

“We would take utmost precaution, figure out new, stricter guidelines but if the work is stopped, it’ll be a huge loss for us,” Tiwari said.

INDIA TO HAVE MORE JABS IN BASKET

The decision to give nod to more jabs aims to facilitate quicker access to such foreign vaccines. It would also encourage imports, including that of bulk drug material, and help in optimal utilisation of domestic fill and finish capacity, which will, in turn, provide a fillip to vaccine manufacturing capacity and total vaccine availability for domestic use, said sources in the Union Health Ministry.

The matter was discussed in the 23rd meeting of the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVC) chaired by Niti Aayog’s Member (Health) Dr VK Paul, on Sunday amid the surge in Covid cases in the country which so far has infected 1,36,89,453 people and claimed 1,71,058 lives.

After comprehensive deliberation, the NEGVC recommended that vaccines for Covid-19 being manufactured in foreign countries as well as those which have already received approval for “restricted use” by USFDA, EMA, UK MHRA, PMDA Japan may be granted emergency use approval in India.”

It is understood that the “vaccines, which are listed in the World Health Organization’s (WHO’s) emergency use listing, may also be granted emergency use

approval in India”.

The Central Government, after due consideration, has accepted the recommendation of NEGVC, said a statement from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

DIDI ACCUSES EC OF BIAS, POLL PANEL BANS BENGAL BJP CHIEF FOR 48 HOURS

The ECI also slapped a notice on Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh for making “objectionable statements.” He has been asked to explain his conduct by Wednesday. Referring to the Sitalkuchi incident Ghosh had said “if the naughty boys do not behave then more Sitalkuchis would take place.”

Earlier, Mamata staged a protest against what she called “undemocratic decision” of the Election Commission to ban her from campaigning.

Despite being banned for campaigning, Mamata stole the limelight when she went for a three-hour sit-in demonstration at the Mahatma Gandhi statue from 12 pm on Tuesday.

She sat in her trade mark wheel-chair with a small folding table which she used for painting. There were no TMC leaders to be seen around the Chief Minister save her security persons and a few hundred onlookers who watched her draw sketches till 3 pm after which she withdrew her protest. Mamata, who missed out on at least three mega rallies on Tuesday ahead of the crucial fifth phase polling on Saturday, made up for the loss of time by cramming in two public meetings at Barasat and Bidhannagar on Tuesday late evening just after the ban ended.

On Wednesday, Mamata will visit Mathabhanga in Cooch Behar where four people had died in Central forces firing on April 10.

Earlier the ECI in a five-page order had banned her from campaigning for violation of the provisions of Model Code of Conduct. Sections 123(3) and (3A) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 were applied against her.

Meanwhile, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday launched a scathing attack on the Chief Minister for “talking nonsense” against Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying what she had been doing of late was unbecoming of her conduct as a Chief Minister.

Singh, who is known to enjoy a good chemistry with Mamata, said in his meeting at Swaroop Nagar in North 24 Parganas, “I have also been a Chief Minister and I know how a CM should behave ... You have not been behaving like

a Chief Minister should do ... you have been talking nonsense about our Prime Minister... it is strange that you blame him for everything.”

MODI FOR GLOBAL SYNERGY TO FACE PANDEMIC CHALLENGE

Many solutions have emerged and many more are yet to come.”

But as global thinkers and leaders, we must ask ourselves some more questions. Why did it come to this? Is it perhaps because in race of economic development, the concern for welfare for humanity was left behind? The answer to many such questions can be found in our recent past, he observed.

More than 150 speakers from 50 countries will share their opinions during the four-day conference.

The Raisina Dialogue is being held virtually this time due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. It is India’s flagship conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics and is being hosted by the think tank Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

The theme for the 2021 conference is “#ViralWorld: Outbreaks, Outliers and Out of Control”.

GOA FORWARD PARTY WITHDRAWS FROM BJP-LED NDA

The GFP’s State executive committee and political affairs committee met in Panaji on Tuesday.

Later, GFP president Vijai Sardesai, in a formal letter to senior BJP leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, conveyed the party’s decision to withdraw from the NDA. “I write to you today formally declaring the Goa Forward Party’s withdrawal from the National Democratic Alliance. There is no doubt that our relationship with the NDA ended in July 2019, with no room for reconsideration,” Sardesai said in the letter. He claimed that in the last two years, the BJP has repeatedly introduced “anti-Goan policies” in every session of the State Legislative Assembly.

Since July 2019, the BJP’s Goa leadership has turned its back on the people of the State who looked ahead with hope to the prospect of all-round development, the GFP alleged.

Parrikar’s death brought Goa to despair, ushering in a period of rampant corruption and dishonesty, it said.

The GFP has pointed out the State Government’s alleged failure in handling various issues, such as three linear projects,

the Mahadayi river water dispute, and other matters.

KERALA MIN JALEEL QUITSDAYS AFTER NEPOTISM FINDING BY LOK AYUKT

The GAD had warned the Chief Minister that Adeeb was not qualified for the post.

The senior officials in the GAD and the minorities development finance commission reportedly objected to the appointment of Adeeb, who was the former chief of the outlawed SIMI. Jaleel reportedly threatened the officials not to speak about it.

Jaleel had approached the Kerala High Court with a plea to get the Lok Ayukta findings quashed. The moment the CPI(M) think tank saw the writing on the wall that their captain , Chief Minister Vijayan, was in for trouble, they dumped Jaleel who was left with no other option other than resigning.

A host of CPI (M) leaders and their poor cousins in the CPI had built a shield around Jaleel to save him from the Opposition onslaught. But by Tuesday morning Jaleel understood that time was up for him and hence the move to quit.

Jaleel is the fourth Minister to quit the Pinarayi Vijayan Government on account of impropriety and violation of oath. E P Jayarajan, Minister for Industries (who was the number two in the Government) had resigned even before completing one year in office following the Vigilance Commission’s finding that he had appointed a relation against norms. It is another thing that he returned to the council of Ministers later. A K Saseendran, Transport Minister, had to quit following disclosures of his sleazy telephonic conversations with a woman of doubtful integrity.

Thomas Chandy, the NCP representative, was the next to leave the Government when it was proved that he had encroached into the vast stretch of land owned by the Government of Kerala to build a resort.

Jaleel was in the news since June 2021 following the seizure of gold smuggled through the diplomatic channel of Thiruvananthapuram airport. The Minister had been questioned by the officials of the Customs department and the Enforcement Directorate twice in the recent past for alleged violation of the code of ethics in accepting gratitude from foreign countries without informing the Centre. He was questioned in connection with the import of “dates and Quran” for distribution among the people of the State.

Bihar reports spike in Covid cases, recovery rate dips

Patna: The recovery rate of Covid-19 patients continues to decline after a rapid spike in the number of infected persons in Bihar.

The state’s recovery rate was recorded at more than 99 per cent during March, which has now slumped to 93 per cent. According to the health department, the infection-free rate has declined after the rise in the number of infected persons, which has brought down the recovery rate.

According to data released by the health department, the recovery rate of Covid-infected persons has declined by three per cent in the last five days. According to the data, 85,050 samples were tested in the state on April 7, of which 1,527 were detected to be new infected cases. The infection rate in the state was 1.79 per cent on this day, while the recovery rate was 97.24 per cent.

According to the health department data, the state recorded an infection-free rate of 99.23 per cent on March 20, registering a steady decline. On March 25, the infection-free rate had fallen to 99.06 per cent, which further reduced to 98.81 per cent on March 31.

As per the state health data, the infection-free rate was recorded at 96.68 per cent on April 8, while it fell to 96.03 per cent on April 9 and 95.13 per cent on April 10. On April 11, the figure further plunged to 94.24 per cent.

On April 12, 80,018 samples were tested, detecting 2,999 new infected persons. As many as 636 people returned to their homes after recovering from the virus. Thus, the recovery rate in the state reached 93.48 per cent on Monday, said a health department official.

The number of active patients has also registered an increase due to the decline in the rate of recovery from the infection. In Patna, 289 micro-containment zones have been created after the number of infected persons increased.

The number of infected cases is said to be more in urban areas than rural areas. The number of micro-containment zones in Patna Sadar division is 163, while the number of micro-containment zones in Paliganj is only nine. Health Minister Mangal Pandey said instructions have been issued to increase the number of beds for corona patients in all hospitals in the state.

At present, there are 17,052 active Covid-19 patients in 38 districts of Bihar after 2,999 new positive cases were reported in the state on Monday. As many as 80,018 samples were tested during the last 24 hours. **IANS**



BRAND NEW FUTURE

New-age career options are a rage among students. MUSBA HASHMI speaks with experts and academicians to tell you how equipped schools are to prepare job ready individuals and what the future holds for these courses

It's time that we have finally managed to get over the likes of engineering, law and medical sciences. Alternative career options are now in the driver's seat. Students, too, are preferring to land a job that not only help them earn a handsome amount of money, but also give them that much needed job satisfaction. Not that, engineering and law lacks it, but it is, of course, not on everyone's cards. As the innovations are mostly turning out to be multidisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary, even the careers are becoming one. CM Faiz, Director, HKBK College Of Engineering, tells you that Sports Analytics/Sports Management and Audio Engineering are some of the few options that students can choose from. "Sports Analytics is used at every level of sports management from school to the international level, while audio engineering open a plethora of options in the music and film industry and also in the ad agencies," Faiz says.

Also, when one talks about technology an innovation, there is no way of not mentioning the growing careers of Full Stack Web Development and Cybersecurity. "Full Stack Web Development is the combination of both front end and back end portions in the life of a web application. You'll be glad to know that full-stack development jobs are considered one of the highest paying jobs in India. This is primarily because of its demand and the lack of skilled professionals in the domain. The average salary of a Full Stack Developer is around ₹10 lakh per annum and an experienced professional can earn ₹20 lakh per annum according to Glassdoor," Diwakar Chittora, CEO & Director, IntelliPaat, explains. On the other hand, cybersecurity jobs are in high-demand worldwide as every organisation professionals in their security teams to maintain their security and prevent any breach of data. "Organisations around the world are in need of cybersecurity

WHAT CAN BE DONE

- Tailor made syllabus
- On the field exposure
- Academic and Industry sessions from subject matter experts
- State of the art infrastructure
- Real-time internships
- Organisations have to strike MOUs with expert entities for knowledge exchange
- Research mentoring by subject matter experts
- Hosting real time student conferences
- Student exchange programs
- Imparting crucial lateral thinking skills in the domain area

professionals as vacancies are left unfilled and these vacancies are still open," Chittora adds. Another one on the list of the most-sought after jobs of the 21st century is Data Scientist. "Demand across the world for Data Scientists will only grow and the lack of competition for these jobs makes data science a lucrative option for a career path. People from across the world are getting into this domain due to its demand and popularity. According to an IBM report, Data Science jobs would likely grow by 30 per cent. The estimated figure of job listing is 2,720,000 for Data Science in 2021. Also, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, about 11 million jobs will be created by 2026," Chittora tells you. While new-age career options are the way forward, the question is whether the school curriculum is well-equipped enough to help students take the alternative way and makes them job ready. "The best route to creating job

ready individuals is to involve business organisations in the academic process. With the implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP 2020) that focuses on industry-academia alliance and vocational learning, we will be able to produce job ready individuals, who will revolutionise the industry and fast-track the development of our country," Alka Kapur, Principal, Modern Public school, Shalimar Bagh, New Delhi, tells you. She lists courses that are on the priority lists of students. "Technological advancement and digitisation of services have expanded the market, and they've opened up a plethora of job opportunities such as application developers, web creative writers, bloggers, wedding photographers, cinematographers, reviewers, influencers, social media handlers, digital marketers, motivational speakers, ethical hackers, web designers, image consultants, stand-up comedians and YouTubers, among others," she mentions.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Aim for success, not perfection. Never give up your right to be wrong, because then you will lose the ability to learn new things and move forward with your life. Remember that fear always lurks behind perfectionism.

— Mokokoma Mokhonoana

Making the country proud

Making the country and her compatriots proud, SRM Institute of Science and Technology's (SRMIST) student Nethra Kumanan has become the first Indian woman to qualify for the upcoming Olympics. While confirming her berth in the Tokyo Olympics, Kumanan will be representing the country in sailing. She qualified for the prestigious event by securing top position at the Laser Radial event in the Mussanah Open Championship, a joint Asian and African Olympic qualifying event. A second-year engineering student of SRMIST, Kumanan has also represented the country at the 2014 and 2018 Asian Games in Incheon and Jakarta, respectively. This is not all. She became the first Indian woman to win



a World Cup medal in sailing when she won Bronze at 2020 Sailing World Cup in Miami, USA. Kumanan will now become the first Indian woman sailor to represent the country at the Olympics. This 23-year-old professional sailor is a resident of Chennai and has made her institution proud. She trains in the Canary Islands, Spain.

Bid to nurture talent

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's coaching capital, Kota, witnessed an unprecedented development when the doyens of coaching institutes get associated with Motion Education to give offline classes to JEE/NEET aspirants. The presence of three directors, viz., Akhilesh Khater, Vishal Joshi, and Surendra Mishra from coaching institute Nucleus Education, in addition to the directors of Sarvottam Career Institute, namely, Lalit Vijay, Ashish Bajpai, Dr Ashish Maheshwari, Jitendra Chandwani, and GS Tiwari into Motion Education is considered a path-breaking event by industry insiders. Apart from the esteemed faculty members of Nucleus Education and Sarvottam Career Institute, Motion Education is further strengthened by the arrival of Gavesh Bhardwaj, Ramesh Sharda and Prashant Jain. They are the experts of Mathematics, Inorganic Chemistry, and Olympiads' preparation, respectively. Nitin Vijay, Managing Director, Motion Education, said: "We believe in putting forth relentless effort to pass the expertise of our esteemed faculty members to the brightest Technocrats and Medicos of the world, and in order to succeed and improve the standard of education on a consistent basis, we persistently search and follow creative methods."

‘NEP will be game changer’

DR RAMESH POKHRIYAL ‘NISHANK’ talks about how the NEP 2020 will help the country in overcoming several challenges by walking the footsteps of the Constitution's chief architect Dr Ambedkar

Bhimrao Ramaji Ambedkar, whom we fondly know as Babasaheb Ambedkar, the face of the Indian independence movement, chairman of the drafting committee of the constitution, a social reformer, an Indian jurist, an educationist, and above all was a staunch supporter of the Dalit Movement in the post-independent Indian history. Babasaheb was the principal architect behind the Constitution and played an integral part in evolving the intellectual tradition within the Indian society. Born in Mahu (Madhya Pradesh), Ambedkarji was a prolific student who earned doctorates from Columbia University in New York and received a D.Sc from London University to become one of the best-educated persons of modern India. Raised in a low-income family, he faced several challenges during childhood; nevertheless, he became one of the greatest icons of the India. As one of the makers of modern India, he said, "Education is not only the birthright of every human being but also a weapon of social change." Ambedkarji was of the view that education is something that ought to be

brought within reach of everyone. It was him who deliberately included Article 45 in the Directive Principles of State Policy that "the state shall endeavour to provide, within ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years." Only a few might be familiar that he contributed his views in the reform of education by taking an active part in discussing the Bombay university act and Primary Education Amendment Bill. His abiding interest in education was not limited to conjecture, but he diligently worked to give practical shape to his views. He founded the people's education society in 1945 and opened several colleges and hostels for the emancipation of Dalits and girls through education. Besides, Dr Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly proposed to keep Sanskrit as a national language and advocated teaching in mother-tongue. He believed in making the child's learning process easy and smooth through education, taught in the mother tongue. Dr Ambedkar was an eminent supporter of job-oriented

Dr Ambedkar's vision on education will be accomplished through the NEP 2020. It is the first education policy for the 21st century, aiming to prepare the youth for gainful employment

and skill-based education. He firmly believed that technical knowledge and skill development were of prime importance for the youth's upliftment and economically backward people. Our Government is committed to fulfilling these aspirations that he had envisioned for the nation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has always believed that BR Ambedkar's thoughts and ideas continue to give strength to millions, and it is in the respect and memory of Babasaheb's ideas that PM

inaugurated the Dr Ambedkar International Centre for socio-economic transformation in 2017. Not only this, today, I am elated to highlight that the vision of Dr Ambedkar on education will be accomplished through the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP is the first education policy for the 21st century, aiming to build character and prepare the youth for gainful and fulfilling employment while being aligned to the Indian ethos. Dr Ambedkar, the Constitution's chief architect, supported the constitutional mandate of reservation as enshrined in Article 15 and Article 16 of our constitution. The NEP 2020 affirms that the provisions of reservations in educational institutions will not be diluted. Instead, new efforts will be made for bridging the gender gap as well as socio-economically disadvantaged groups in access, participation, and learning outcomes. Further, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalas will be strengthened and expanded for girls from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The NEP 2020 is aligned with Babasaheb's vision of female edu-

cation and women emancipation. With the NEP, Sanskrit will be mainstreamed by being offered both at school and higher education and Sanskrit knowledge systems will be established and strengthened to conduct teaching and interdisciplinary research. The NEP keeps teachers at the centre of the reforms in the education sector as they are the ones who will truly shape the future of India. The policy will help recruit and train the best and brightest to enter the teaching profession at all levels. These teachers will help in fulfilling the vision of Dr Ambedkar, who has been one of the enlightened minds of modern India; the man who had contributed immensely to shaping India's future as a democracy and the secular fabric of our country. Thus, as one of the founding fathers of the Republic, the Bharat Ratna Dr Ambedkar will always be remembered fondly by the nation who was committed to the development and larger well-being of the entire nation. The writer is Union Education Minister, Government of India



Top institutes to go for

Data science is the field of study that combines domain expertise, programming skills and knowledge of mathematics and statistics to extract meaningful insights from data. Today, from multinational companies to small startups, every organisation requires a Data Scientist for proper usage of the huge amount of data it generates and stores. The rising demand for data science professionals presses on the need to have some significant courses and curriculum to skill-up the budding leaders. Here is a list of India's top institutes offering comprehensive and advanced data science online courses that can help learners acquire the right skill set and land their dream job. **Henry Harvin:** The course equips students with the most essential skills needed to apply data science in any number of real-world contexts. It blends theory, computation, and application in a most easy-to-understand and practical way. The training duration is 40 hours with 12 month free Brush Up sessions and 50 hours e-learning access. The course fee starts from ₹13,500 onwards. **IntelliPaat:** IntelliPaat's Data Science training programme offered in collaboration with IBM lets learners gain proficiency in Data Science with Python, Machine Learning, AI, Deep Learning, Big Data Hadoop, Spark and Tableau Desktop. This programme comprises 10+ courses, 53+ industry-specific projects, and 232 hours of online instructor-led training with a CAPSTONE project. Learners will get access to the IBM

course and earn a certificate from IBM. **Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode:** IIM Kozhikode has launched the Certificate Programme in Data Science, designed to give you a detailed insight into modern data science practices. The course helps participants to understand the differences between small data and big data, explore Python and learn to import Python libraries such as NumPy and Pandas amongst other skills. The three months programme is conducted online through session of four-five hours per week. Graduate or diploma holders in any discipline with minimum one year of work experience can apply. The fee is ₹71,750 excluding taxes. **Simplilearn:** The Post Graduate Programme (PGP) in Data Science in partnership with Purdue University is a comprehensive Data Science bootcamp programme — leveraging Purdue's academic excellence in Data Science and Simplilearn's partnership with IBM. This programme is ideal for all working professionals, covering job-critical topics like R, Python programming, and machine learning algorithms. The programme duration is one year where classes are conducted online four-five hours per week. The admission fee is ₹2,15,000 (excluding GST) **Upgrad:** It offers India's first NASSCOM certified Executive PGP in Data Science from IIITB. The duration is one year and classes are conducted. The eligibility for the course is to have a Bachelor's Degree with minimum 50 per cent or equivalent passing marks.

Being one of the major reforms introduced to the education system in recent times, the Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET) is an All-India test for admission various undergraduate/integrated, post-graduate and research programmes in Central/State universities of India. Having a major change in this academic year, CUCET has been named the common entrance test for admissions to 54 central universities. It is anticipated that the CUCET will be conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA). Recently, Delhi University has also hinted to conduct the admission process for 2021 through CUCET and based on Class XII marks. CUCET is not an entirely unfamiliar entrance test, the Central universities have been conducting it until last year for admissions. While the major difference would be that the earlier version of

Common platform for all

With CUCET being named as the common entrance test for admissions to 54 Central universities, ANKIT KAPOOR tells you what the students can expect from it

CUCET was conducted in the offline mode and now the proposal is to conduct the test as a Computer Based Test (CBT), which, with complete details of the exam is expected to be revealed soon. The New Education Policy 2020 proposed a common entrance test for higher education. This will scrap the current domination of marks among the students. Over a period of time, we have seen the sky-scraping cut-offs of Delhi University creating a lot of pressure on the students and the parents to get the best so that they get admission to these colleges. There will be no stream instead



there will be a multi-disciplinary setup with the option to choose a foreign language and more emphasis on critical thinking.

This will enable students to have a varied knowledge of the subjects. For example, a student wants to pursue Math Hons with it now it is possible to make history as a subject. This is the most important recommendation of NEP called multi-disciplinary. The expected CUCET approach. The Computer-based aptitude test will test the students on:

- Verbal Aptitude
- Logical Reasoning
- Quantitative Aptitude

 The CUCET entrance test will be compulsory for the students who seek admission to all the universities, and experts believe that it is absolute-

ly the need of the hour. It is important for the following reasons:

- The rising cut-offs of the universities create unnecessary pressure on the students
- Equal opportunities to all the students
- This will enable the students to understand the importance of aptitude building and will make them market-ready.
- The quality of students will get enhanced
- This will aim to give students holistic development

 This change of conducting an exam is the change for good and will allow students to experience equal opportunity in the real sense. For this, students need to continuously strive towards honing their skills and understand the importance of aptitude building. The writer is Managing Director — Pratham Test Prep

Priyanka, Jinson test + for COVID-19

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

New Delhi, Apr 13 (PTI) Five track and field athletes, including Tokyo Olympics-bound 20km race walker Priyanka Goswami, and a support staff have tested positive for COVID-19 at the Sports Authority of India Centre in Bengaluru.

The 2018 Asian Games 1500m gold medalist Jinson Johnson and steeplechaser Chinta Yadav were among the five athletes while race walk coach Alexander Atsybashev has also tested positive for the virus.

Another Tokyo Games-bound race walker K T Irfan has returned negative after he was tested as a primary contact of Johnson.

"My test result which came on Monday was positive and so I am currently in quarantine in my room. I have fever, not very high, and headache also," Johnson told PTI from Bengaluru.

"Otherwise, I have no major problems. I will have another test in three days and I hope to have a negative result. KT Irfan was also tested as he was my primary contact but his



result was negative."

A source in the SAI Center said that Goswami, Yadav and two more athletes were also COVID-19 positive, apart from Johnson.

"Goswami is positive, so is Chinta Yadav and another two. They are all under quarantine at the SAI Center here," the source said.

Goswami had qualified for Olympics by shattering the national record during the National Open Race Walking Championships in Ranchi in February. She had clocked 1 hour 28 minutes and 45 seconds, bettering the earlier national record of 1:29:54 in the name of another Tokyo-bound Bhawana Jato.

The Tokyo Olympics qualifying standard in women's 20km race walk is 1:31:00.

Sajan Prakash bags gold but misses Olympic 'A' cut

TASHKENT: India's top swimmer Sajan Prakash clinched the gold in the 200m butterfly event at the Uzbekistan Open Championships, but a Tokyo Olympics qualifying 'A' standard eluded him here on Tuesday.

The Kerala swimmer, who has already achieved the Olympics 'B' mark in 200m butterfly, clocked 1:57.85s to bag the top honours in the Olympic qualifying event. The Olympics 'A' cut for 200m butterfly is 1:56.48s.

"Today was a good sign of improvement. We did the best we could do. There are a few things I need to work on, like the front speed," Prakash told PTI.

"This is not my peak yet, when I peak after some skill sharpening, after that I think it (A mark) will happen. I have to be patient for that," he added.

Prakash was last seen in the pool at the Latvian Open last month where he finished on



top of the podium in the 200m butterfly, clocking 1:59.31s.

The 27-year-old, who has been constantly improving his timing, is optimistic about breaching the elusive mark.

"We still have two months to go. I will be competing in Monaco next month, there is one more event in France in June and after that we have our Nationals."

Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) development group swimmer Kenisha Gupta

won the other gold of the day for India.

Competing in the women's 100m freestyle event, Kenisha clocked 57.42 while the seasoned Shivani Kataria bagged the bronze medal with an effort of 59.62s.

In the men's 100m freestyle event, Anand AS (51.95s) won the bronze medal while Adhithya D (52.07s) finished fourth. Both swimmers registered their personal best timings.

India Open set to be held behind closed doors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic champion Carolina Marin and World No. 1 Kento Momota will headline a star-studded field of international shuttlers when the India Open Super 500 event is held here from May 11 to 16, albeit behind closed doors due to the raging COVID-19 pandemic.

The USD 400,000 tournament, one of the last few qualification events for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, has attracted 228 (114 men and 114 women) entries from 33 different national associations, including China.

However, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) said "due to the rapidly rising COVID-19 cases in the country, the tournament will be contested in a bio-secure bubble without spectators and media while implementing strict COVID-19 safety protocols."

"All the players and officials coming from South Africa, Brazil, Middle East and European countries including UK will be serving a 7-day quarantine period and have to report in the capital city on May 3," BAI said in a release. "... Players and officials

from rest of the world can arrive on May 6 and undergo a 4-day quarantine period."

On the court, three-time world champion Marin will lead the women's singles category along with other Top-10 shuttlers such as Akane Yamaguchi, 2019 world champion PV Sindhu, Korea's An Se-Young and Thailand's Pornpawee Chochuwong.

India boasts of the largest contingent with 48 players (27 women and 21 men), while Malaysia has fielded the second biggest squad with 26 shuttlers, which includes 10 women and 16 men.

A total of 10 shuttlers (4 women and 6 men) from China are also part of the participants list.

Among the men, two-time world champion Momota, defending champion Viktor Axelson, Anders Antonsen and reigning All England Open champion Zii Jia Lee will be in the fray.

Former World No. 1 Srikanth Kidambi will lead the Indian charge along with B Sai Praneth, HS Prannoy and Parupalli Kashyap.

India's men's doubles challenge will be spearheaded by World No. 10 pairing of Chirag

Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, while Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy will aim for some valuable Olympic qualification points in the women's doubles.

Ponnappa will also partner Satwik in the mixed doubles category which sees the Japanese pair of Yuta Watanabe and Arisa Higashino leading the list of six Top-10 combinations in fray.

The last date for withdrawal of entry is April 19 while the draw will be announced on April 20.

The governing body said "Delhi Government will conduct RT-PCR test on arrival on May 3 and 6 as well as on May 9 and 14.

"We are really happy to finally be able resume badminton action. But with the recent spike in cases, we have to be more cautious," BAI general secretary of BAI Ajay Singhania said.

"We understand spectators have been an integral part of our growth story but this year despite it being an Olympic qualifier and an array of star shuttlers in action, we have to take the decision of conducting the tournament in a bio bubble."

Xavi Hernandez leads Al-Sadd into Asian Champions League

SEOUL: Xavi Hernandez was touted as a future coach of Barcelona even before leading Al-Sadd to the Qatar League title undefeated earlier this month. His chances will only improve if he can add the Asian Champions League title to his accomplishments this year.

The group stage of the continental competition kicks off on Wednesday in the western zone which includes Al-Sadd. The side plays Iranian side Foolad in its opening Group D match.

Al-Sadd was dominant this year under the 41-year-old

Xavi, who won the World Cup with Spain in 2010. Al-Sadd finished first in Qatar's 12-team league, winning 19 out of 22 games and scoring 77 goals while conceding just 14.

"The toughest tournament awaits us," the former star midfielder said. "We are in an excellent period and fully ready to compete"

Xavi took over Al-Sadd in May 2019 but even with former Arsenal star Santi Cazorla in strong form, the 2021 tournament will be a bigger challenge than usual.

The number of teams has been expanded from 32 to 40



which means that only the 10 group winners and six best runners-up will progress to the knockout stage.

In order to reduce travel in the global pandemic, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) decided in March that each

group will be staged in one city with each team playing six games in just 15 days.

Al-Sadd will play all its games in Riyadh, home of Al-Nassr.

Elsewhere, 2019 champion Al-Hilal is hosting Group A in Riyadh with two teams from Central Asia AGMK of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan powerhouse Istiklol making their first appearances.

The eastern zone, which features teams from Japan, South Korea, China and Australia, is scheduled to start in June, although the hosting venues have not been decided.

Anirban Lahiri eyes good show at RBC Heritage

PTI ■ HILTON HEAD

Inspired by Japanese Hideki Matsuyama's sensational win at the Masters and with long-time coach Vijay Divecha by his side, India's Anirban Lahiri will hope to end his winless streak when he tees up at RBC Heritage on Thursday.

Lahiri was overjoyed to see Matsuyama, one of his good friends on the PGA Tour, register a historic victory in Augusta.

"Hideki is a good friend since we played on the Presidents Cup team. And we knew each other a bit from the Tour before that also. Seeing him play the highest level and win a Masters was a big boost," he said.

Soon after Matsuyama's magnificent win, Lahiri tweeted, "What a win! Hideki you did it! Time for all of us to step. So happy and proud of you my friend! #asariasing #gointl #Masters #greenjacket"

Lahiri also finally re-united for three weeks with his coach Divecha, who arrived right at the start of the Masters week.

Lahiri had been struggling for quite some time before coming up with a solid fifth place finish at the Valero Texas Open.

"It's been tough the last three or four weeks just grinding, grinding, and grinding and working hard. So it felt nice to be rewarded by a nice week (in Texas). And now Vijay can



add to that.

"Having him (Divecha) is a big change. Had not had him next to me watching my game physically. It is a big difference," said Lahiri, who is used to having Divecha with him in the US every 2-3 months.

Talking of the week in Texas, Lahiri said, "It was really good week, a solid week. Just generally, I think my game was rock solid tee to green. When I've put in a lot of hours a lot of work."

"These last month 45 days, you know, going through that tough stretch on the Florida swing was not easy."

"I was hitting the ball terrible, lots and lots of back and forth with Vijay and of videos and lots of instructions lots of applications. All that work on videos sent back and forth with Vijay was great."

Divecha's mantra for Lahiri is - just simplify things.

"He (Lahiri) would not have reached where he is if he was not good, but you should not try to do too much or too many things. That's what we are addressing. Simplifying things," said Divecha, who will spend around three weeks with Lahiri.

On how he tried to help from India, Divecha said, "We realized that there was nothing we could do. Without vaccines I could not travel. Once vaccination was announced, I made sure I got them to travel."

"From India, I was sitting on his shoulders and watching videos and using technology to guide him. I gave him a set of protocols. He would try and call me even at intervals of 15-20 minutes so we could discuss.

Rejuvenated Gangjee returns to Japan Tour

NAGOYA: A rejuvenated Rahil Gangjee will look forward to good results at the Token Homestate Cup here this week after his encouraging trip back home as the Indian golfer returns to play in Japan after nearly five months.

Gangjee, who won the Panasonic Open Championship on the Japan Golf Tour three years back in April 2018, has been plying his trade in the country ever since, having earned full playing rights on the tour.

However, with the 2020 season hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, the two-time Asian Tour winner could only manage to play three events on the tour with his best finish being tied 37th and Order of Merit position being 74th.

The Japan Golf Tour's curtailed 2020 season has been extended to 2021.

The 42-year-old Gangjee posted two top-10s and a top-20 in his three appearances on the PGTI between December



last year and March in India.

"The resumption of events on the PGTI since November last year was a huge blessing for players like me, as the Asian Tour, the other tour I play on, had no events during that time. I'm grateful for just having had the opportunity to play events on PGTI," Gangjee said.

ious things further."

The RBC Heritage returns to its traditional post-Masters spot on the schedule after serving as the second event in last year's Return to Golf.

World No. 1 Dustin Johnson, who missed the cut at the Masters, will be headlining the field which also includes Webb Simpson, the defending

"You can practice as much as you want but playing a tournament is always different in terms of the focus and the feel. Playing on the PGTI helped me keep in touch with these important aspects of professional golf," he added.

While in India, Gangjee, who hails from Kolkata, also got time to work on his swing under the watchful eyes of his Delhi-based coach Ajai Gupta.

"I'm making some key adjustments in my swing and being able to do that in the physical presence of my coach Ajai was important as I won't be seeing him for a long time now with my hectic schedule in Japan consisting of seven events till June."

"The few days I spent with my coach in Delhi were quite reassuring even though changes in the swing are an ongoing process and will take time to settle in. Adapting quickly to Japanese greens will be the most crucial factor for me now," he added.

champion.

Collin Morikawa, current FedExCup leader Bryson DeChambeau, Will Zalatoris, who was in the final group Saturday at the Masters, are all also in the field.

Other notables teeing it up include Patrick Cantlay, Tommy Fleetwood, Sergio Garcia, and Daniel Berger.

Balbir Singh Junior dead

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Balbir Singh Junior, who was a member of the silver medal-winning 1958 Asian Games Indian hockey team, died here at the age of 88, his daughter Mandeep Samra said on Tuesday.

He is survived by his wife, daughter and son.

"My father passed away in sleep on Sunday morning due to heart failure," his daughter said. His son is settled in Canada and could not attend the last rites of his father because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Born on May 2, 1932, at Sansarpur in Jalandhar, also known as the nursery of Indian hockey, Balbir Singh Junior had played alongside legends like Balbir Singh Senior, Leslie Claudius, Prithipal Singh, Balkishan and Charles Stephen among others.

Singh took to hockey when he was six years old. He studied at Lyallpur Khalsa College in Jalandhar and was first selected to play for the Indian hockey team in 1951 during the tour of Afghanistan.

He was part of the Punjab state hockey team and also captained Panjab University team. Later, he also played for the Indian Railways team that toured European countries such as Spain, Switzerland and Italy. The team also played Test matches in Netherlands.

In 1962, he joined the Army as an emergency commissioned officer. He played for the Services hockey team in

Singh took to hockey when he was six years old. He studied at Lyallpur Khalsa College in Jalandhar and was first selected to play for the Indian hockey team in 1951 during the tour of Afghanistan

the national tournaments at Delhi. Singh retired as a Major in 1984 and later settled in Chandigarh.

Post retirement he took keen interest in playing golf.

Hockey India consoled the death of Balbir Singh Junior.

"On behalf of Hockey India, I express my deepest condolences to Balbir Singh Junior's family. His contribution to Indian hockey will always be remembered and the hockey fraternity mourns his demise," HI President Gyanendro Ningombam said.

Punjab Governor VP Singh Badnore, who is also Administrator Union Territory Chandigarh, expressed condolences at the passing of the hockey player.

Badnore said that Balbir Singh Junior, who represented India in many international championships, will be remembered for his outstanding contribution to the sport.

Olympic torch runs through empty park in Osaka as cases rise

AP ■ TOKYO

The torch relay for the Tokyo Olympics ran through a mostly empty Osaka city park on Tuesday, showing the risks of trying to hold the postponed games during a pandemic.

It came on the same day that the government said new coronavirus cases in Osaka hit 1,099, a single-day record for Japan's second largest metropolitan area.

The torch relay began three weeks ago in northeastern Japan, attempting to navigate around the pandemic with a total of 10,000 runners crisscrossing the country and bound for the opening ceremony on July 23 in Tokyo.

Osaka, which announced plans last week to take the relay off city streets and bar the pub-

lic, became the first detour since the relay began. Organizers warned beforehand there may be more.

Wednesday's second leg in Osaka the day the Tokyo countdown clock hits 100 day to go will be in the same park under the same closed-doors conditions.

New COVID-19 cases are rising across Japan, where fewer than 1% of residents have been vaccinated in very slow rollout.

Japan has attributed about 9,500 deaths to COVID-19, far fewer than many countries but higher than most neighbors in Asia.

Osaka, Tokyo and other parts of Japan have declared quasi-emergency conditions until early May with bars and restaurants being asked to close by 8 p.m.



Former Olympian Aya Terakawa posing with the Olympic torch

Many runners arrived in Osaka's Expo '70 Commemorative Park by bus and ran short legs carrying the torch alongside metal barriers or in empty park space.

They were accompanied by security officials who jogged or walked alongside, and followed by an "escort or promotional vehicle festooned with logos of major Olympic sponsors Coca-Cola and Toyota.

After the postponement a year ago, organizers talked of doing away with the relay to save money. That idea never gained traction, largely because it's promoted by some of the IOC's largest sponsors.

The top sponsors paid the International Olympic Committee 1 billion in the last full Olympic cycle (2013-

2016). That number could double when the next cycle is completed with the postponed Tokyo Games.

A poll conducted Saturday and Monday by Japanese news agency Kyodo showed 13.2% want the relay to continue until the opening ceremony. Another 49.3% said the relay should be canceled in areas with severe outbreaks, and 35.9% said it should be called off entirely.

Opposition to holding the Olympics in a pandemic is also strong in Japan with up to 80% saying the games should be canceled or postponed.

The Olympics and Paralympics are expected to draw 15,400 athletes and tens of thousands of officials, judges, media and broadcasters. Fans from abroad have been banned.

