

OPINION 8
SOCIO-ECONOMIC
DIVIDES IN 2021**WORLD 11**
OUSTED MYANMAR ENVOY
APPEALS FOR UK GOVT HELP**SPORT 13**
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LUCKNOW, FRIDAY APRIL 16, 2021; PAGES 14 ₹3



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JLO & ALEX
RODRIGUEZ
BREAK UP
12 VIVACITY

UP Board exams postponed, all schools closed till May 15

Covid curfew extended from 8pm to 7am in worst-hit districts

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amid the surge in corona cases and subsequent panic setting in across the State, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has ordered extension of "Covid curfew" from 8 pm to 7 am in districts with more than 2,000 active cases and also announced postponement of the UP Board Exams for Class 10 and 12. The new dates of UP Board examination will be announced later, the CM said and also ordered the closure of all Government and private schools till May 15.

"The corona curfew will be effective from 8 pm to 7 am in all 10 districts with more than 2,000 active cases, including Lucknow, Prayagraj, Varanasi, Kanpur Nagar, Gautam Budh Nagar, Ghaziabad, Meerut and Gorakhpur. This order should be implemented with immediate effect," Yogi said while reviewing the current situation of the State virtually with the Team-11 officials on Thursday.

At present, corona curfew is being enforced in these districts between 9 pm and 6 am. To prevent the spread of the disease among the children and safeguard them from the second wave of coronavirus infection, the CM said schools up to Class 12 should be closed till May 15.

He instructed the officials to make all necessary arrange-

ments in view of the changing situation every day in all the districts of the State. Yogi assured the State was successful in fighting the first wave of Covid-19 and similarly, this time the second wave will also be controlled soon.

"For this it is required that all citizens strictly adhere to Covid protocols such as masks, sanitizers and social distancing. Not only this, it is better that people include this protocol in their lifestyle. People should be made aware about this," he said.

In a bid to ensure an effective Covid-19 management

system, Yogi said inflow of patients from other districts in Lucknow is natural.

Therefore, we need to make additional arrangements here. In such a situation, KGMU and Balrampur Hospital should be prepared as a dedicated Covid Hospital, he said.

The Chief Minister instructed the officials to conduct this work in a phased manner. Also, the non-Covid patients should also be taken care of so that no inconvenience is caused to them.

"The TS Mishra Hospital, Integral and Hind Medical

Colleges in Lucknow should be converted into dedicated Covid hospitals. In the next two days additional beds should be provided in these hospitals," said the Chief Minister.

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

Yogi further said with the proliferation of Covid-19, the return of migrant workers from different States is likely. Therefore, quarantine centers should be operated in all districts as per Covid protocol. In quarantine centers, along with medical facilities, proper arrangements for food/sleeping etc. will be ensured.

Going through the district-wise situation of coronavirus infection, the CM was informed that there is no shortage of beds and oxygen for Covid patients in all 75 districts. "We must ensure that adequate availability of Covid beds, medicines, medical equipment and oxygen is maintained in every district. The ministers in charge should review their respective districts every day. Along with this, rapid action should be taken to increase the number of beds in the hospitals. Arrangement of medical staff and medical resources in Covid hospitals should be made on priority," he said.

The CM also directed to increase the number of RTPCR tests by using the available RTPCR capability in the laboratories of the central institutes located in the State. Manpower should also be arranged according to the requirements of these institutions. It would be useful to use TruNet machines for Covid probes.



People stand in queues to cast their votes during the first phase of panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh on Thursday AP

ASI closes monuments
for visitors till May 15

New Delhi: All Centrally protected monuments, museums and sites under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have been closed with immediate effect till May 15 due to the surge in coronavirus cases in the country, the Union Culture Ministry said on Thursday.

An order to this effect was issued by the ASI and it was tweeted by Culture Minister Prahlad Patel on Thursday evening.

104 more die due to Covid in state

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The COVID-19 monstrosity spread its tentacles in Uttar Pradesh as there was a surge in the coronavirus infections with the state recording 22,439 fresh cases during the last 24 hours on Thursday while the number of positive cases was 20,510 on Wednesday.

In the last one day, 104 people lost lives to COVID-19 while the number of fatalities was 68 on Wednesday.

The state capital Lucknow witnessed the biggest spike with 5,183 positive cases followed by 1,888 in Prayagraj, 1,859 in Varanasi, 1,263 in Kanpur Nagar and 750 in Gorakhpur.

■ Details on Page 3

CAPSULE

HC: 50 PEOPLE CAN OFFER NAMAZ AT NIZAMUDDIN

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Thursday allowed 50 people to offer namaz five times a day at Nizamuddin Markaz during Ramzan, saying there is no direction in the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) notification to close down places of worship.

CITI TO EXIT CONSUMER BANKING IN INDIA

Mumbai: American banking major Citibank on Thursday announced that it will exit from the consumer banking business in India as part of a global strategy. The business comprises credit cards, retail banking, home loans and wealth management.

ISRO ESPIONAGE CASE: SC ASKS FOR FURTHER PROBE

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday ordered that the report of a high-level committee on the role of erring police officials in 1994 espionage case relating to ISRO scientist Nambi Narayanan be given to the CBI and directed the agency to conduct further investigation on the issue. The apex court said the CBI may treat the panel's findings as part of preliminary investigation and asked the agency to submit its report to the court within three months.

Govt postpones NEET-PG in view of rising Covid cases

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In view of a spike in the number of Covid-19 cases, the National Eligibility-Cum-Entrance Test (postgraduate) (NEET-PG), which was scheduled to be held on April 18, has been postponed, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Thursday.

The decision was taken keeping the well-being of the young medical students in mind, he added. "In light of the surge in #Covid19 cases, GoI has decided to postpone #NEETPG2021 exam which was earlier scheduled to be held on April 18. Next date to be decided later. Decision has been taken keeping well-being of our young medical students in mind," Vardhan tweeted.

Earlier on Thursday, a group of student doctors moved the Supreme Court asking for postponement of the NEET-PG medical entrance exams. A bench headed by Chief Justice of India SA Bobde was scheduled to hear the matter on Friday.

Kumbh sees 0.7% Covid positivity rate

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Confirming the fears of the experts that the mega religious congregation of Kumbh in Haridwar would accelerate the pace Covid-19 infection, the authorities on Thursday confirmed that 1,700 people were tested positive for the disease from April 10 to 14 in the Mela area.

The Kumbh Mela which is considered as the biggest religious congregation in the world officially started on April 1.

The medical workers conducted 2,36,751 tests during the five-day period (April 10 to 14) in the Mela area. Out of these, 1,701 samples came out positive for Covid-19, that means 0.7 per cent positivity rate.

It is learnt that in the Kumbh area a number of the Sadhus belonging to different Akhadas and sects have been reported positive for the disease.

The death of Mahamandaleshwar Kapil Dev Dass Naga belonging to the Akhil Bharatiya Nirvani Akhada due to Covid-19 has come as a shock among the members of the Akhada. The ascetic belonging to Chitrakoot



in Madhya Pradesh was in Haridwar to attend the Kumbh. The ascetic was admitted in a private hospital in Dehradun after he was found positive for Covid-19 in Haridwar on April 12.

Meanwhile the condition of the president of Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad (ABAP), Narendra Giri admitted in All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Rishikesh is improving. He was admitted in hospital April 12 after testing positive for Covid-19.

The Public Relations Officer (PRO) of AIIMS Rishikesh Harish Thapliyal said that the condition of Swami Narendra Giri is improving and he is on room air and he doesn't have a fever now.

No plan to club rest 4 phases in Bengal: EC

All-party meet called to discuss Covid-19 norms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Dismissing speculation that the final four phases of the ongoing Assembly elections in West Bengal could be clubbed due to an exponential rise in daily cases of Covid-19 across the country, the Election Commission (EC) on Thursday said there is no plan of clubbing the remaining phases.

EC officials said that the chief electoral officer (CEO) of West Bengal has called an all-party meeting in Kolkata on Friday to discuss adherence to Covid-19 guidelines issued by the poll commission. All political parties have been asked to send one representative for discussion over following Covid-19 related protocol for the last four phases of the poll.

This comes after the ECI, last Friday, sent a letter to all political parties in the fray in



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a roadshow campaign in Kolkata on Thursday PTI

the eastern State, mentioning that instances of elections campaigns/meetings, in which social distancing norms, wearing of masks were flouted were brought to its notice.

The letter re-emphasised Covid-19 protocols issued ahead of last October-November's Bihar Assembly elections, as well as by-elections in various States, the first electoral exercise to be conducted since the pandemic began.

The EC has come under fire for scheduling the Assembly polls in West Bengal in eight phases.

Earlier in the day on Thursday, Mahua Moitra of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) slammed the ECI over the scheduling of the polls, calling it "criminal negligence bordering on manslaughter."

Continued on Page 11

24-hr campaign ban imposed on Bengal BJP prez Dilip Ghosh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Thursday evening imposed a 24-hour campaign ban on the BJP's West Bengal president Dilip Ghosh for his "there will be Sitalkuchi in several places" remarks.

The commission "sternly" warned Ghosh and advised him to desist from using such statements while making public utterances during the period when the Model Code of Conduct is in force, the order said.

Four people were killed in a firing incident by CISF personnel in the Sitalkuchi Assembly seat during the fourth phase of polls in West Bengal on Saturday. Officials had said the jawans opened fire after they came under attack from locals.

The ban on Ghosh will be in effect from 7 pm April 15 to 7 pm April 16, during which Ghosh will not be allowed to campaign.

Foreign vax applications to get DCGI decision within 3 days

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The country's top drug regulator, Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), will take a decision on applications seeking approval for restricted emergency use of foreign-produced Covid-19 vaccines within three working days from the date of submission, the Government said on Thursday.

The decision will facilitate quicker access to such foreign vaccines by India and would encourage imports, including that of bulk drug material, optimal utilisation of domestic ones. This will in turn provide a fillip to vaccine manufacturing capacity and total vaccine

availability within the country, said the Union Health Ministry in a statement here.

The move comes at a time when India is battling a surge in coronavirus infections with over two lakh cases reported in a single day on Thursday. Recently, the DCGI had approved Sputnik V, a Russian-manufactured jab, the third in the Indian vaccine basket which so far had Covaxin and Covishield.



However, now with growing demand for vaccination for all, the Government has issued the Regulatory Pathway in India for Covid-19 vac-

cines approved for restricted use by US FDA, EMA, UK MHRA, PMDA Japan or which are listed in WHO Emergency Use Listing (EUL).

As per the proposal, the DCGI shall prepare detailed guidelines specifying regulatory pathway for approval of foreign approved Covid vaccines based on NEGVAC recommendations.

"Application can be made by the foreign manufacturer through its Indian subsidiary or through its authorised agent in India (in case it does not have an Indian subsidiary). The DCGI will process such applications for restricted use in emergency situation and take a decision within three working days from date of submission of complete application by the applicant."

Continued on Page 11

Coast Guard, Gujarat ATS seize Pak boat with ₹300 cr heroin

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a joint operation, the Indian Coast Guard along with the Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad on Thursday apprehended a fishing boat, carrying eight Pakistani nationals and 30 kg of heroin, near Kutch district's Jakhau coast. The value of the contraband in the international market is worth over ₹300 crore.

The operation was undertaken after an input received on Tuesday regarding suspected narcotics trafficking by a Pakistani boat off the Indo-Pak notional international maritime boundary line (IMBL), the statement issued by the Indian Coast Guard said.

"On receipt of the input, a coordinated operation was

launched swiftly by the ICG in association with Gujarat (anti-terrorism squad) of ATJ," it said.

The suspected Pakistani boat was sighted inside Indian waters on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday, and it was intercepted by the ICG, the statement said.

About 30 kg of heroin, approximately ₹300 crore in value, was recovered from the boat, it said.

"Preliminary investigation revealed that the consignment being smuggled was destined for landing on a Gujarat shore. The boat and its eight-member Pakistani crew are being escorted to Jakhau for further rummaging and joint investigation," the statement mentioned.

Continued on Page 11

Vacant middle seats raise fliers' protection against Covid: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leaving middle seats vacant could provide airline passengers more protection from the coronavirus that causes Covid-19.

Based on laboratory modelling of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 on single-aisle and twin-aisle aircraft, exposures in scenarios in which the middle seat was vacant were reduced by 23 per cent to 57 per cent, compared with full aircraft occupancy, the researchers, including those from the USA Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) noted.

Lately, airlines have abandoned the pandemic practice of blocking seats to maintain physical distancing between the travelers.

"Physical distancing of airplane passengers, including



through policies such as middle seat vacancy, could provide additional reductions in risk for exposure to SARS-CoV-2 on aircraft," the researchers concluded.

The team of researchers from CDC and Kansas State University in the US used a bacteriophage — a virus that infects bacteria — as a surrogate for airborne SARS-CoV-2.

They modelled the relationship between SARS-CoV-

2 exposure and aircraft seating proximity, including full occupancy and vacant middle seat occupancy scenarios.

"Compared with exposures in full occupancy scenarios, relative exposure in vacant middle seat scenarios was reduced by 23 per cent to 57 per cent depending upon the modelling approach," the researchers said.

A 23 per cent exposure reduction was observed for a single passenger who was in the same row and two seats away from the SARS-CoV-2 source, rather than in an adjacent middle seat, they said.

When quantifying exposure reduction to a full 120-passenger cabin rather than to a single person, the study predicted exposure reductions ranging from 35 per cent to 39.4 per cent.

Continued on Page 11

Amid stray violence, 65 per cent vote in 1st phase of Panchayat polls

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amid sporadic violence, the first phase of the three-tier Panchayat polls in Uttar Pradesh was conducted with over 65 per cent of 30 million voters using their franchise in 18 districts.

State Election Commission (SEC) sources said in Lucknow said that the poll percentage was 61 per cent by 5 pm and was expected to cross the 65 per cent mark at the conclusion of the voting process at 6 pm.

In the first phase, voting was done in 88 tehsils which included 312 blocks, while posts at stake were 14789 for gram pradhans, 186583 for gram panchayat members, 19313 kshetra panchayat members and 779 zila panchayat members.

District where the first

phase of elections were held included Saharanpur., Ghaziabad, Rampur, Bareilly, Hathras, Agra, Kanpur Nagar, Jhansi, Mahoba, Prayagraj, Rae Bareli, Hardoi, Ayodhya, Shravasti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Gorakhpur, Jaunpur and Bhadohi.

West UP districts like Saharanpur, Ghaziabad witnessed high polling of around 65 per cent till 5pm while Ayodhya and Kanpur recorded just 51 and 59 per cent respectively.

SEC sources said that polling was by and large peaceful though there were reports of minor incidents in some districts.

A report said that a pradhan candidate was shot at in Gorakhpur while group clashes were reported in Sant Kabir Nagar district. In Kairakhar vil-

lage of Garautha in Jhansi, a polling station was turned into a police camp after violence took place during polling.

At a polling booth at a Primary school at Kairakhar, mobs looted ballot boxes and beat up the polling staff.

A report from Agra said that miscreants looted ballot boxes from a booth in Riharvi village in Fatehabad area. The miscreants took away ballot boxes by cutting the grill of a window of the room where they were kept. Efforts were on to track down the miscreants and recover the ballot boxes. Another report in the Agra report said that ballot boxes were looted from Chansora village in Jagner police station area.

In Kanpur, six persons, including a BDC candidate, were taken into custody for



Villagers stand in queue to cast their vote at the polling station, during the first phase of Uttar Pradesh Gram Panchayat election, in a village Phulpur, Prayagraj on Thursday

assault and fake voting in Rar village of Bhergaon block of Ghatampur. A dispute took

place between pradhan candidates Shivhari Khangar and Rajesh Pal.

Elsewhere, a woman polling personnel Nirmala Sahu (56) deputed at a polling

center of Jhansi's Baragaon block died during the process on Thursday morning. While conducting election at booth number 61, the officer complained of uneasiness and vomited blood.

But by the time she could be given medical treatment, she died. Nirmala Sahu is said to be suffering from cancer. Villagers started to protest at some booths in Gagaha in Gorakhpur after their names were found missing from voters' list. The gram pradhan sat on a dharna.

Residents of Bhatura village of Sakri, a gram sabha of Gagaha block, alleged that names of at least 135 people were missing from the voters list after which they declared to boycott the elections. They threatened not to vote in future elections and demanded an

inquiry to identify the culprits.

Residents of Vantangia villages in Gorakhpur cast their votes for panchayat polls, for the first time ever. The villages were declared revenue villages by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in 2018.

In Saharanpur, two pradhan candidates and their supporters came to a head leading to damage to a couple of vehicles.

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 while the counting of votes will be held on May 2.

Each voter has the privilege to cast four votes, one each for village panchayat members, pradhan, kshetra panchayat members and Zila panchayat members.

Self-imposed lockdown: Lucknow wears deserted look



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The state capital wore a deserted look on Thursday with traders going for a self-imposed lockdown to break the transmission of coronavirus. President of Akhil Bharatiya Udyog Vyapar Mandal Sandeep Bansal said their call to close the shops was followed by all the main markets in dense areas of the city.

“The markets in Hazratganj, Aminabad, Chowk Hussainganj, Mahanagar, a large part of Indiranagar, Gomtinagar, Hussainganj and Vidhan Sabha Marg remained closed,” he said, adding the traders would keep the shutters down till April 18, after which the situation would be reviewed and further decision taken.

He said other districts of

the state are also going by the same pattern and trade organisations in districts where cases have increased beyond 1,000 have also gone for a self-imposed lockdown. “Prayagraj, which has over 1,000 cases, is also doing the same and the main markets of Civil Lines are closed,” he said.

Regarding the problems which the people faced in view of the markets remaining

closed, he said it was an unexpected situation for them. “I was present at Hazratganj earlier today and people were inquiring why the markets were closed. They were informed that the decision was taken by the traders themselves because of the surge in cases,” he said.

“If the cases come down, we will see if alternate shops or shops in one lane can be opened,” he said.

He added that except for small shops, all the other markets remained closed. “We have not seen this kind of response

“THE MARKETS IN HAZRATGANJ, AMINABAD, CHOWK HUSSAINGANJ, MAHANAGAR, A LARGE PART OF INDIRANAGAR, GOMTINAGAR, HUSSAINGANJ AND VIDHAN SABHA MARG REMAINED CLOSED”

in the various calls for bandh in the city previously,” he pointed out.

Meanwhile, a senior UPMRC official said that as per the DMs order and prevalent Covid situation leading to night

curfew, Lucknow Metro will start its operations from 7 am from Munshipulia and CCS Airport stations.

“The last train will depart at 8 pm from both end stations,” he said.



Cleanliness drive brings down infectious disease cases in rural areas

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Yogi Adityanath government's special cleanliness campaign to contain the spread of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases in rural areas has played a major role in bringing down transmission levels with villages recording a significant drop in the number of patients in hospitals in the last 14 days.

Under the campaign organised in coordination with Urban Development, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj departments and other

institutions, anti-larval chemicals were sprayed in all districts to prevent mosquito breeding and thwart other vector-borne diseases.

Besides, frequent large-scale fogging was done along with regular cleaning of water tanks, removal of garbage and cleaning of drains. Also, public toilets were constructed in rural areas on a priority basis.

Additional teams were set up to undertake mass awareness campaigns across the state to promote the use of masks, frequent washing of hands and social distancing.

The Uttar Pradesh government in its commitment to eradicate mosquitoes carried out rigorous fogging campaigns in all gram panchayats and revenue villages of all 75 districts. The state set a record by undertaking fogging and cleanliness drives more than a thousand times in villages of Sultanpur, Siddharthnagar, Shahjahanpur, Rampur, Kanpur Dehat, Jaunpur, Gorakhpur and Barabanki. These areas report the maximum number of infectious disease cases. The government agencies conducted regular inspections to

check breeding of mosquitoes and all pest-control measures were implemented thoroughly. As per official data, fogging and sanitisation exercises in various villages of Jaunpur were carried out 3,629 times in the last 14 days. Consequently, the number of vector-borne diseases and cases of infections remarkably dipped.

Similarly, fumigation in all gram panchayats and revenue villages of Barabanki, Gorakhpur, Hardoi, Kanpur Dehat and Rampur was carried out 1,138, 1,159, 1,741, 1,027 and 1,066 times, respectively.

The cleanliness drives and cleaning of drains started showing positive results as villages recorded a significant drop in the number of patients. Besides, sanitisation in rural areas of Sant Kabir Nagar, Shahjahanpur, Siddharthnagar and Sultanpur was also being carried out at a rapid pace.

In about 97,521 revenue villages, spraying of disinfectants like bleaching powder, sodium hypochlorite was carried out regularly for 14 days. As per official data, fumigation in all revenue villages was carried out a total of 21,610 times.

PGV attacks govt for preventing clicking of pics of Covid victims' pyres

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a fresh attack on the Yogi Adityanath government, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra uploaded a video of erecting blockers around a Lucknow crematorium to prevent clicking of lit pyres of COVID-19 victims and advised the chief minister to focus on extending better healthcare to patients instead of wasting time, resource and energy in concealing facts.

Priyanka tweeted on Thursday, “Wasting your time, resources and energy to conceal the pandemic is of new use. To control it, to save lives and to take concrete steps to check the virus spread is the need of hour.”

A video has been doing the rounds on social media showing rows of pyres burning in the overburdened crematorium in Lucknow and local authorities putting up tin sheets around them to conceal the tragic spectacle. The video has been shared by numerous social media users to point towards the ordeal triggered by the second wave of COVID-19 and the apathy of the authorities.

With the video going viral, voices of criticism grew targeting the UP government for failing to contain the deadly virus and under reporting deaths caused by it.

According to various Twitter users and accounts on social media, after the video went viral raising eyebrows on Wednesday, Lucknow authorities set up tin sheets to cover the Bhainsakund cremation ground in Lucknow in a desperate bid to prevent people from clicking pictures and recording videos of pyres being burnt.

On Wednesday too, Priyanka had accused the UP government of concealing the exact number of COVID-19 patients and said that



had the government been cautious from day one, people would not have witnessed such times.

Addressing UP Congress leaders in a virtual meeting, Priyanka said, “The situation in Uttar Pradesh is on the verge of being the most explosive while the state government is constantly hiding data. Had the government been cautious, people would not have seen such days. The government has consistently hidden the number of infections and deaths.”

“There is no system and plan of the government to deal with the situation and control it. The government has failed, it is insensitive and irresponsible amid the spread of the infection,” she further said.

Referring to a letter of UP minister Brajesh Pathak, the Congress leader said that it was clear that testing was not being done in hospitals.

“Between April 5 and 11, while coronavirus cases spiked by 70 per cent in the country, in UP these cases rose by 281 per cent. Of the 24 crore population of UP, not even one crore people have been vaccinated,” she added.

Priyanka claimed that the situation was such that queues of bodies could be seen in Lucknow and there was a shortage of wood at cremation grounds for the last rites.

Sengar’s daughter questions BJP over cancellation of ticket to mother

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As polling for the first phase of panchayat elections ended on Thursday, former Bharatiya Janata Party legislator from Unnao and rape convict Kuldeep Sengar's daughter Aishwarya questioned the cancellation of ticket to her mother, Sangeeta Sengar, by the ruling party and asked if she and her mother did not have the right to live with dignity.

In a video posted on her Twitter account on Thursday morning, Aishwarya is heard saying, “Namaskar, It doesn't matter what my name is, but my

surname is Sengar. For the last three years my family has been facing injustice. My mother Sangeeta Sengar is a member of Unnao Zila Panchayat for the last 15 years and has been a part of active politics. She has been fulfilling her duties with utmost sincerity and honesty. Probably that is why she was also chosen as Zila Panchayat Chairperson.”

The BJP rejected the candidature of Sangeeta after announcing her name as the party's official candidate for zila panchayat member's post after the family of the rape victim opposed it.

In the video, Aishwarya questioned why her mother's candidature was cancelled. “While giving a ticket to a woman is it prudent to see who her husband or father is? Why she is branded as tainted. What was her fault? Can anyone explain this to me?” she asks in the 90 second video.

The dismayed daughter further said: “Political parties talk about women empowerment but are not ready to recognise the good work done by a woman in politics. Instead, they start looking at her through the prism of which family she belongs to.”

Girl abducted, thrashed

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A Mumbai girl staying in Lucknow these days accused a youth and his unidentified supporter of abducting her on the way to a hotel in Charbagh, thrashing her and threatening to burn her face with acid.

In her complaint, the woman said she was returning to Charbagh from Husadiya crossing by an autorickshaw when two youths forcibly stopped the auto and sat inside. “They gave Rs 100 to the driver and asked

him to leave at once. They later bundled me into their car and took me to a secluded place where they thrashed me with belts and also slapped me. They asked me to withdraw a complaint and let me off later,” she told the police. She said she had filed a case against Sudhir Tiwari of Amethi. “I suspect it was a handiwork of Sudhir and his family members. The police should work on the case and arrest the accused as they threatened to burn my face with acid and kill me,” she said.

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CITATION (BY ADVERTISEMENT)
(Chapter XXX, Rule-21)
IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT ALLAHABAD
ORIGINAL JURISDICTION
TESTAMENTARY AND INTES-TATE JURISDICTION

TESTAMENTARY CASE
NO. 54 OF 2020

IN THE MATTER OF
THE GOODS OF

Late Jay Narayan Yadav son of Late Parmanand Yadav, R/o Mohalla-Sakhaura Khurd, Tappa-Chaurasi, Pargana-Kantit, Post Office-Sadar, Tahsil-Sadar, District Mirzapur..... Deceased
Smt. Shanti DeviPetitioner
WHEREAS an application has been made by Smt. Shanti Devi aged about 74 years, R/o Village-Chhota Sakhaura, Mahuaria, District Mirzapur for the probate of the will (or Letters of Administration to the estate) of Late Jay Narayan Yadav deceased, who died at Chhota Sakhaura, Mirzapur on 14.08.2012 AND WHEREAS, the 30th day of April, 2021 has been fixed for hearing of the said application. THIS CITATION is issued calling upon all persons claiming to have any interest to come and see the proceedings if they think fit before the grant of Probate (or Letters of Administration)
Given under my hand and the seal of the Court this 25th day of March, 2021.

DEPUTY REGISTRAR
HIGH COURT, ALLAHABAD

यूपी0 प्रोजेक्ट्स कारपोरेशन लि0
(उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार का उपक्रम) CIN: U1510UP1976SGC004285
कार्यालय- परियोजना प्रबंधक, निर्माण इकाई-7, गोमती बेराज, बायां तट,
गोमती नगर, लखनऊ। Website: www.upprojects.org,
Email: pm.uppci7@gmail.com, GSTIN: 09AAACU3393F128

पत्रांक- 48/ गौरीगंगा/परिपत्रक/इकाई-7 दिनांक: 15/04/2021

अल्प कालीन ई-निविदा सूचना

एतद्वारा इस इकाई के अन्तर्गत जनपद गोरखपुर में राप्ती नदी के बायें तट पर स्थित पंचप्रिया कर्मनी तटबंध की बाढ़ से सूखा हेतु ग्राम दुमिया के निकट हाइड्रोलिक एक्जैक्टर के माध्यम से बैनलाइजेशन कार्य हेतु निविदा सूचना संख्या-13/ वी.सी.एल./परि.प्रम./इकाई-7/2021-22 दिनांक 15.04.2021 द्वारा ई-टेंडरिंग के माध्यम से आइटम दरों के आधार पर ऑनलाइन निविदाएं आमंत्रित की जाती है। उक्त कार्य की बिड दिनांक 19.04.2021 से दिनांक 24.04.2021 अपरान्ह 3:00 बजे तक ऑनलाइन सबमिट की जा सकती है, जो दिनांक 24.04.2021 को अपरान्ह 4:00 बजे अधोहस्ताक्षरी के कार्यालय में खोली जायेगी। निविदा से सम्बन्धित आवश्यक सूचना, निविदा प्रपत्र, निविदा शर्तें एवं ऑनलाइन निविदा अनलॉड किये जाने व डाउनलोड किये जाने की लिखि आदि का समस्त विवरण www.upprojects.org एवं <http://tenderer.up.nic.in> पर उपलब्ध है।

परियोजना प्रबंधक, निर्माण इकाई-7

Menacing spread: 22,439 infected in UP; 5,183 in Lko

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The COVID-19 monstrosity spread its tentacles in Uttar Pradesh as there was a surge in the coronavirus infections with the state recording 22,439 fresh cases during the last 24 hours on Thursday while the number of positive cases was 20,510 on Wednesday.

In the last one day, 104 people lost lives to COVID-19 while the number of fatalities was 68 on Wednesday.

"To check the spread of coronavirus infection, there is an impetus on testing. In the last 24 hours, 2,06,517 samples were tested out of which 22,439 new cases of coronavirus infections were detected. We are going to further ramp up testing and will take it to 2.50 lakh tests per day," Additional Chief Secretary (Medical and Health) Amit Mohan Prasad here during his daily press briefing.

The state capital Lucknow witnessed the biggest spike with 5,183 positive cases followed by 1,888 in Prayagraj, 1,859 in Varanasi, 1,263 in Kanpur Nagar and 750 in Gorakhpur.

Prasad said there were 1,29,848 active coronavirus cases in the state out of which 66,528 patients were in home isolation. He said in the last one



A makeshift wall comes up in front of Baikunth Dhaam in Lucknow on Thursday. A viral video of flames emerging from scores of pyres the other day had put the government in a spot. (Right) An area in Wazirganj turned into a containment zone



infection. Under this campaign, 15.63 crore people had been informed about infection and 3.75 crore Covid tests had been done, he said and added, "In this way, under the surveillance campaign, out of the 24 crore population about 19.38 crore people have been contacted by the government machinery."

Amid the COVID-19 surge, migrant labourers have started coming back to their native places in Uttar Pradesh from different states, including Haryana, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

Sehgal said people who were not found to be infected would be sent to home quarantine for 14 days, whereas people without symptoms would be sent to home quarantine for seven days.

"Not only this, it has been clearly stated in the guideline that upon arrival of migrant labourers in their district, the district administration should not only screen them but also prepare a list of important information, including their names, addresses and mobile numbers," Sehgal said and added that along with medical facilities, proper arrangements for food and shelter would be ensured in these quarantine centres.

day, 4,222 COVID-19 patients had recovered in the state.

As the difference between the number of people who have recovered from coronavirus infection and people testing positive is very high, there is acute shortage of beds in Covid hospitals.

"Uttar Pradesh now signi-

fies death and mourning.

Death is reported from each mohalla almost every day in big cities like Lucknow, Kanpur Nagar, Prayagraj and Varanasi. Majority of the people have died waiting for medical help," Samajwadi Party spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary said on Thursday.

He is not off the mark. An emotional letter by retired District Judge Ramesh Chandra, 67, has exposed the administration's inefficiency in controlling the COVID-19 surge. He and his wife Madhu Chandra, 64, tested positive for coronavirus infection. They were home quarantined as they

did not get admission in any hospital. On Wednesday, Madhu Chandra died. Chandra wrote a letter and posted it on social media seeking help saying: "I have called the helpline numbers given by the government over 50 times since yesterday but there was no response. There was no one to

deliver medicines at home or facilitate admission in any hospital. My wife died and now there is no one to help me in cremation."

"If a retired judge is facing the apathy of the government administration, what is happening to common man on street can be judged," Suresh

Chandra, a social activist, said and added that a panic had set in as there was a surge of coronavirus positive cases across Uttar Pradesh but the government looked indifferent.

Additional Chief Secretary Navneet Sehgal, however, said that surveillance was the only weapon to counter coronavirus

KGMU, Balrampur hospital to function as dedicated Covid facilities



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Even as the total Covid cases in the state capital have crossed the one lakh-mark, KGMU, Balrampur Hospital, ERA's Medical College and Hospital, Integral, TS Mishra, Mayo and Hind hospitals will now be converted into complete and dedicated Covid facilities. KGMU Vice-Chancellor Dr Bipin Puri said they have received directions from the state government and the services will be started from April 19 onwards.

"All the non-Covid activities and emergencies will come to a stop and only Covid patients will be admitted to the hospital. To start as a dedicated Covid facility, around 1,200 non-Covid patients will be shifted to other facilities. These are serious patients, including those suffering from cancer, heart diseases, gunshot wounds, fractures etc, and they have to be sent to different hospitals. It will take some time," he said. He added that discussions are on with the government which has to decide where these patients will be shifted and where the emergency services will come up.

At other Covid hospitals, the doctors have started innovative methods for trying to extend consultations to patients at homes.

Dr Zia Hashim from SGPGI said he tries to get oxygen arranged for his patients. "There are patients who call me when they face problems and though it is difficult to arrange a bed for them, we manage these patients through doctors who are not trained in Covid management. We tell these doctors what injections could be given to these patients and whether it is necessary to give them oxygen," he explained. He said they have managed several patients in this way but this method was tried with patients with mild symptoms.

"We extend this kind of help to them before they test positive. However, once they test positive, they have to approach the Integrated Control and Command Centre," he said. He added that getting a test done is a difficult task and even patients with low oxygen levels are finding it hard to get beds.

He said the scenario at present is such that the cost of oxygen cylinders has increased. The best management technique is that people have fever, they should assume that they have Covid-19 and start taking precautions if the report is delayed, he said.

"Such patients should keep monitoring their oxygen levels and shift to a hospital if the oxygen level goes down. This way, the burden on hospitals will reduce as many patients with good oxygen saturation levels are reaching the hospitals. It is important to categorise patients before admission," he said. He added that there have been several patients with RT-PCR negative reports but they were found to be positive when tested at SGPGI.

Meanwhile, Lucknow University lost another professor to Covid-19. Prof KC Pandey, who was admitted in Ram Manohar Lohia Institute for Medical Sciences for the last 10 days, succumbed on Thursday. Prof Vibhuti Rai from Geology department said he worked primarily in logic, philosophy of Mathematics, philosophy of mind and philosophy of language.

Meanwhile, medical experts said holding panchayat elections in these unprecedented times could lead to further increase in the number of cases.

A senior health official said the situation is akin to emergency and activities like panchayat polls should be postponed. Another medical expert said that elections should be avoided for the greater good.

सफाई, दवाई और कड़ाई जीतेंगे कोरोना से लड़ाई

- ◆ मास्क अवश्य पहनें ।
- ◆ दो गज़ की दूरी का पालन करें ।
- ◆ सैनिटाइजर/साबुन से बार-बार हाथ साफ करें ।
- ◆ खांसी, जुकाम, बुखार, सांस लेने में तकलीफ होने पर जाँच कराएं ।

कोरोना की जाँच एवं उपचार सरकारी चिकित्सालयों में निःशुल्क उपलब्ध है ।

45 वर्ष से अधिक आयु के सभी नागरिक टीकाकरण अवश्य करवाएं ।

हेल्पलाइन नं. **104**

दो गज़ की दूरी मास्क है जरूरी

घबराने की नहीं है बात सरकार खड़ी है साथ

#Unite2FightCorona

सूचना एवं जनसम्पर्क विभाग, उत्तर प्रदेश

4,42,902 vaccine jabs given in city so far

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow is on top of the vaccination charts having given 4,42,902 jabs so far. The state capital has administered almost double the doses as compared to other districts in the state. The districts following Lucknow include Varanasi with 2,22,711 vaccinations, Prayagraj (2,83,552), Meerut (2,56,796) and Kanpur (2,58,162).

A senior official from the National Health Mission said the number of doses administered in Lucknow is more but other districts with less population have also witnessed a good response. "Take for example Balrampur where 1,43,000 people have been vaccinated and looking at its population, it has done well," he pointed out. He said it could not be denied that the mobilisation of frontline and health workers by ASHA workers in Lucknow has been encouraging.

"Also, with Lucknow being an urban part of the state, people are more educated and aware, and a large number of



people registered for vaccination because of the large population," he said.

He pointed out that in Uttar Pradesh, the vaccination figures have already crossed the 1-crore mark.

The official said that the

vaccination of jail inmates is going on simultaneously and those the 45-plus age category are being given the jabs.

"Earlier, we vaccinated the 60-plus category and now we are vaccinating those aged above 45 years. The wastage of

vaccine during the exercise was less than 5 per cent," he said.

The NHM official pointed out that the main challenge that they are facing is the staff members testing positive for coronavirus infection during

the vaccination exercise. "Most of those testing Covid positive include doctors and other officials, which is creating a lot of problems. Even the managing director has tested positive and after most of the meetings that witnessed the presence of all officials concerned, many senior officials have tested positive. These meetings are held regularly and though some of them are held virtually, physical meetings also take place as it is necessary for this kind of challenges that we are faced with," he said.

He added that the vaccination programme involves activities like disbursal of vaccines from the store which has to be carried out physically. "The vaccination team has to be present physically as work from home is not possible," he pointed out. However, the NHM official said that the silver lining of the exercise is that there has been no person who became serious after taking the vaccine jab even if he or she contracted infection. UP is now close to Rajasthan at the third place in the country.

Case of fraud lodged against manager of private company

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A group of men lodged a case against the manager/agent of Sahu Investment Mutual Benefit Provident Limited at Hazratganj police station. The complainants said that the accused, Kumar Yadav, duped more than 200 people by luring them into investing in the company. They said they were running their accounts for the last 6-7 years and had invested about Rs 2 crore on being asked by Vinod.

They said when they asked

Vinod to refund the money after the investment scheme matured, he and his men beat them up and threatened them with dire consequences," they said. A case was registered in this connection.

Meanwhile, a woman working with an NGO lodged a case against an unidentified accused who impersonated her colleague in Gomtinagar Vistar police station area. The woman, identified as Princy Prajapati of Ganga Apartment in the area, said she works with a UK-based NGO. "On April 12, I got

an email from a colleague who asked me to buy a Google Pay card for her and send it to her. She also told me that she would send me the money for that," Princy said.

She said she bought a Google Pay card worth USD 100 and sent the code to her colleague. "I had to purchase a total of 10 cards. However, later I noticed that the person who was sending me the mail was not my colleague but someone else," she said. She gave details of the bank account through which she made the transaction.

Foundation of 20km link road to be laid next month

Lucknow (PNS): The foundation stone of a 20km link road connecting IIM tri-section on Sitapur Road with Janeshwar Mishra Park in Gomti Nagar will be laid next month. It will be a joint venture of Lucknow Development Authority, Public Works Department and Nagar Nigam, LDA chief engineer IS Singh said on Thursday.

The idea was conceived two-and-a-half years back and since then the planners were engaged to work out the route. Half the road is supposed to be elevated.

The chief engineer said the purpose is to ensure better connectivity and ease traffic congestion besides shortening the distance. The layout has been planned by experts drawn from the civil engineering department of IIT, Roorkee.

The project is expected to be completed within 18 months of its launch.

Heavy vehicles like trucks and passengers buses coming from Delhi or Uttarakhnad will be diverted to the link road at least 10 kms before the municipal limits. Similarly, heavy traffic from Allahabad or Varanasi will be diverted from Sultanpur Road.

Acting LDA VC Abhishek Prakash said arrangements would be made for the passengers dropped on the outskirts. Autorickshaws would be made available to ferry them to their respective destinations in the state capital.

The LDA chief engineer said driving is safe on the link or elevated road if drivers follow the instructions or remain cautious.

Weatherman predicts rains at few places

Lucknow (PNS): The Meteorological department has forecast light to moderate rainfall over a few parts of Uttar Pradesh and thunderstorm, lightning and gusty winds at isolated to scattered places between April 16 and 17. A senior official said that a fresh western disturbance-induced cyclonic circulation over west Rajasthan and neighbourhood now lies over central Pakistan and adjoining west Rajasthan at 1.5 km above mean sea level.

"A cyclonic circulation lies over Haryana and neighbourhood and extends up to 0.9 km above mean sea level," he said.

He added that the impact estimate is disruption of electricity and traffic flow. He added that the advice is to stay indoors, close windows and doors and avoid travel, if possible.

BIRD expands training outreach despite Covid-19 pandemic

Lucknow (PNS): The Banker's Institute of Rural Development (BIRD) is a premier training institute of NABARD for training and capacity building of banks, government institutions, NGOs, FPOs and other stakeholders involved in implementation of programmes of national priority and specifically for improving the supply of institutional credit to agriculture and rural sectors.

In an official communique, it was stated that BIRD also hosts Centre for Cooperative Excellence (C-PCE), Centre for Research on Financial Inclusion and Microfinance (CRFIM), Centre for Climate Change and APRACA Centre

of Excellence (ACE). BIRD has wrapped up the year 2020-21 with a slew of new training offerings in keeping with the constraints imposed by Covid while meeting the training needs under overarching national priorities. Within a month of lockdown, BIRD switched to online mode of trainings for its client institutions such as commercial banks, regional rural banks, cooperative banks and their training institutes, small finance banks, MFIs, NGOs, government officials etc. During 2020-21, despite the lockdown, BIRD provided online training facilities to 9,119 participants through 243 training programmes.

SCHOOLSCAN

DEBATE CONTEST

Yuvraj Singh, a class V student of Cambridge Section of City Montessori School, Gomti Nagar Campus II, has brought laurels to the institution by winning the first prize in a debate contest organised by Bugs India Organisation, Gwalior. The debate was held online on 'Online vs offline classes'.





यू०पी० प्रोजेक्ट्स कारपोरेशन लि०
(उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार का उपक्रम)
CIN: U150UP1976SGC004285
कार्यालय :- परियोजना प्रबंधक, निविदा इकाई-7, गोमती नगर, कायां तट, गोमती नगर, लखनऊ | Website : www.upprojects.org
Email : uppc17@gmail.com, GSTIN : 09AAACU3393F128

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परियोजना प्रबंधक

**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
BUILDING CELL U.P.P.W.D., LUCKNOW**
(eebidgcell@gmail.com)
Letter no.:-700 /General/Bhawan Cell/2021 Dates -13.04.2021
(E-Tender Notice)
Superintending Engineer, Building Cell, UPPWD, Lucknow on behalf of Governor of Uttar Pradesh invites Expression of Interest from reputed Authority Engineer (for Project Management) for construction of building works above 50 crores under UPPWD on EPC Mode from reputed firms having experience and expertise in the field of Engineering, Design & Architecture. The details of e-tender notice are as given below:

S.No.	Name of Work
1	Notice Inviting Bids for Empanelment of Authority (for Project Management) for construction of building works above 50 crores under UPPWD on EPC mode.

Period for downloading of EOI document from 19/04/2021 at 11:00 am to 18/05/2021 up to 05:00 PM. Last date of submission of proposal 19/05/2021 upto 12:30 Noon. Opening of proposal 20/05/2021 at 3:00 pm. The hard copies of the EOI documents of interested bidders shall have to be submitted by 20/05/2021 upto 05:00 PM as per GO No.-1 / 2018 / 3070 / 78-2-2018 / 42 IT / 2017 (22) Date 03/01/2018. Rest of the related conditions can be seen on <http://www.etender.up.nic.in>.

Note :

- The formats and other details of the EOI is available in the bid document which is available on the website www.etender.up.nic.in
- The tender fee shall be deposited online through Net Banking/RTGS on the e-tender portal site www.etender.up.nic.in through the available gateway.

(Pawan Verma)
Executive Engineer
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Lucknow
UP- 163281 Date 15.04.2021 विज्ञापन वेबसाइट www.upgov.nic.in पर उपलब्ध है।

(Pawan Verma)
Superintending Engineer
Building Cell, UPPWD, Lucknow
For on behalf of Governor of UP

NREGA schemes generating jobs in times of crisis

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In the time of crisis, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) schemes have again come as an instrument of employment generation at the villages. According to the data of the Village Development Department on April 14, as many as 9,51,583 villagers of 74 districts are working in various schemes of

MGNREGA. Whereas on April 1, the number was 2,24,106. "Thus, within 14 days, the number of villagers working in MGNREGA schemes has increased by 7,27,477," an official said. To ensure villagers get employment, all the works related to water conservation are being done under MGNREGA. The government has also linked migrants from other states with employment in village

panchayats for digging of ponds, roads, tracks, drains," the official said. After the coronavirus outbreak last year, the Yogi Adityanath government had come up with a scheme to provide employment to labourers under which, along with the construction of ponds, check dams, the work of cleaning rivers was started on a large-scale which created sufficient employment opportunities for them.

Alarmed by Covid surge, J&K admin defers summer Darbar

Jammu: Taking note of the alarming surge in Covid-19 cases, the Union Territory Government on Thursday decided to defer the summer Darbar move 2021 and reinforce its resources towards the containment of the pandemic.

It was also decided that the civil secretariat will continue to function through its e-office in both the capital cities of Jammu and Srinagar so that the public at large is not inconvenienced at either capital.

As part of the biannual darbar move and the civil secretariat's shift, other move offices and the Raj Bhavan were scheduled to close in Jammu on April 30 to May 1 and set to begin functioning in the summer capital from May 10.

Last year also the government had delayed the shifting of Darbar move offices to Srinagar till June 15 in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic.

The functioning of the dual-secretariat will ensure uninterrupted functioning of the UT administration while reducing the need for long-distance travel of the public.

During a high-level meeting chaired by LG Manoj Sinha it was observed that a complete shift of Darbar offices to Srinagar from 30th April can jeopardize COVID-control efforts in Jammu and Kashmir. As elsewhere in the country, the number of COVID cases in the Union territory is at an all-time high and requires uninterrupted attention for effective monitoring and control.

The Government also directed the Administrative Secretaries to put in place a robust mechanism for holding virtual offices through e-office and use online/electronic/video conferencing/other modes of communication at the two capital cities.

J&K Secretariat has already switched over to a paperless office by rolling out the prestigious e-office project. As such, most of the official record is available on the web cloud which can be easily accessed and retrieved by the authenticated employees' accounts anywhere, anytime.

It was also decided that GAD will issue orders regarding 'move' HoDs, all of whom will also need to shift to e-office. This will apply to all HoDs, barring a few.

Meanwhile, the UT government also decided to postpone the class XII J&K board exams till further orders and cancelled ongoing class X exams.

The Union Territory recorded 1141 fresh cases of coronavirus with Jammu division accounting for 434 and Kashmir 707 cases. PNS

Kerala takes fresh measures to control Covid

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

With the Centre terming Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan as a COVIDIOT because of his alleged violation of pandemic protocols and the number of new persons tested positive for Covid-19 nearing 8,300 on Thursday, the State administration tightened the rules to prevent further spreading of the disease.

Earlier in the day the Union Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs and External Affairs said Vijayan should be addressed as COVIDIOT because of his reckless behaviour on the day of polling (April 6) and in the subsequent days when he threw to the winds all norms specified by medical experts.

Vijayan had been admitted to the Medical College Hospital from where he was discharged on Wednesday. He is back in his palatial residence

at Pinarayi where he would be recuperating for the next ten days.

The Chief Minister reportedly held a virtual meeting with other ministers and bureaucrats on Thursday where it was decided to take drastic steps to prevent the spread of the pandemic but without causing any inconvenience to the general public.

A Government Order issued after the meeting said that crowding during public and private functions would be brought under strict control. Marriages, house warming functions and other private ceremonies should be intimated to the local authorities well in advance, said the order.

Addressing the media later in the day, V P Joy, chief secretary, said all front line workers and people above the age of 45 would be checked on Friday and Saturday as part of the massive testing ordered for the next two days,

Govt only indulging in sham of Covid 'vaccine festival': RaGa

New Delhi: Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi on Thursday attacked the Government over the handling of the Covid-19 situation and alleged that it is only indulging in a "sham" of a 'vaccine festival'. He also alleged that there is no testing, no beds in hospitals, neither ventilators nor oxygen and vaccine is also not available. His sister and party's general secretary Priyanka Gandhi asked the Uttar Pradesh government to take concrete steps to prevent the spread of coronavirus and asserted that it is "futile" to invest time and resources in "hiding" this tragedy.

Rahul Gandhi also took a jibe asking what PM-CARES is doing, as huge donations were given to the fund for handling COVID-19 situation. "There are no tests or beds in hospitals. There are no ventilators or oxygen. The vaccine is also not there. But there is a sham of a festival. PM-

CARES?" he asked. His attack came after the government celebrated the 'Tika Utsav' (vaccine festival) from April 11 to 14.

Taking to Twitter, Priyanka tagged a video purportedly showing Baikunth Dham crematorium in Lucknow being covered by opaque screens. "There is a request to the government of Uttar Pradesh: It is futile to invest time, resources and energy into hiding, suppressing this tragedy," Priyanka Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi.

"Take concrete steps to stop the pandemic, save lives, and prevent the spread of infection. This is the need of the hour," she said. The Congress leader had on Wednesday accused the Uttar Pradesh government of hiding coronavirus numbers and said had they been cautious from day one, people would not have witnessed such times. PNS

Political differences make friends foes in Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ BAGULA/NADIA

Jehanara Khatoon and Alpina Biswas are two great friends. Their husbands are not. While Jehenara's husband Kamran is a committed Trinamool Congress worker, Biswas' husband Aroop is a "comrade-turned-pracharak."

Such is the intensity of their hatred that one suspects that Kamran had a hand in Biswas' tank being poisoned last December killing fishes worth about a lakh of rupees. All for political rivalry.

Whereas till a few years ago the two families had great dealings. "Both belonged to the Left and both were happy... After Mamata Banerjee came to power her men bought over the minority people here with posts and other facilities ... Kamran joined the TMC.

As the rivalry began the organizational base of CPI(M) shrank "not because we were disliked by the people but because they would not allow us to work politically ... if you join a rally they will fine you often in lakhs ... insult your sister ... or even kill you ... gradually the Left workers were immobilized as the TMC had a field day ..."Still we gave a fight in 2013 panchayat elec-

tions and even 2016 Assembly polls ... but they would not let our men vote ... we would sit back home and they would cast our votes ... as the CPI(M) faded the vacuum that was filled by the BJP which came with leaders like Dilip Ghosh who prescribed eye-for-an-eye ... that the people lapped up and the whole village became BJP," Biswas a member of the Matua community says, adding the TMC has filled the area with corruption, cut money and crime.

Curiously "both the TMC and the BJP are vying for Matua votes but when it comes to the ground level minorities are preferred to the Matuas because they vote in block," says Swapan Bhowmick a social worker adding how "communalization of Bengal has taken place in the past 5-10 years."

At Hatishala village Naresh Mandal a local says, "For my sister's marriage I had to take loan of Rs 2 lakh from a bank at Bagula (a nearby panchayat). The local TMC leader managed it for me and took a whopping Rs 75,000 out of that."

Iphsita a school teacher from Mayurhat says how she had to shell out Rs 5 lakh for the job adding her sister a nurse had to give Rs 2 lakh for a temporary job at a hospital at

Ranaghat. Abdul Karim a local from Majdia says he has job card but is seldom given work in the 100-days work scheme. "If they get me to sign there for 50 days, they will give me payment for 10 days ... rest will be appropriated by their men," he says. And what if he takes it up with the BDO. "Babu then you will not be there to be seen the next day... even the BDO Saheb does not have a say... they have the power to make him do sit-ups in public."

Anima a 75-year-old widow from Shahpur says how she had to give Rs 10,000 for a room and a bathroom to be made under Indira Awas scheme. "When I refused to give that money they stopped my widow allowance ... on the one hand they had to show the list of constructed houses on the other hand they needed cash and there they took that from helpless people like us ... asked," says she adding she has not voted since 2011. "My husband was a CPI(M) voter and so was I. But after 2011 we could not vote because they would not let us vote," she says adding "who wants to get hurt ... if I die it is good but if I get a fractured leg then who will look after me ... I have nobody." The helplessness is writ large on her face.

DELHI JAL BOARD: GOVT. OF NCT OF DELHI
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (E&M)-HP-I
HAIDERPUR WATER WORKS, DELHI-110085


STOP CORONA: WEAR MASK, MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING AND MAINTAIN HAND HYGIENE
Short Press N.I.T. No.01 (2021-22)

S. No.	Name of Work	Approximate value based on Schedule of rates/Item rates/Item Sum (Rs in lacs)	Earnest Money (Exempted) In Rs.	Tender Fee	Date of release of tender in e-procurement solution	Last date/time of receipt of tender through e-procurement solution
1.	Removal of floating material manually by labour at different bar screens installed at Twin Main Point under HPWW-I. Tender ID: 2021_DJB_202941_1	Item rate	59000/-	500/-	15.04.2021	23.01.2021

Further details in this regard can be seen at <https://delhi.govtprocurement.com>

ISSUED BY P.R.O. (WATER)
Advt. No. J.S.V. 31 (2021-22)

Sd/-
(SUNIL KUMAR)
EE (E&M) HP-I



GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA email- serwabsd2003@yahoo.com
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
SOUTHERN CIRCLE, RURAL WORKS, SUNABEDA

O-49

No: _____ **Date:** _____
E-Procurement Notice for PMGSY PHASE-III (Batch-II) works.

1	Name of the work	Construction/Upgradation of Roads under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and their Maintenance for Five years (34 Nos)
3	Class of contractor	"B", "A", Special & Super Class of (Odisha PWD) or relevant class of other licensing authority.
4	Estimated Cost	Varies from Rs.137.40 Lakhs to Rs.1331.68 Lakhs (Approximately)
5	Details projects as per Annexure attached.	

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender online for bidding	Last Date & Time of seeking tender clarification	Date & Time of opening of tender		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Superintending Engineer, Rural Works, Southern Circle, Sunabeda	SERWSCSD - Online - 03/2020-21	16.04.2021 at 11.00 A.M.	06.05.2021 up to 5.30 P.M.	05.05.2021 up to 2.00 P.M.	07.05.2021 at 11.00 A.M.	21.05.2021 at 11.00 A.M.

6. The details of PMGSY works can be seen from the web site <https://www.pmgstyenders.gov.in>

7. Any Corrigendum/Addendum will be displayed in the above e-tender web sites.

OIPR-25045/11/0003/2122

Superintending Engineer,
Southern Circle RW: Sunabeda.

Varanasi records biggest ever spike, positive cases cross 36K-mark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The district has recorded the biggest ever spike and the positive cases of COVID-19 crossed 36K-mark on Thursday evening. As many as 2,484 more have tested positive, increasing the total number to 36,432 and with five more deaths during the last 24 hours, the death toll increased to 416. During the last 24 hours, 497 patients have been recovered and all of them in home isolation. The total number of patients cured in the district is 24,260 including 21,249 in home isolation and 3,011 in COVID-19 hospitals. The number of active cases has jumped up to 11,756 crossing the 11K-mark.

In the first report of the day, 1,192 positive patients were found out of 2,945 reports received and this figure increased to 2,484 as per report provided by the Health department in the evening increasing the active cases to 11,756. Earlier, in view of finding hundreds of new positive cases, with 8 new hotspots, the number of active hotspots has increased to 471 with 11 green zones having been converted to red zones by a day ago. Out of total 2,884 hotspots, 2,413 are green zones and 471 are red



A nurse vaccinating a youth

Pioneer

zones.

The Health department continued the vaccination at 66 centres including government hospitals and health centres. The vaccination was also made at the municipal corporation, medical care unit in Collectorate, head post office in Visheshwarganj, SBI's zonal office in Kutchery and Central Jail in Shivpur. The long queues of the people particularly of old aged persons were seen at government hospitals for the vaccination but at the same time, the carelessness was also seen and no distance was maintained between the corona positive and persons with negative report. Earlier, a total of 26,305

beneficiaries were vaccinated during the Tika Utsav launched from April 11 to 14 by the Health department. The police launched drive at night and made challan of those found on the road without any genuine reason.

As there is restriction on the movement on ghats from 4 pm to 6 am and hence, all the ghats wore a deserted look during evening hours when there was heavy rush on the normal day.

Meanwhile, the District Magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma held a meeting with the dealers of oxygen at his camp office and directed them to supply the oxygen cylinders to COVID-19

hospital first and also cautioned of action if the obstacles were created on this way by anyone.

The supply chain of oxygen cylinders should remain continues he directed and said, the non-COVID-19 hospitals should be given second priority.

The Commissioner of Police A Satish Ganesh held a meeting with traders and appealed them to close the business establishments on their convenient to break the corona chain and his appealed yielded positive result soon when the Kirana Vyapar Samiti held an emergency meeting and decided to close the Kirana Mandi from April 19 to 24. The president Manoj Kumar pandey chaired the meeting and general secretary Ashok Kaseera conducted it.

In view of the surge in COVID-19 pandemic, the management of Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) has cancelled the summer vacation of academic staff. The Veda department, Faculty of SVDV, BHU has cancelled the online counselling of test-B main discipline & allied discipline which was to be conducted on April 16 and 17 till further order.

Villagers create furore over fake voting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Enraged over fake voting during Panchayat election in Dalounha village of Meja under trans-Yamunapar in the district, villagers created a furore. The villagers alleged that a candidate's husband is getting votes with fake Aadhaar cards. Angry villagers locked the polling booth and created a ruckus there.

On the receipt of information SDM and CO reached the spot to review the situation. The computer centre operator making the fake Aadhaar card was caught red handed. SP Crime and SSP also reached the spot on getting the information and somehow, they convinced the villagers and got the voting resumed.

Polling began in the morning in Dalounha village of Meja in Yamunapar. Meanwhile, at around 11 in the morning, some villagers came to vote and it was found that their vote had already been cast by some other persons. People were shocked knowing this. In this way, the vote of many people had already been franchised. Villagers created a ruckus by accusing the husband of a prime candidate of voting with fake Aadhaar cards. This disrupted voting.

On getting the information, CO Bhim Kumar Gautam



and SDM Renu Singh reached the spot to take stock of the situation.

After raiding the mentioned place of the villagers, the computer centre operator was caught. Even after this, the villagers were not allowing the voting to begin. They alleged that when one booth has so far got about 100 votes only, then

how more than hundreds votes were polled in the second booth at the same time. The computer operator also took the name of the prime candidate's husband and told that about 90 fake Aadhaar cards have been prepared for him. Villagers put a lock on the polling station.

After receiving the infor-

mation, SP Crime Ashutosh Mishra, SSP Sarvshresth Tripathi reached the spot. Somehow, by explaining the reason, the polling station lock was opened and after about two-and-a-half hours the polling could start again. The police have also detained the husband of the prime candidate.

Curbs on movement of people

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In view of the COVID-19 turned into an alarming situation, the district administration is gradually imposing restriction on the movement of people and vehicles as well and in this order, it is seriously considering to erect barricading on the district borders to restrict the people of other districts wanting to come to city without any genuine reason. The railway administration has stopped the sale of platform tickets and also sealed the borders of important railway stations.

The barricading will be erected on the borders of the district to restrict the movement of the people of other districts who want to come to the district without any genuine reason. The barricading will be erected on Ledhupur border on

Varanasi-Ghazipur, Padoa-Sujabad & Pararia on Varanasi-Chandauli, ring-road (under-pass border) on Varanasi-Azamgarh, Bhati Chowk on Varanasi-Mirzapur, BHEL Company on Varanasi-Jaunpur, PAC Bhullanpur, Akhri, Kanwa tr-junction & Dafi police outpost on Varanasi-Prayagraj route, the Divisional Commissioner Deepak Agrawal and Commissioner of Police A Satish Ganesh informed to presspersons adding, that the police personnel will conduct checking of the people coming to district from adjoining districts and they would be allowed the entry only on the genuine reasons.

But the vehicle fetching the necessary commodities will not be stopped and allowed entry. There will be restriction on ferrying the passengers in the bus, auto-rickshaw and

other vehicles more than its capacity. The district administration has decided to show strictness and if any employee or customer is found without using face mask at shop, then action will be taken against shopkeeper.

The people are being made aware about the guidelines of pandemic through 40 vehicles of police control room, 55 vehicles of municipal corporation, vehicles of all police stations and 35 vehicles of PRV under public address system, Ganesh informed and appealed the people not to forward the fake news without making confirmation. Action will be taken against those indulging in hoarding of medicines and realising the fee of the tests of diseases more than the fixed. Both the officers appealed to the people to remain at homes and come out only for the necessary work.

essential work.

In the meantime, the railway administration of Varanasi Division, NER has stopped the sale of platform tickets at all the railway stations of the division till the further directive as a precautionary measure in view of continuously increasing cases of corona. The borders of important railway stations have also been sealed. Those who have confirmed tickets are being allowed entry through a single entrance gate and the thermal scanning is being made of each and every passenger. There is also arrangement of conducting the antigen test at railway stations of the passengers coming from other states. The RT-PCR test is also being conducted on the suspected passengers. The railway has issued helpline number-139 on which the passengers can contact for help.

Admn extends period of night curfew

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Due to the surge in the cases of COVID-19, the district administration has extended the period of night curfew from 8 pm to 7 am for the 15 days till April 30 which was earlier, from 9 pm to 6 am. The district court has been closed till April 19 and the collectorate has been closed till April 17, while office & court of the divisional commissioner have been closed till April 20. Meanwhile, the Kashi Covid Response Centre (KCRC) has been established to ensure the availability of health facilities in a better and well-managed way and it will function for 24

hours. The Health department has released five telephone numbers on which the people could also seek help relating to COVID-19.

The government has decided to impose night curfew from 8 pm to 7 am in such districts where the active cases of corona have reached to more than 2,000. The district administration received a letter regarding this and by making compliance the directive, the District Magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma extended the period of night curfew from 8 pm to 7 am which was earlier between 9 pm and 6 am. The fresh restriction will remain in effect till April 30.

The district administration and Health department are making efforts to provide better health facilities to the people in the present difficult situation and in this order, the KCRC has been established with the coordination of the MLC AK Sharma, Divisional Commissioner Deepak Agrawal, Commissioner of Police A Satish Ganesh, District Magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma and health officers.

The KCRC will ensure the availability of health services in the better and well managed manner to the people and it will function for 24 hours. The people could also seek help

by dialing the telephone numbers-1077, 272005, 222193, 2221941, 2221942 and 18001805567 released by the Health department.

The KCRC appealed the people go outside the house only if it is necessary, use face mask & follow the corona protocol while going outside, immediately start domestic treatment in case feel the symptoms of corona and consult the doctor and centre as well in case the test report comes positive.

It also appealed the people to avoid becoming the part of crowd in the market and wash hands with soap on regular basis.

75 polling centres ultra-sensitive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

There are as many as 75 polling centres which have been kept under ultra-sensitive category, while as many as 27 polling centres have been declared as sensitive centres in the district to ensure the peaceful elections of gram pradhan and members for the gram panchayat, kshetra panchayat & zila panchayat. Varanasi will go for the voting on April 19 under the second phase of three-tier Panchayat polls.

The district administration has geared up preparations to ensure the peaceful and free & fair conduct of Panchayat polls and in this order, the sensitive and ultra-sensitive polling centres have been identified. The District Electoral Officer Kaushal Raj Sharma has also directed the sector and zonal magistrates to conduct an inspection of such polling centres so as there is no fault in ensuring peaceful polling. The police officers were directed to ensure the action against the anti-social elements.

A total of 850 polling centres have been made in eight blocks of the district for the voting of gram pradhan and members for the gram panchayat, kshetra panchayat & zila panchayat and out of them, as many as 748 polling centres have been kept in the general category including 127, 115, 95, 88, 86, 86, 83 and 68 in Arajiline, Pindra, Cholapur, Harahua, Badagaon, Chiragaon, Sevapuri and Kashi Vidyapeeth block respectively. As many as 75 polling centres have been identified as the most-sensitive polling centres including the maximum 17 in Pindra and minimum one in Harahua block, while 12, 12, 9, 9, 8 and 7 in Cholapur, Arajiline, Chiragaon, Sevapuri, Badagaon and Kashi Vidyapeeth block respectively. Similarly, as many as 27 polling centres have been identified as sensitive polling centres including the maximum nine in Sevapuri and minimum five in Kashi Vidyapeeth, while seven and six in Badagaon and Arajiline block respectively.

It is mentioned that there are 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.

A total of 10,749 candidates are in election fray including 554 for the members of zila panchayat, 4338 candidates for 694 seats of gram pradhan and 4,530 candidates for 1,007 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.

DEVOTEES THROG CHANDRAGHANTA TEMPLE: On the third day of auspicious occasion of Chaitra Navratri the devotees thronged the temples of Goddess Chandraghanta and Saubhagya Gauri to have darshan and perform puja on Thursday.

The temple of Goddess Chandraghanta is situated at Chowk where the devotees in scores turned up and had darshan. They offered prayer to the Goddess and performed puja. As per saying, the darshan and puja of Gauri form of Goddess Durga is made during this auspicious Navratri and thus, the devotees in large numbers reached the temple of Saubhagya Gauri situated in Bansfatak area.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

The number of infected people in the district was less as compared to the number which reported on Tuesday, but the infection is still uncontrollable. On Wednesday evening, 1,891 new cases of COVID-19 were found, 231 fewer than on Tuesday. The decrease in numbers is not due to a decrease in the rate of infection, but rather the testing was conducted a bit less. In the 11,972 testing conducted on Tuesday, 2,142 were found infected and on Wednesday only 10,813 testings were conducted, out of which 1,891 were found infected.

The rate of infection is about 18 per cent as of Tuesday. In the last 24 hours, the virus killed 10 people. With this, the number of deaths from corona in the district has so far increased to 489. It is clear that the virus remains as dangerous as before. It is a matter of concern that now due to non-availability of essential medicines in

the district and not getting proper treatment in time, people have started dying.

There were 622 infected discharged on Wednesday, of which 66 were hospitalised, who were discharged after reports came in negative. While there were 556 home isolated. So far, 31,658 people have been free from infection by staying at home. According to a list released by the Department of Health, the infection of corona has reached several major offices of the state and central government, including Allahabad University. What is disturbing is that the doctors are also getting infected, who have the important responsibility of saving the lives of the severely infected.

The list of infected released by the Health department includes the names of doctors of SRN Hospital, professors of Allahabad University, teachers and principals of many schools as well as engineers and officers of Railways. The names of assistant audit officers of CDA

Pension Office, horticulture officer, clerk of HRI, engineer of Power Department, NTPC, advocates of High Court are also in the list.

MONMNC PRINCIPAL GETS CORONA INFECTED : Dr SP Singh, Principal of Motilal Nehru Medical College has also become corona infected. On April 14, his corona test was conducted for throat problems and body aches. Its report came positive in the late evening. After this, Principal Dr. SP Singh went into home isolation. He is following the Covid protocol. The principal said that during this crisis, he will be available virtually to help the patients, especially the corona infected and the government and administration.

The second wave of corona virus infection is extremely dangerous. The infected due to this are upset, and the doctors who were saving the lives of people by becoming an angel last year were also helpless. There is chaos in cities and

hospitals.

Monotony atmohsphere is prevailing everywhere due to corona pandemic, but there is no need to panic. Just protect yourself from the weather and follow some precautions. This is the advice of the city's well-known doctors during the crisis days.

Dietician Vijayalakshmi Singh of Colvin Hospital said that the best way is to drink the 'Kaadha' two to three times a day, not tea. It is easily made at home. Several research has claimed that drinking the 'Kaadha' is best for the body's immunity.

Digestive power is strengthened by drinking lukewarm water by adding lemon. If the digestive power remains strong then you will not be able to catch the virus. Do this twice a day, she added.

Dr MK Akhauri of Beli Hospital said that the corona virus enters the body through breath, even when eating something with hands, the germs reach inside.

Tributes paid to Ambedkar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

The 130th birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar was celebrated here on Thursday at 11.30 am in the premises of General Manager office building Bhumital. On this occasion, Ranjan Yadav, Additional General Manager, NCR, Prayagraj first garlanded the portrait of Baba Saheb Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar and paid homage.

Subsequently, all the divisional heads, officers and employees present along with the All India Scheduled Castes / Scheduled Tribes zonal secretary Lalsa Ram garlanded the portrait of Baba Saheb and paid homage.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (14 April 1891 - 6 December 1956), popularly known as Baba Saheb Ambedkar, was a prolific student, eminent jurist, economist, politician and social

reformer who inspired the movement against social discrimination and social Widespread campaign for equality. He was the first Minister of Law and Justice of independent India and the chief architect of the Constitution of India.

In 1990, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award. Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar was the great architect of the Constitution who made unprecedented efforts to implement society and governance based on the principles of equality and justice.

Additional General Manager, Principal Chief Personnel Officer and all the Heads of Departments were present on the occasion. The programme was conducted as per all protocols of COVID-19.

MAN KILLS WIFE OVER TRIVIAL ISSUES: In a shocking incident, a drunkard husband killed her wife over some trivial issues at a Shramik basti located under the Naiini police station of Prayagraj district. During a fight on Wednesday night, the wife was beaten to death with a stick. To hide the incident, her body was hanged by a fan of and tried to make it a form of suicide by her husband. Her four-year-old child divulged the entire incident in front of the police who reached the spot on the receipt of information. After this, the police took the husband into custody. Ankur Shukla, son of Ramjit Shukla, a resident of Shramik Basti, was married in May 2014 to Shilpa, daughter of Srikant Tiwari, a resident of Nahuwari village. Shilpa lived with her father-in-law in the labour colony along with her two children, Shiva and Tanu. Ankur worked in a private company in Noida. Shilpa and Ankur had been in dispute for the last two days when he returned home about

a week ago. On Wednesday night, Ankur beat his wife with a pipe and battered her to death. He then hung Shilpa's body from the ceiling fan to make it look like a case of suicide. In the morning, the family shouted after seeing Shilpa's body hanging from the ceiling fan, but people gathered around, but after seeing the injury marks on Shilpa's body, people suspected her of murder. When the police reached the spot, the deceased's son told the police that the father killed the mother. Naiini Inspector Sunil Kumar Bajpai said that several injury marks have been found on the deceased's body. Prima facie the case seems to be of murder. His son has opened up all the secrets. However, her husband Ankur has been taken into custody.

People from the maternal side have arrived. Action will be taken after filing a case on the basis of a written complaint.

Masks mandatory for people entering Kanpur: Shekhar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Dr Raj Shekhar said it was mandatory for all the people entering the city from airport, railway station and bus station to wear masks and warned that legal action would be taken on the spot against those not wearing masks.

Addressing a meeting at the commissionerate here on Thursday, Shekhar said at all the three entry points, hand sanitisers should be available along with thermal screening devices to take the temperatures of the people coming to the city.

The divisional commissioner said wearing masks was also mandatory for all those entering shopping malls, market places, shopping complexes, fruit and vegetable mandis, hospitals, petrol pumps, public gardens and cinema halls. He said officials had been deployed at all such places to ensure that the Covid protocol was strictly followed.

Shekhar said announcements on the public address systems regarding Covid protocol should be constantly played.

He also gave orders that Covid testing should be made more effective. He said inside the malls, messages on COVID-19 had to be played constantly.



Kanpur Divisional Commissioner, Dr Raj Shekhar addressing a meeting at Commissionerate

Pioneer

He directed the officials to work with a team spirit and in perfect coordination.

He said in offices, only 50 per cent staff should be allowed on a particular day as per the roster. He said the seats of the staff should be at a six feet distance from each other and all the offices should have a Covid help desk.

He said entry in office should only be allowed if the person wore a mask, sanitised hands and maintained the social distancing norms.

The divisional commissioner said it had come to the notice of the administration that most of the officers were not wearing masks or were wearing it on the chins. He said action should be taken against such erring officials so that people took a lesson from it.

He said in case people

came across a person with COVID-19 symptoms they should immediately report to help line number 18001805159 and get the person tested on priority. He said all the government officials on Covid duty were directed to carry out random sampling and the people need to cooperate with them.

Shekhar said in case a customer approached a shopkeeper without wearing a mask, the shopkeeper should not give the desired goods until the person wore a mask. He said in case people were adamant then the shopkeeper should inform the authorities immediately.

He said shops selling edibles should take care that the employees wore masks and gloves and allowed people only after thermal screening and hand sanitisation. He said be it

private or public vehicle, all people had to mandatorily wear masks and maintain social distancing. He said the traffic police had been asked to impose fines on people who were not using masks.

He said in all the wholesale markets every person, be it worker or owner, had to wear masks and they must wash hands and use hand sanitisers after performing any particular work. He asked the additional city magistrate to carry out surprise checks in this regard.

Police Commissioner Arun Asim, KDA Vice Chairman RK Singh, Municipal Commissioner Akshay Tripathi, SP (Traffic) Basant Lal, joint development commissioner and other senior officials took part in the meeting.

KNN launches sanitisation drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Mayor Pramila Pandey, while flagging off the six jetting machines for sanitisation from Brajendra Swarup Park on Thursday, said all the jetting machines had been assigned to cover all the zones.

She said in view of the rapid spread of COVID-19, the Kanpur Nagar Nigam had decided to carry out a sanitisation drive in public places as was done in the past so as to contain the spread of novel coronavirus.

Pandey said that people should understand that social distancing was the sole effective way to escape this infection and the jetting machines would carry out sanitisation work regularly from 9 am to 5 pm.

She said the KNN had also launched a cleanliness drive under which stagnant drains and piled up garbage was being cleared on priority. She said a special team had been assigned to monitor the work and ensure that once the area was cleaned, it was sanitised properly.

KNN Health Officer Dr Prahlad Pathak said the objective of the sanitisation drive through the jetting machines was to clean the surfaces of respiratory droplets from an infected individual. He said as the coronavirus could survive and remain infectious even on various surfaces and could be as a source of transmission, the surfaces needed to be sanitised immediately and at regular intervals. He pointed out that on plastics, stainless steel, copper and cardboard, the coronavirus could survive and remain infectious for up to 72 hours and the contaminated surfaces remained a source of transmission unless they were disinfected.

He said the contaminated surfaces could be decontaminated within a minute using common surface disinfection procedures with 62-71 per cent ethanol, 0.5 per cent hydrogen peroxide, or 0.1 per cent sodium hypochlorite.

He said the KNN had launched a special drive to de-sanitise the public places on priority. He said people were advised to refrain from touching surfaces and keep using hand sanitisers as when they laid their hands on any surface.

He said the KNN had decided to sanitise all the 110 wards in the city.

Trader ends life in depression

KANPUR (PNS): Depressed by his chronic disease, a soap trader committed suicide by jumping off from the third floor of an apartment in Swaroop Nagar police station area on Thursday morning.

He was identified as Pradip Kumar Garodia (54) who was living with his wife Sujata and son Raghav in Ashish Apartment. Garodia was trading in soap and phenyl and had his agency in Swaroop Nagar.

The kin of the deceased trader said that he was suffering from cancer for the past three years and was undergoing treatment at JK Cancer Hospital here. They said his condition had not improved even after surgery last year and due to this he was in depression. Besides, they said the business was also not running well. On Thursday morning, he quietly went out of home and jumped from the third floor of the Manta Apartment situated opposite his apartment. He was rushed to the LR Hospital where the doctors pronounced him dead. Station House Officer Ashwani Kumar Pandey said the kin of the deceased had disclosed that he committed suicide in depression. No suicide note was found.

ROAD MISHAP: A youth coming here from Lucknow on a motorcycle to cast his vote in the panchayat election was fatally knocked down by a truck at Miyaganj intersection in Unnao on Wednesday night. He was identified as Hari Om Shukla (22), a resident of Kukaradeo in Bithoor. Father of the deceased, KK Shukla, said Hari Om was looking after his maternal uncle Pappu's show-room in Lucknow and he met with the accident while coming to the village to cast his vote in the panchayat election of Chaubeipur block on Thursday.

Gkp-Bandra Terminus summer spl to run on April 17, 21, 25 & 29

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

The railway administration will for the convenience of passengers extend the running period of 05181/05182 Gorakhpur-Bandra Terminus-Gorakhpur and 05183/05184 Gorakhpur-Surat-Gorakhpur summer special trains. All coaches in these trains will be of reserved category and the passengers travelling in them will have to follow the Covid-19 prevention guidelines, Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) Pankaj Kumar Singh said.

GKP-BANDRA TERMINUS SUMMER SPECIAL

The 05181 Gorakhpur-Bandra Terminus (BDTS) summer special train will on April 17, 21, 25 and 29 depart from Gorakhpur at 13.30 hrs, from Khalilabad at 14.16 hrs, from Basti at 14.43 hrs, from Gonda at 16.35 hrs, from Aishbagh at 20.00 hrs, from Kanpur Central at 21.40 hrs, on the second day from Tundla at 01.35 hrs, from Agra Fort at 02.40 hrs, from Bayana at 05.02 hrs, from Gangapur City at 06.05 hrs, from Sawai Madhopur at 07.05 hrs, from Kota at 08.40 hrs, from Nagda at 12.47 hrs, from Ratlam at 13.40 hrs, from Godhra at 16.32 hrs, from Vadodara at 17.50 hrs, from Surat at 20.40 hrs, from Vapi at 23.02 hrs, from Borivali at 01.00 hrs on the second day and arrive at

Bandra Terminus at 01.30 hrs.

BDTS-GORAKHPUR SUMMER SPECIAL

In the return journey, the 05182 Bandra Terminus-Gorakhpur summer special train will on April 19, 23 and 27 and on May 1 depart from Bandra Terminus at 04.20 hours, from Borivali at 04.56 hrs, from Vapi at 07.02 hrs, from Surat at 09.25 hrs, from Vadodara at 11.15 hrs, from Godhra at 12.35 hrs, from Ratlam at 15.35 hrs, from Nagda at 16.30 hrs, from Kota at 20.15 hrs, from Sawai Madhopur at 21.50 hrs, from Gangapur City at 23.00 hrs, from Bayana on second day at 00.20 hrs, from Agra Fort at 02.55 hrs, from Tundla at 03.15 hrs, from Kanpur Central at 07.25 hrs, from Aishbagh at 09.10 hrs, from Gonda at 11.50 hrs, from Basti at 13.15 hrs, from Khalilabad at 13.47 hrs and reach Gorakhpur at 14.30 hrs. A total of 21 coaches, including two of generator-cum-luggage van, four of general second class, seven of sleeper class, six of air-conditioned third class and two of air-conditioned second class.

GORAKHPUR-SURAT SUMMER SPECIAL

The 05183 Gorakhpur-Surat summer special train on April 18, 22, 26 and 30 depart from Gorakhpur at 13.30 hrs, from Khalilabad at 14.16 hrs,

from Basti at 14.43 hrs, from Gonda at 16.35 hrs, from Aishbagh at 20.00 hrs, from Kanpur Central at 21.40 hrs, from Tundla at 01.35 hrs, from Agra Fort at 02.40 hrs, from Bayana at 05.02 hrs, from Gangapur City at 06.05 hrs, from Sawai Madhopur at 07.05 hrs, from Kota at 08.40 hrs, from Nagda at 12.47 hrs, from Ratlam at 13.40 hrs, from Godhra at 16.32 hrs, from Vadodara at 17.50 hrs and reach Surat at 20.30 hrs.

SURAT-GORAKHPUR SUMMER SPECIAL

In the return journey, 05184 Surat-Gorakhpur summer special train will on April 19, 23 and 27 and on May 1 depart from Surat at 23.30 hrs, from Vadodara at 01.30 hrs on the second day, from Godhra at 02.55 hrs, from Ratlam at 06.00 hrs, from Nagda at 06.52 hrs, from Kota at 10.30 hrs, from Sawai Madhopur at 12.05 hrs, from Gangapur City at 13.15 hrs, from Bayana at 14.32 hrs, from Agra Fort at 17.05 hrs, from Tundla at 18.20 hrs, from Kanpur Central at 22.20 hrs, from Aishbagh on the third day at 00.25 hrs, from Gonda at 02.55 hrs, from Basti at 04.20 hrs, from Khalilabad at 04.47 hrs and reach Gorakhpur at 05.35 hrs.

A total of 22 coaches, including two of SLRD, 12 of general second class and eight of sleeper class will be attached in this special train.

Homage paid to Ambedkar

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

The birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar was celebrated across the district by the

occasion threw light over struggles of Dr Ambedkar, who was conferred the Bharat Ratna posthumously, his achievements, contribution to the

through the folk songs.

MURDER CASE: A case of murder of a woman was registered at Jigna police station on Thursday.

According to a report received here, Munna Bind, brother of the deceased, registered a case in connection with the murder of his sister, Gunja Devi (32), who was married to Ram Naresh Bind, a resident of Negurabansingh village, nine years ago. As per the complainant, the victim was found dead on Wednesday night. On getting information about the matter the men in khaki reached the spot and took the body of the into custody for completing legal formalities. The husband of the deceased has been taken in custody for the interrogation. Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Operation Mahesh Singh Atri, Circle Officer of Lalganj and Station House Officer (SHO) of Jigna Pranay Prasoon Srivastava visited the spot.



DM Praveen Kumar Laxkar paying tribute to Dr BR Ambedkar at Collectorate on Wednesday

many organisations at several places on Wednesday. The programme organised at the Collectorate started with the garlanding of the portrait of the celebrated leader by District Magistrate Praveen Kumar Laxkar. The speakers on the

nation and paid homage to him. A function was also organised at Ghantaghar ground in which chairman NPP Manoj Jaiswal too was present. The artists threw light over life of the popular leader and social reformer

Household articles destroyed in fire

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

Wheat crop and household articles were gutted in separate fire incidents on Wednesday. According to a report received here, wheat crop of Jagdeesh Singh caught fire in Saria village under Jamalpur police station following which the locals tried their best to extinguish it but seven bighas of crop could not be saved. About four bighas of crop was destroyed in a fire in Vishnupura village under the same police station. In Jangalmahal village under Ahraura police station the hut of Nandlal caught fire as a result of which household articles worth thousands of rupees were to the ashes. However, due to the hard labour of the locals the spread of the flames could be checked.

Earlier property worth lakhs was destroyed in separate fire incidents recently. Reports said that the fire broke out in Taler jungle under Sukrit forest range under Madihan police

station which could be controlled with the hard labour of Forest personnel, locals and fire brigade.

In another incident wheat crop of 60 bighas which was kept at the threshing ground was reduced to the ashes in Gauravaan village under Halia police station. The owner of the crop Tilak Raj Dubey had come to Mirzapur. The locals tried their best to extinguish it but no avail. The fire was so devastating that it caught the crop of Vidyakant Dubey too but was saved somehow and he only had to suffer a minor loss. In Chandel Darhia village under Chhil police station crop of two bighas kept at threshing ground was reduced to ashes when fire which caught the bundles.

An earlier report said that the wheat crop was reduced turned to ashes when a fire broke out in the field of Om Singh in Negurabansingh village under Jigna police station recently. The villagers tried to extinguish it but no avail at all.

On other hand, a man was run over by a train near Parsodha railway crossing under Chunar police station recently. In the morning the area police was informed about the recovery of the body on the railway track. The police reached the spot, took the body of the deceased into custody and tried to ascertain its identity. The deceased was later identified as Sudarshan Biyar (46), a resident of Madara village under Jamalpur police station.

CASE REGISTERED: Jamalpur police registered a case of violation of model code of conduct in connection with the panchayat election. The SDM was informed about distribution of lunch packets that by an candidate. Thereafter SDM Surendra Bahadur Singh raided the place along with the police and took the lunch packets into possession. After registering a case in this connection the police warned the said candidate to follow the model code of conduct.

Function to mark Ambedkar's birth anniversary

CORRESPONDENT ■ SONBHADRA

A function to mark the 130th birth anniversary of the chief architect of Indian Constitution Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar was organised by the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe Employees' Welfare Association in the conference hall located in the administrative building. The event was inaugurated by Executive Director (Rihand) Balaji Jyengar, who was the chief guest on the occasion, by lighting the lamp. The chief guest and co-guests garlanded the statue of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar during the programme. Social distancing was also kept in mind during it in view of Covid-19 pandemic. The programme was conducted by Krishna Kumar. Prominent among those present during the programme were General Manager (O&M) KN Reddy, General Manager (Maintenance) S Srikrishna, General Manager (FM) M Ramesh, General



Manager (Operation) AK Chattopadhyay, General Manager (MTP) KC Tripathi, Additional General Manager (HR) SVD Ravi Kumar, representatives of various unions and associations and other employees.

Fire Service Week in OPF

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Acting incharge of Ordnance Parachute Factory, Shishir Sinha, while hoisting the flag on the occasion of Fire Service Week on Thursday, said the OPF officers and employees should always remain vigilant and aware of safety issues.

He said in any organisation, teamwork mattered and if the people joined hands all the forthcoming problems could be successfully handled and losses minimised.

The OPF staff then observed a two-minute silence in the memory of those who died in a major fire at Mumbai Port in 1944.

Sinha said as part of the week-long celebrations, various events would be held so as to keep the people vigilant and aware as to how to act in times of crisis. He said it had been decided that the safety week celebrations would be held till April 20, 2021.

He said it had also been decided to put up an exhibition of fire-fighting equipment on April 16 and on April 17 a workshop would be held in the HR department on the topic



Fire Service Week being inaugurated at OPF on Thursday.

Pioneer

Fire fighting Service. He said on April 20 it had been decided

to hold a fire mock drill. Addressing the gathering,

Additional General Manager Ashish Kumar said fire safety training helped protect business and ensured everyone knew how to act safely, reducing the risk of injury or loss of life in the event of a blaze.

He said basic fire-fighting techniques could also help to prevent small fires from becoming big emergencies and this needed collective effort and teamwork.

Deputy General Manager Pratikhsha Saini said in every organisation there should be a proper fire safety plan and added that the single best way to eliminate fires was to eliminate the risk of fires.

Works Manager Aisha Khan said a fire prevention plan outlined all the appropriate fire safety protocols and documented every potential fire hazard the workplace may deal with.

She said if the organisation was prepared in advance, a fire prevention plan would make it easy to identify the risks in the workplace and minimise the losses.

Vivek Gupta, Ramgyan Singh and VR Rawat were also present on the occasion.

Ranjana Devi music college students excel in competition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Students of Ranjana Devi Sangeet Mahavidyalaya and Dhruvad Kendra were adjudged the best in the Sambhagiya Uttar Pradesh Sangeet Natak Akademy competition 2021 organised at Dayanand Girls' PG College here on Thursday.

They excelled in both the styles of recital — Dhruvad and Khayal — by representing all categories of the event.

All the students were being imparted training under the able tutelage of renowned Dhruvad exponents Pt Vinod Kumar Dwivedi and his son Ayush Dwivedi.

Principal of Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, Ranjana Dwivedi, while congratulating the students, said it was a moment of pride for the college to see its students carving a niche in the field of classical music. She also expressed gratitude to the Sangeet Natak Akademy and said that during the past several years, the students of the college were being adjudged the best in the state level competitions organised by it.

The winners were Child category: Vatsala Bajpai (Khayal) I, Shashwat Pandey,

Akshita Awasthi, Vatsala Bajpai (Dhruvad), I, II & III; Teen category: Anushka Bajpai (Dhruvad) I, Ashutosh Dixit, Ishika Singh (Khayal) I, II; Youth category: Kriti Gupta, Chetan Gupta (Dhruvad) I, II.

NEW HEALTH POLICIES NEEDED FOR PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF GENETIC DISORDERS

Haemophilia is a bleeding disorder which has been dangerously threatened by COVID-19 not only in India but across the world. Haemophilia Day is observed on April 17 and this year the theme is 'Adapting to change: sustaining care in a new world'. The country needs new health policies for the prevention and control of genetic disorders. Haemophilia is an inherited single gene disorder with an incidence of 1 per 10,000 births.

This was stated by Dr Rahul Kapoor, who is the adviser and consultant of Haemophilia Society, Kanpur. He said India had the second highest number of global patients with haemophilia A. He said it was in fact a rare genetic disorder due to which low public health priority is

accorded to it in India, even though it accounts for a significant number of patients and their family members.

He said India had 27 million new births and as genetic disorders increase in the population through spontaneous mutations and through affected births in families with known risk of a genetic disorder, in absolute numbers, the birth prevalence of genetic disorders was high in India.

He said there was poor genetic counselling which was the main tool for the prevention and control of genetic disorders, targeted at families with an affected birth or with a family history of the disorder.

He said haemophilia A and B were single gene disorders, occurring due to a mutation in either the coagulation factor VIII gene (haemophilia A) or the coagulation factor IX gene (haemophilia B), resulting in deficient synthesis of coagulation factor VIII and IX, presenting as haemorrhagic tendencies in the patient and such patients suffered from repeated haemorrhagic episodes in joints and soft tissues. He said the patients were classified as having severe, moderately severe or mild haemophilia based on <1, 1-5

and 5-40 per cent of normal clotting factor levels.

Dr Kapoor said patients with severe haemophilia constituted nearly 70 per cent of patients with bleeding disorders. He said the haemorrhagic episodes of haemophilia were treated with replacement therapy with either clotting factor VIII for haemophilia A and clotting factor IX for haemophilia B or with cryoprecipitate or fresh frozen plasma. He said it was the duty of the parents to extend the best possible help to their children, mainly male children as a recessive X-linked genetic disorder, the mutation that caused hemophilia, was passed to offspring via the X chromosome.

He said hemophilia was more common among male children, as they only inherit one X chromosome, which means that they would develop symptoms of hemophilia if that chromosome carried the mutation. He said the parents need to enroll their child in the nearest hemophilia treatment centre and regularly give medicines as prescribed by the doctor and be very careful as to prevent any injury or bleeding of the child. He also advised the parents to regularly keep in touch with dentists.

India foiled Chinese bid to change status quo at LAC: CDS Rawat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Despite China adopting “shove and push” tactics, India foiled these bids and prevented a change in status quo at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat said here on Thursday.

Making this assertion in his lecture at the Raisina Dialogue, he also said the country proved it will not get pushed under any pressure in apparent reference to the nearly ten-month long stand-offs in Eastern Ladakh. He also said China is using its military might and conveying the message it is “my way or no way.”

Rawat said China felt that it will be able to compel nations to give in to its demands by doing a little bit of ‘shove and push’ as it has superior armed forces because of technological advantage.

“But, I think India stood firm on the northern borders and we have proven that we will not get pushed,” he said at the virtual conference.

He said India was able to get support of the international community by standing firm in preventing the attempt of changing the status quo in the region.

“They tried to ensure that they can change the status quo by the use of disruptive technologies without using force...They thought that India, as a nation, will succumb to the pressures that they have been putting on us because of the technological advantage that they have,” he said, adding

RAISINA DIALOGUE



that did not happen.

The CDS said the international community came to India’s support to say that “yes there is an international base-line order which every nation must follow. That is what we have been able to achieve.”

His remarks came in the backdrop of face-offs at several friction points in Eastern Ladakh since May last year. The tension mounted after a violent brawl in June in the Galwan valley between the troops of India and China leaving 20 Indian soldiers including the commanding officer dead. More than 40 Chinese soldiers were also killed but China is yet to officially make public the number of casualties.

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, India and China completed withdrawal of troops and weapons from the North and South banks of Pangong lake in February. The two sides are now engaged in talks to extend the disengagement process to the remaining friction points.

Rawat said “They feel that they have arrived and they have a superior armed force because of the technological advantage that they have,” He also said “They have been able to create disruptive technologies which

can paralyse systems of the adversary, and therefore, they feel that just by doing a little bit of shove and push, they will be able to compel nations to give in to their demands.”

Referring to modernisation of the armed forces, the CDS described the F-35 fighter jets of the US as a state of the art platform but added that he was not sure whether the US will share the technology with India.

“What they have offered us is a lower version in the F-series,” he said.

At the conference, Chief of Staff, Joint Staff of Japan Self Defence Forces, General Koji Yamazaki said China is attempting to unilaterally change the international order, and that it is necessary for cooperation among like-minded countries in areas of disruptive technologies and counter the “grey zone tactics”.

He said China does not recognise the legitimate interests of Japan and other countries in the region and such an approach will heighten tension, adding rules-based order is necessary for stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Yamazaki also noted that any probable contingency in Taiwan directly impacts the defence of Japan.

Chief of Defence Force of Australia General Angus Campbell said the “grey zone tactics” are a way to nibble away at territory. “We see this in the South China Sea. It is very challenging to respond without

Indo-Pacific epicentre of strategic contest: Oz PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With China flexing its muscle in the Indo-Pacific region and objecting to the Quad nations presence there, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said here on Thursday the region has become the epicentre of strategic competition.

Making this observation in the ongoing Raisina Dialogue here, he said in this backdrop like-minded nations need to act more consistently and cohesively to protect their shared interests in the face of multiple challenges.

His remarks came as the Quad nations including India, US, Japan and Australia some months back conducted the Malabar series of naval exercises off the Indian coast. China has objected to it saying the Quad will lead to militarisation of the Indo-Pacific region.

Without mentioning any country, the Australian Prime Minister also referred to the growing tensions over territo-



rial claims and the unprecedented pace of military modernisation in the region.

“Democratic sovereign nations are being threatened and coerced by foreign interference. Cyber attacks are becoming more sophisticated, including from State-sponsored actors,” he said at the virtual conference.

“Economic coercion is being employed as a tool of statecraft. Liberal rules and norms are under assault and there is a great polarisation that our world is at risk of moving towards,” Morrison said.

He said a polarisation is taking place between authoritarian regimes and liberal democracies, adding that a liberal democracy and a liberal set of values underpin the global order that has delivered so much to the world.

breaching the line that leads to open conflict,” he said.

Rawat said geo-politics, coupled with geo-economics, is seeking to reshape the rules that govern the world order and that China is attempting to convey a message that it is “my way or no way.”

“There are some nations

which follow international order. There are others which depend on their own law and make their own rules and regulations, try and change the status quo. These kinds of things do lead to conflict situations and that is what we are witnessing on our northern borders,” he added.

The CDS said the world is becoming “fragile” on account of threat from high-technology warfare. “Nations feel that they have arrived with better technology, and therefore, threaten other nations which probably do not have that kind of technology.”

“Unconventional means of

US Indo-Pacific Command, identified the Quad as a strategic opportunity diplomatically, military and economically, as he designated China as “the greatest strategic threat” to rules-based international order.

The two Navy top commanders during the conclave held virtually discussed the potential of the Quad and agreed that there are many new spheres of engagement where the grouping can come together and also include more like-minded countries.

Asked about the future of Quad military in terms of joint patrolling and others, the Indian Navy chief said the Quad started as a consultative grouping and has evolved and grown organically. “There is no dearth of issues that it can handle and we have a robust engagement with the navies of all Quad members,” he said.

The Navy chief said the Quad navies already enjoy high degree of interoperability and highlighted that the Malabar exercise started with the US in 1992.

Similarly, he pointed out that India has been carrying bilateral naval exercises with Japan since 2012 and with the Australian Navy for the last six years. “So if an opportunity arises, we have the capability and capacity to come together in almost a plug and play mechanism,” he said.

The US Navy commander said the Quad has tremendous potential for cooperation, going far beyond the security sphere. “The vaccine approach is a powerful signal to the region that the Quad is working for the common good outside these four countries,” he said.

Noting that the Quad has gained momentum, Davidson said, “It’s a diamond of democracies in region... We should think about it in broadest possible terms.”

He also said China seeks to exploit the current global pandemic with increased military aggression throughout the Indo-Pacific. He added that China’s intent is to undermine international law and norms.

conflict being employed by clever use of disruptive technologies could paralyse networks causing breakdown of systems like banking, power grids, transportation and communication to name a few,” he added.

Organised by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), a

think-tank, in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs(MEA), Raisina Dialogue is India’s premier conference on geopolitics and geo-economics, and its sixth edition is being held from April 13 to 16. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the high-profile event on Tuesday.

Make plans to counter future challenges, IAF told

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



their task.

Referring to changing international geopolitics, he observed that the perceptible shift of focus from Trans-Atlantic to Trans-Pacific has become more obvious in the recent past.

Changing dimensions of war would now include advanced technologies, asymmetric capabilities and information dominance, and it was very important that the IAF’s

preparations for the future must include these aspects, he said.

Reiterating Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of ‘Self Reliance,’ Rajnath stressed on the need to promote Atmanirbharta in defence infrastructure.

He added the IAF’s order for Tejas Light Combat Aircraft(LCA) would result in a substantial boost to the domestic defence industry and



will be a game changer from the indigenisation perspective. The order for the LCA to be manufactured by the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited(HAL) is more than Rs 50,000 crores for 100 jets.

He urged the Commanders to continue their efforts for achieving even greater results in the field of indigenous defence production and aircraft maintenance.

He added that national security and economic development are complementary aspects of national policy.

Rajnath stressed on the need to continue to work proactively towards the integration process currently underway, implementation of the joint logistics plan and to enhance synergy in areas of joint planning and operations.

He assured the Commanders of the wholehearted support from the Ministry of Defence in achieving the goal of being a potent Strategic Aerospace Force. The Commanders’ Conference will conclude on April 16.

The status of strengthening current combat capabilities and the action plan for making IAF a future-ready combat force would be examined. Issues pertaining to systems, reforms and restructuring for ensuring more efficient processes across all domains and optimised operational training will also be discussed.

NGT prepones 2021 summer vacation due to exponential surge in Covid-19

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal on Thursday preponed its summer vacation for 2021 in the light of exponential surge in Covid-19 cases.

An office order issued by the NGT authorities said that the earlier notified summer vacation from June 1, 2021, to June 30, 2021 stands cancelled and shall be working for the tribunal.

In lieu of the same, the period from April 19, 2021, to May 18, 2021 (both days inclusive) shall be observed as summer vacation for all the benches, it said.

“In the light of the sudden and exponential surge in COVID-19 cases, the competent authority has pleased to modify the calendar with respect to summer vacations to be observed by all the benches of the National Green Tribunal.

India, France sign agreement for cooperation on Gaganyaan mission

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Space agencies of India and France on Thursday signed an agreement for cooperation for the former’s first human space mission, Gaganyaan, a move that will enable Indian flight physicians to train at French facilities.

French space agency CNES said under the agreement, equipment developed by it, tested and still operating aboard the International Space Station (ISS) will be made available to Indian crews.

The CNES will also be supplying fireproof carry bags made in France to shield equipment from shocks and radiation, it said.

The agreement was announced during French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian’s visit to the Indian Space Research Organisation’s (ISRO) headquarters in Bengaluru.

Centre urged to restart distribution of free food grains

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Following the second wave of Covid-19, a few State Governments including Rajasthan, Kerala and Uttarakhand as well as MPs from NCP, TMC, CPI and CPI-M have urged the Centre to restart distribution of free food grains to 810 million poor people under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY), which was launched last year during the first wave of the pandemic. Under the scheme, the Centre distributed 5 kg rice or wheat per person and one kg of pulses per family covered under the National Food Security Act from April-November 2020.

With various States imposing partial lockdowns and curfews due to a sharp rise in cases in the second wave of the pandemic, the need for providing food security to the poor is being felt again by some State Governments.

Ample stock of oxygen available in country to tackle Covid: Centre

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid growing demands for medical oxygen in the country, the Centre on Thursday assured that sufficient stocks of oxygen are available in the country even as it has started the mapping of sources for supply of medical oxygen to the affected States to ensure its uninterrupted supply. The States with greater needs of oxygen are Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and Chhattisgarh. Besides, there is more consumption of medical oxygen in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Rajasthan.

The Union Health Ministry said that the present oxygen stocks are more than 50 thousand metric tonnes in the country. In a statement here, it said that the country’s daily

production capacity of oxygen is more than seven thousand metric tonnes and the production capacity has further scaled up.

The Central Government has asked the States to make rational use of medical oxygen and avoid wastage to fulfill the growing demands.

An Empowered Group in this regard has also initiated action to ensure the sufficient availability of medical oxygen. The Government assured that the surplus oxygen available with the steel plants is also being utilised as per the need. States have also been asked to set up Control Rooms to ensure a smooth supply of oxygen to the districts.

The Government has initiated several measures to ensure the supply of medical oxygen to various affected States.

Some allegations against judges are shockingly false, says SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said some of the allegations made against judges are so “shockingly false” that if there had been no security of tenure, they could have been easily “knocked out”.

The top court favoured fixed tenure of two or more years for ad-hoc judges if they are appointed in high courts to reduce the backlog of pending cases.

A special bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde said, “Position of judge has to be made secure. I tell you, we have seen allegations against judges which are shockingly false. Yes, some of them are shockingly false. You can easily knock out a judge if there is no security. There has to be security of tenure for ad-hoc judges”.

A bench, also comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Surya Kant, which was hearing arguments on the modalities of appointments of ad-hoc judges, reserved verdict on a plea filed by NGO Lok Prahari seeking appointment of additional judges in the high courts under Article 224A of the Constitution in order to reduce the pendency of cases.

Article 224-A of Constitution says that “the Chief Justice of a High Court



for any State may at any time, with the previous consent of the President, request any person who has held the office of a Judge of that Court or of any other High Court to sit and act as a Judge of the High Court for that State”.

Justice Kaul said he concurs with the views of the CJI as every time a judge is appointed, frivolous complaints are made and the court cannot put the entire system of appointment of ad-hoc judges in question.

“Ad-hoc judges cannot be made vulnerable,” the bench said, adding that too much fine-tuning may lead to losing the objective behind the appointment process.

The top court also rejected the submission of senior advocate Vikas Singh and

some of other lawyers appearing in the matter that many of the former judges may not be interested in taking the job as they may be more interested in other lucrative fields like arbitration.

“We think this decision should be left to the former judges. We cannot decide for them. The chief justice will definitely discuss with the retired judge which is proposed to be appointed as ad-hoc judge. If the retired judge thinks that he has something better to do, then he can very well say no to the appointment,” the bench said.

The CJI also brushed aside the argument that high court chief justices may not be able to hear important matters, if ad-hoc judges are appointed.

Walk the talk

Only lip service won't do, the *netas* must follow COVID-appropriate behaviour at all times

The pandemic has upended all the notions of life, as we knew it, from personal hygiene to societal behaviour to health to economy, but the one bulwark it has failed to burst through is the way our politicians think and act. There should be no double standards in dealing with the raging contagion but unfortunately this duality is a trait quintessential to our politicians. Though the Government is fastidiously dealing with the rising COVID-19 cases, it has literally turned a blind eye to the situation in the States currently undergoing polls, where the COVID-appropriate behaviour is a disregarded casualty. During their public rallies, road shows and campaigns, almost all political leaders and their minions overlook measures like wearing masks, maintaining social distance and other protocols. For these power-hungry politicians, the vote of any individual is more important than his/her life — hence, they have scant concerns if the COVID protocols stand in the way of their votes. Despite repeated warnings by the Election Commission, the ground condition hasn't ameliorated. But there are good examples to be had from most of the politicians abroad who — discounting the likes of ousted US President Donald Trump and Brazil's strongman President Jair Bolsonaro — aren't dyed in the same wool. For instance, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson earlier this year



put off his India visit, where he was to be the chief guest at this year's Republic Day parade, because the number of COVID-19 infections in his home country shot up exponentially and he chose to stay with his constituents to alleviate their fears. Now, again, Johnson has decided to curtail his India trip later this month because of the virus situation in England.

Johnson said the rapid drop in the COVID-19 deaths in the UK was because of the three-month lockdown and not so much because of the vaccination. We don't know whether he has any empirical evidence to back his claim, but the fact remains that the condition in his country has steadily improved while India has consistently been climbing the chart of the worst-hit countries, lagging behind only the US at the number two position, for now. Our leaders, therefore, should be ashamed of facing the electorate, for whatever it is worth, rather than milling with them to garner votes. God forbid, but if they do contract the virus — as has become the lot of a host of them — they immediately quarantine themselves in the best of medical institutes and access the best of medical care, of course at the cost of the taxpayers' money. But what about the fate of the poor masses that they leave behind, afflicted? It is for several similar reasons that after almost winning the war against COVID, we are again pinned down on the mat; thanks partly to our insouciance and largely to our political leaders. All the festivals, including the celebration of democracy, can be cherished in the real sense only when the nation's people remain healthy and enjoy their basic right to life.

PICTALK



Preparations to showcase a heritage engine, on the eve of the 168th anniversary of the first train run in India, in Thane PTI

Matters of faith

Can devotion alone, in the absence of precautions, protect one from deadly contagions like COVID-19?

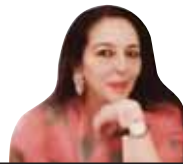
Even as lakhs of devotees throng the Kumbh Mela venue every day in Haridwar, with practically non-existent observation of the COVID-appropriate behaviour including face masks and social distancing, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat kicked up another controversy by saying that the Coronavirus won't infect the pilgrims. The corollary to his logic: The devotees are "our own people" (read Indians) spread over a "vast open area" and "Ma Ganga's blessings will ensure the devotees' well-being". His reasoning flies in the face of all expert warnings and empirical evidence — the authorities detected 1,701 COVID-19 cases between April 10 and 14 at the congregation. Rawat's pearls of wisdom sprang forth when some sceptics dared to compare the largest human gathering in India to the Jamaat at the Nizamuddin Markaz, which was tainted in April last year as the "hotspot" and "epicentre" of the COVID-19 cases in Delhi and across India. He said the Kumbh was different because the Tablighi event was organised in a small enclosure, with several overseas attendees and when the Markaz was held, neither was there much awareness about Corona nor were any guidelines.



Coming from a Chief Minister who had tested positive for the viral infection on March 22 before winning the battle against it in early April, it seems that some people, and unsurprisingly the politicians, have so thick a skin that they don't learn any lessons from even personal experiences. India is currently being battered by a rapidly spreading second wave of the pernicious virus and here we are, throwing all sense and caution to the winds amid a sea of humans. One shudders to think of what may happen at the Kumbh if the virus spreads like wildfire and when these lakhs of asymptomatic devotees head back to their homes all across India and unknowingly become the delivery agents of the contagion. Experts have already warned that such a large gathering in the midst of a raging pandemic can prove to be catastrophic and severely impede India's fight against the deadly disease that has claimed millions of lives globally. Yes, Mr Chief Minister, the matters of faith can't and shouldn't be ignored but can these be subservient to the right to life and the joys of good health? That really is the question.

Socio-economic divides in 2021

As a nation, we must tear down all the obstacles that impede the participation of women in the economy, even those of the mind



BINDU DALMIA

Along expected lines, the post-COVID economic data point to a widening of three pre-existing divides: The gender divide, increasing asymmetries between the incomes of the rich and the poor, and an increasing rural-urban digital divide. As each of these inequalities are subjects that need targeted policy interventions, the focus in this post is on the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Report 2021*, wherein India has slipped to the 112th ranking among 153 countries.

India, home to 0.65 billion women, has widened its gender gap from 66.8 per cent a year ago to 62.5 per cent this year. The decline is seen on multiple sub-index parameters, like the labour force participation falling from 24.8 per cent to 22.3 per cent; the share of women in senior managerial positions being as low as 14.6 per cent; estimated earnings being one-fifth of men; the political empowerment index has regressed by 13 per cent where in ministerial berths for women have declined from 23.1 per cent in 2019 to 9.1 per cent.

Gender equality is a basic human right enshrined in our Constitution and its achievement has multiplier socio-economic benefits. India is committed to the timelines of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations which place gender parity at the heart of bringing a gender perspective to all development initiatives. However, the COVID-triggered economic stress will defer the timelines for achieving the SDGs by 2030.

The post-pandemic policy initiatives require increased gender-specific budgeting and recovery strategies: The Modi Government's flagship schemes that positively impacted women during the first term are an outcome of closely aligning with the Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) norms of the 'UN Women'. The GRB is a globally-followed "best practice" among nations which allocates fiscal expenditure with specific gender perspectives. Though the *Magna*



Carta of Women (1999) required that the Governments allocate at least five per cent of the GDP to address gender issues, the amount allocated towards women's welfare has stagnated in recent years. The Union Government releases the 'Gender Budgeting Statement' consisting of two parts. The first part reflects women-specific schemes in which 100 per cent allocation is only for women. The second part reflects pro-women schemes in which 30 per cent of the allocation is for women.

In the recent years, while some schemes have achieved transversal benefits like the Jan Dhan Yojana, DBT and MNREGA, specific gender-targeted schemes have made significant improvements in the socio-economic living conditions of women. However, the funds allocated for the GRB are limited to less than five per cent of the public expenditure, and shrink to about one per cent of the GDP, making it necessary to significantly increase these budgetary outlays. The NITI Aayog estimates that India will have to increase its gender-specific spend by an additional 6.2 per cent to comply with the SDG targets.

Upskilling women to

adapt to the changing nature of jobs: The job market has undergone a tectonic shift since COVID, so the nine-to-five model is no longer the future. Deloitte's research shows that economic contraction is nudging companies towards hiring experienced freelancers.

Data point to the fact that this gig work model has found a growing traction, with 78 lakh women who had earlier dropped off from work have sought to revive their careers as the WFH concept has opened the floodgates for those who hold professional degrees combined with robust work experience. Therefore, while automation will displace many jobs, it will also create 90 million flexi-jobs in the next 10 years, according to the Boston Consulting Group.

Second, as self-employment and micro-entrepreneurship is expected to grow at an annual rate of 17 per cent and projected to reach \$455 billion by 2023, State and cooperative banks must readjust their models to disburse loans at lower rates for priority sector lending to women because the data show that women have stronger saving habits and lower non-performing loans than men. As most women lack collateral and

credit history to access formal lending, we need innovative ways to build credit history.

How much has gender inequality stunted India's economic progress? The lack of equal ownership of land, access to formal credit, the unfamiliarity of women with the latest technologies, high educational dropout rates as well as inequitable household and unpaid workload distribution have impeded Indian women's economic prosperity. Gender inequality has, therefore, translated into enormous notional capital losses for India. The economic impact of achieving optimum levels of gender equality in India is estimated to be \$700 billion of the added GDP by 2025. The IMF estimates that equal participation of women in the workforce will increase India's GDP by 27 per cent.

There is clear evidence: "When women do better, economies do better. That means we must tear down all obstacles that impede the participation of women in the economy, even the subconscious obstacles of the mind."

(The writer is an author, columnist and Chairperson, NCFIL, at NITI Aayog. The views expressed are personal).



DATA POINT TO THE FACT THAT THE GIG WORK MODEL HAS FOUND A GROWING TRACTION. A WHOPPING 78 LAKH WOMEN WHO HAD EARLIER DROPPED OFF FROM WORK FOR REASONS LIKE CHILD CARE, HAVE SOUGHT TO REVIVE THEIR CAREERS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GOOD DECISION TO CANCEL BOARD EXAMS

Sir — It would ease the minds of students and their parents that the CBSE exams for Class 10 have been cancelled and those for Class 12 were postponed to minimise the risk of infection. It was a wise and welcome move needed at this point in time when we are fighting a second wave. It reflects the priority given to the health and safety of students and keeping them out of harm's way.

The exams by State or other boards, now in progress or scheduled to be held in the coming weeks and months, too should be either cancelled or put off for the simple reason that it will aid in mitigating the pandemic and minimising morbidity and mortality. A picture can be drawn only if there is a canvas or a wall. The preservation of life is of paramount importance. The considerations of safety override all other concerns. It is true that education is vital for students to be able to unlock their potential but treating examinations as the be-all-and-end-all of students' existence is not done.

The "real exam" the mankind is currently taking is the continuing pandemic. We cannot afford to do badly in this life-and-death exam. The sole question that bears on our existence and is far from academics is how best we can respond to the once-in-a-lifetime global public health crisis and get through it. Our handling of the COVID-19 pandemic must be based on strategies defining how best we can adapt by modifying our behaviour and way of life and availing the benefit of vaccination to achieve population immunity in order to survive.

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

SERVE THE GREATER GOOD

Sir — Do we need to be "Faster - Higher - Stronger", the Olympic motto, or should we just try to be okay and healthy? The Olympics may yet be cancelled completely after having been delayed a year, says Toshihiro Nikai, the secretary general of the Liberal Democratic Party.

The 2020 Olympics were postponed because of the COVID pandemic and the 2021 version will have few people in the stands as overseas spectators have been

Respect our jawans



The Cooch Behar violence may or may not have been fomented by the TMC but West Bengal Chief Minister and party chief Mamata Banerjee has created a flutter by accusing the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) of wrongdoing — that the security force intentionally shot down four people in her serious allegation. Over and above, she has put the blame at the doorstep of the BJP and Home Minister Amit Shah by charging him with "genocide".

The CISF personnel were apparently targeted by a rampaging mob of over 500 men,

incensed by a rumour that a boy of theirs was shot dead by the police, so goes the common version. It is said that when things went out of control, the CISF men fired at the mob. A very unfortunate incident that should not have taken place in the first instance if everybody had a good head on their shoulders. Here, neither the mob nor the police can be blamed.

On the other hand, Shah has accused Mamata of provoking the people. Caught between the two political bigwigs are the CISF and the Election Commission (EC). It is a mockery of democracy that the constitutional bodies and paramilitary forces are ridiculed and berated by politicians every now and then. Our paramilitary personnel are steadfast on their duties but our politicians have scant respect for them. Let us face the truth — these entities work against all odds. The security forces have a thankless job — no encomiums for doing a thing right. But one mistake, even if inadvertent, can turn things topsy-turvy. Ditto with the EC.

Ganapathi Bhat | Kola

banned and many of the local citizens aren't interested or actually want it cancelled. Any spectators who would attend will only be allowed to clap and not cheer which seems a rather sad, paler version of the event. The first priority for most countries is to get citizens vaccinated, stop the spread of the virus and then start on an economic recovery rather than watching two weeks of Olympians and para-Olympians doing the best they can. Considering how many have already died and will still die, it is probably best to commit all resources to the medical world and stay safe at home. I know a number of Olympics competitors will miss their one opportunity but that may be the cost they have to pay for the safety of the majority.

Dennis Fitzgerald | Australia

STICK TO COVID PROTOCOL

Sir — The second wave of COVID-19 is rav-

SOUNDBITE

The Governors can play an important role with the involvement of the Red Cross volunteers and others in creating awareness among the people on the COVID-appropriate behaviour.



Prime Minister — Narendra Modi



Over the past two years, we've been reducing our military presence in Afghanistan from a high of over 1,500 personnel to around 80 personnel currently.

Australian Prime Minister — Scott Morrison

Every day you go through your own journey of asking questions to yourself. There are your own challenges and weaknesses. You have to overpower them.



Actor — Fatima Sana Shaikh



It's nice to have batters behind you, you have the freedom with AB to come and it's a very similar role I have in the Australian cricket team.

Cricketer — Glenn Maxwell

There is no test, no bed in hospitals, no ventilators, no oxygen, no vaccine, bus utsav ka dhong hai (a festive pretence)... PM cares?



Congress leader — Rahul Gandhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com


FIRST COLUMN

AN INVESTMENT FOR PEACE



SNEHA GAUTAM

Art can serve as an excellent means of self-expression. Curating an art collection that reflects one's personality and taste is indeed an extremely fulfilling experience. When one looks at an artwork from a vantage point, beyond its financial aspect, s/he tends to delve deeper and reflect upon its inherent attributes of mystery and philosophy. This, in turn, will help achieve further clarity and give one the confidence to keep adding art works to one's collection. The World Art Day is observed on April 15 to make people realise that one of the most important roles of art is its ability to trigger introspection and the mirror it holds up to society at any given point of time. Acquiring and being in the presence of art is also about breaking one's perception and engaging with the work of visionary artists. The art one chooses to display at home or the workplace will most likely be a topic of discussion, so it makes sense to carefully pick and select the work that resonates with one's mind and aligns with one's philosophical ethos. The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown also have a positive side when looked at from the aspect of being in the presence of art and the effectiveness of creative expression in our daily lives.



Before the pandemic brought most of the world to a standstill, the World Health Organisation had published a report enlisting the various beneficial effects of art on the health and well-being of individuals. This report encouraged many firms to use art as a medium to boost the morale of their employees during the pandemic. With movements and social interactions largely restricted, art gave countless people a way to look inwards and thus proved to be a means of cathartic relief and helped people in staying optimistic during these tumultuous times. It is exactly in a moment of crisis that art consoles us with hope and reminds us that we are not alone. It's a proven fact that looking at art triggers the human brain to release the feel-good hormone, Dopamine, and initiates a chemical reaction within that is similar to the feeling of euphoria. Hence, one can easily imagine the far-reaching and therapeutic effects of art. Carefully, surrounding oneself with hand-picked creations can play a deciding role in influencing our mood and have a calming effect. It is widely known that colours affect us and certain hues are largely associated with catalysing the onset of different moods. Thus, inevitably, the colour composition of an artwork a person selects will affect him/her. The advantages of being around art are so well-established that a complete art therapy field has been recognised. It helps individuals explore their creative side, arm their perceptions with the thought of the artists, process and present their ideas in a unique way. The fact that museums display artworks as a visual treat for visitors reflects the fact that Governments have recognised these benefits and thus they promote art. People invest good sums in masterpieces made by various renowned artists so as to broaden their horizons and increase their joy.

If these reasons are not convincing enough for someone to actively collect art work, then the originality factor would definitely inspire him/her to do so. This way, one can be assured that the artwork s/he has decided to collect or which is already in one's possession will be uniquely his or hers. Another important aspect while collecting art is the connections one can forge within the art world with like-minded people. Collecting artwork is a passion for many and certainly adds value to one's life. Currently, technology has definitely eased how enthusiasts can learn and explore the techniques of seminal artists from the past and contemporary ones, too. Virtual exhibitions and online auctions are also tools that can help one make decisions regarding acquiring artwork that will add a soothing presence to one's mental space.

(The writer is vice-president, AstaGuru. The views expressed are personal.)

Engineering a better future for humankind

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

In this age of unprecedented technological revolution, genetic engineering is fast occupying the centre stage. Susan Hockfield, a Professor of Neuroscience at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), says that virus-powered batteries, protein-based water filters, cancer-detecting nanoparticles, mind-reading bionic limbs, computer-engineered crops, and so on, have the potential to overcome some of the greatest humanitarian, medical and environmental challenges of our time. These are going to be next generation products that have the potential to reshape our lives. For instance, the discovery of products like aquaporin to purify water for our use that functions like a parking lot that permits only cars identified with a specific transponder to enter, is nature's marvel. All these frontier technologies have inputs of genetic engineering.

Genetic engineering has come a long way since 1971, when two scientists, Berg and Jackson, created the first molecules of a recombinant DNA. Many milestones have been accomplished since then to make genetic engineering almost child's play in the hands of a molecular biologist. But gene therapy, which genetic engineering promised, has been fraught with pitfalls despite a multitude of methodologies. As a result, inherited disorders resulting from aberrations in one's genes could not be treated by replacing or correcting a faulty gene. Correcting the gene in its specific location was an issue and when this was overcome by employing viruses, our immune system would play the spoilsport apart from other issues that sprung up. Ever since the failure of the Jesse Gelsinger trial for the cure of a rare metabolic disorder called ornithine transcarbamylase deficiency syndrome, (OTCD) in 1998, gene therapy was left gasping for breath amid stringent regulations. This is where a serendipitous observation of bacteria having the ability to specifically target the DNA of viruses to inactivate the invader, provided the breakthrough to overcome many of the pitfalls of the earlier methodologies.

CRISPR and GENE editing: CRISPR technology is a simple yet powerful tool for editing genomes. It allows researchers to easily alter DNA sequences and modify gene function. Its many potential applications include correcting genetic defects, treating and preventing the spread of diseases and improving crops. The CRISPR-Cas9 can do the job easily and precisely as CRISPR is a part of the bacterial immune system and germs, too, can get sick from viruses. Bacteria fight them by chopping their DNA or RNA with CRISPR sequences and then remember them by pasting their DNA bits into their own genome, allowing to ward off any future infections. These genetic scissors, whose use for targeted modification of genomic DNA was perfected by Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier, have given a new life to genetic engineering and gene therapy. Both these scientists were the recipients of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2020.

The use of CRISPR-Cas9: Many diseases that were incurable through traditional means can now be treated easily, thanks to genetic engineering. There are ongoing clinical trials using



APART FROM MEDICAL APPLICATIONS, IT IS BEING USED TO GENETICALLY MODIFYING CROPS TO MAKE THEM RESISTANT TO VIRUSES, MAKE LEANER PIGS, HELP YEAST MAKE BETTER BEER, MAKE MOSQUITOES INFERTILE AND SO ON. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE TO RECREATE AN EXTINCT SPECIES, SO A 'JURASSIC PARK' COULD ACTUALLY BE A REALITY IN THE FUTURE

Sinha is a former IPS officer and Pai is Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Virology & Immunology. The views expressed are personal.



CRISPR-based approaches to treat monogenic inherited diseases such as sickle cell anemia, childhood blindness and so on. It holds the promise to treat many other diseases such as cancer, autoimmune disorders and polygenic genetic disorders in future.

Apart from medical applications, it is being used to genetically modifying crops to make them resistant to viruses, make leaner pigs, help yeast make better beer, make mosquitoes infertile and so on. It is also possible to recreate an extinct species, so a 'Jurassic Park' could actually be a reality in the future.

Research is also underway for the use of CRISPR gene editing that could make us less vulnerable to pandemics, cancer, Alzheimer's and other diseases. Mammals have a gene known as p53 that encodes the proteins that suppress the growth of cancerous tumours. Humans and most other mammals have only one copy of this gene, whereas elephants have 20 copies, and they almost never get cancer. Hence, research is ongoing to double this gene in human beings.

Up till 2020, over a dozen clinical trials were underway for a disease called acute myeloid leukemia, super-high cholesterol and baldness. The thrust of the ongoing research is to study how bacteria developed an immune response to ward off new viruses.

Coronavirus: COVID-19 jabs, like many modern vaccines, have also gained from the advancements in genetic engineering.

Bits of the SARS-CoV2 genes have been pasted onto the adenoviral DNA backbone, some of whose own genes have been knocked off to accommodate the foreign gene. When this vaccine is delivered, the adenovirus carrying the SARS-CoV2 will enter the human cell, it will pretend that it produces the SARS-CoV2 protein but will itself be unable to replicate and make a person sick. This creates a temporary SARS-CoV2 protein factory in our bodies to prime our immune system and prepare it to tackle any infection with the real SARS-CoV2 virus.

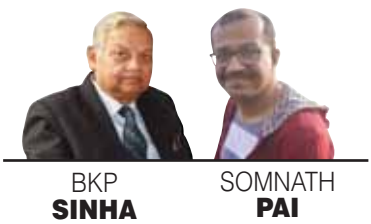
Hopes and pitfalls: Ever since Herbert Boyer and Stanley Cohen patented the recombinant DNA technology that they developed in 1972, and Boyer co-founded Genentech, the world's first biotechnology company in 1976, genetic engineering has been the subject of intense debate beyond the scientific arena, involving lawyers, journalists, politicians and the public at large.

Since then, genetic engineering has come through the moral issue of man playing God, with a possibility to determine the fate of the evolution of all species on planet Earth. It is generally agreed that genetically engineered organisms will not be released into the environment. Many countries, including India, have put in place ethical committees at various levels that oversee and approve research that involves the use of genetic engineering. Even routine laboratory experiments which only aim to demonstrate cloning experiments to students in biology laboratories also need mandatory approvals of the institutional ethical committees or relevant boards. Though there are already products of genetic engineering in the market like vaccines, pest-resistant crops and genetically-engineered mosquitoes, debate continues on the ethical and moral issues surrounding genetic engineering and gene therapy. Thankfully, its fruits are slowly blossoming for larger public good.

Fortunately for humankind, in 2015 at the NAPA international conference, a consensus quickly developed that it would be bad to completely ban germ line gene editing.

The CRISPR inventor, Jennifer Doudna, herself summed it up: "We wanted the scientific community to hit the pause button until the social, ethical, ecological and philosophical implications of germ line editing could be properly and thoroughly discussed ideally at the global level."

It was concluded at the conference that though it was too early to do germ line editing safely, but someday it would happen and the goal should be to provide prudent guidelines. This holds the key to the future of this marvelous invention.



BKP SINHA SOMNATH PAI

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THE POOR PEOPLE OF BANGLADESH COME TO INDIA AS EVEN NOW THEY DO NOT GET ENOUGH TO EAT IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY. —UNION HOME MINISTER AMIT SHAH



I WOULD SAY THAT HIS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT BANGLADESH IS LIMITED. NOBODY DIES OF HUNGER IN OUR COUNTRY. —BANGLADESH FOREIGN MINISTER AK ABDUL MOMEN



Arrest the COVID wave as lockdown is not an option

Any congregation, be it election rallies, religious or social gatherings, must be immediately banned if the pandemic is to be controlled

There is a familiar sense of dread in the air and a feeling of *déjà vu*. That is because, what we are witnessing right now is a rerun of last year and at vastly alarming proportions than before. The new strain of the Coronavirus is creating havoc across the country and straining the existing healthcare system once again.

Railway stations and bus depots are getting packed once again with migrant workers trying to catch a public transport back home. Once again, we can see motley groups of migrant workers silently trudging back home with all their worldly belongings on their drooping shoulders. Thankfully, this time the exodus on foot does not seem to be as major as the last time because the trains and buses are still running.

Messages of total lockdown



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

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

down are constantly being shared by State-level Ministers, even as the Centre is maintaining that localised containment is the best solution to effectively bring the pandemic under control.

The only fact emerging from this second wave sweeping the nation is that India has failed to take lessons from the total lockdown and the first COVID wave that hit it last year. As the experts rightly point out, somewhere towards the beginning of this year, when the active cases across the country started to come down drastically, the Government and citizens alike, threw caution to the winds. The best example of this was the number of weddings which took place in the last couple of months or the long queues outside restaurants for a seat at the table. People, tired of being stuck in the house for almost a year, forgot that masks and social distancing are going to be a part of our everyday existence for a long time to come. From weekly bazaars to shopping malls or airports, not to forget the recent festival of Holi and the Maha Kumbh in Uttarakhand, everywhere there is a massive crowd to be seen.

It was only a matter of time before the contagion started spreading exponentially. This explosion of cases that we are witnessing now was imminent and new studies suggest that the virus strain is much more infectious, even though the mortality rate could be lower.

What, therefore, needs to be done before India shuts down again for business and a year of irreparable economic damage is registered? First, as the Prime Minister has been saying, "track, trace and isolate." India, in the last two



weeks, has again got back to ramping up its testing infrastructure to identify the patients. However, the strategy should not have been discarded or taken lightly in the first instance. It took a while to set up centres testing for COVID across the country and there were instances of mandatory negative reports before anyone was allowed free movement across borders. The creation of micro-containment zones to stop the spread of infections was also an

effective tool, thereby leaving the larger area open for economic activities. It is time to revisit these lessons learnt last year.

Any congregation, be it election rallies, religious or social gatherings, must be immediately banned if the pandemic is to be controlled in any manner. It is a mockery of the citizens' patience and persistence if local lockdowns are imposed in some cities or districts thereby curtailing free movement, while thousands congregate to celebrate the festival of democracy, or mammoth religious events like the Kumbh Mela. There has to be political will cutting across party lines to immediately priorities public health and prevent the spread of the contagion by voluntarily calling off any public rallies in the remaining phases of elections.

The migrants have already

started to trickle back into their towns and villages from the big cities, bringing with them unknown variants of the virus. Any mass spread of the pandemic in rural belts and smaller towns may cripple the backbone of India. Any amount of night curfew or complete lockdown may not be able to contain the spread of the disease if a sizeable chunk gets infected.

India has achieved a great feat by vaccinating over 10 crore people in 86 days since the exercise began. However, vaccine shortages are being reported from across the country. First the Central Government should ensure that all States, down to the last district, get the appropriate number of vaccines and are prepared to face any life-threatening conditions due to the jab.

It is an established fact now that the new variant of the

virus may make the vaccine less effective even though the mortality rates are still within control. India was one of the largest suppliers of vaccines to the world and it is time the focus shifts to domestic use. As we read this, there are five more vaccines awaiting the Government's nod in order to be introduced into the market. Speedy approval and speedier delivery of the Sputnik V vaccine in India could go a long way in saving lives. The Government needs to rethink its vaccine strategy and provide financial support to private players to ramp up production. Plus, based on vaccine availability they should allow every willing person to start taking the jab. All the facets of this deadly disease are still unknown, however, last year's knowledge and the preventive shield of the vaccine are always reliable options.

WPI inflation spikes to over 8-year high of 7.39% in Mar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The wholesale price-based inflation shot up to over 8-year high of 7.39 per cent in March on rising crude oil and metal prices.

Also, the low base of March last year, when the data was computed with a low response rate due to the nationwide lockdown, contributed to the spike in inflation in March 2021.

The WPI inflation was 4.17 per cent in February 2021 and 0.42 per cent in March 2020.

This is the third straight month of up-tick seen in the wholesale price index (WPI)

based inflation.

“The annual rate of inflation stood at 7.39 per cent (provisional) for the month of March 2021 over March 2020,” the Commerce and Industry Ministry said.

Such a high level of WPI was last recorded in October 2012, when inflation was 7.4 per cent.

Inflation in food articles in March was 3.24 per cent as prices of pulses, fruits and paddy hardened.

In pulses, it was 13.14 per cent in March, while in fruits and paddy, inflation was 16.33 per cent and 1.38 per cent, respectively.

In vegetables, the rate of

price rise softened to (-) 5.19 per cent, against (-) 2.90 per cent in the previous month. Inflation in the fuel and power basket was 10.25 per cent in March, against 0.58 per cent in February on higher fuel prices.

In manufactured products, inflation was 7.34 per cent.

“The prices of crude oil, petroleum products and basic metal substantially increased in March 2021 as compared to the corresponding month of last year. Also, due to nationwide lockdown, the WPI index for the month of March 2020 was computed with a relatively low response rate,” the ministry said while releasing the WPI data.

Citi to exit consumer banking biz in India, to focus on institutional segment

PTI ■ MUMBAI

American banking major Citibank on Thursday announced exiting the high visibility consumer banking business in India as part of a global strategy.

The consumer banking business comprises credit cards, retail banking, home loans and wealth management. The bank will be exiting the segment in India after more than three decades.

The bank has 35 branches in the country and employs approximately 4,000 people in the consumer banking business.

On Thursday, the bank announced exiting from the consumer banking businesses in 13 countries, with its glob-

al CEO Jane Fraser attributing the decision to an absence of scale to compete in these geographies.

Contours of the exit were not immediately known and the proposed exit from the consumer banking business will also need regulatory approvals. “There is no immediate change to our operations and no immediate impact to our colleagues as a result of this announcement.

In the interim, we will continue to serve our clients with the same care, empathy and dedication that we do today,” Citi India’s Chief Executive Ashu Khullar said.

“... the sharpened strategy announced today will strengthen our ability to bring the full global power of Citi to

our institutional clients, reinforcing our leading positions across corporate, commercial and investment banking, treasury and trade solutions, as well as markets securities services,” he added.

Citi had entered India in 1902 and started the consumer banking business in 1985.

From a social perspective, the consumer bank had extended loans of Rs 27,911 crore to agriculture, affordable housing, renewable and MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) as of March 2020.

Of that amount, Rs 4,975 crore was extended to weaker sections as part of Citibank India’s priority sector lending obligations, as per a release issued by the bank last year.

Markets extend gains to 2nd day as banks, financial stocks rally

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Sensex and Nifty closed in the green after a volatile session on Thursday as investors accumulated banking, finance and select IT counters despite an unabated rise in COVID-19 cases.

A recovering rupee and positive global cues also propped up the bourses, traders said.

After gyrating 877 points during the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 259.62 points or 0.53 per cent higher at 48,803.68.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty advanced 76.65 points or 0.53 per cent to

14,581.45. TCS topped the Sensex gainers’ chart, climbing 3.67 per cent, followed by ONGC, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Dr Reddy’s, HDFC, Axis Bank and HCL Tech.

On the other hand, Infosys was the biggest loser, dropping 2.65 per cent after its March 2021 quarter earnings missed market expectations.

The IT services major had on Wednesday posted a 17.5 per cent rise in net profit to Rs 5,076 crore for the March quarter, and announced up to Rs 9,200 crore buyback offer at a maximum price of Rs 1,750 per share.

RBI sets up RRA to streamline regulations and reduce compliance

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Thursday set up the second Regulatory Review Authority (RRA 2.0) with a view to streamlining regulations and reducing compliance burden of regulated entities. RBI Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao has been appointed as the Regulations Review Authority, the central bank said in a statement. The RBI had set up a Regulations Review

Authority (RRA) initially for a period of one year from April 1, 1999, for reviewing regulations, circulars, reporting systems, based on the feedback from public, banks and financial institutions. The recommendations of the RRA enabled streamlining and increasing the effectiveness of several procedures, simplifying regulatory prescriptions, paved the way for issuance of circular and reduced reporting burden on regulated entities.

Amazon announces \$250 mln fund for small, medium businesses in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce giant Amazon on Thursday announced a USD 250 million (about Rs 1,873 crore) fund that will focus on digitising small and medium businesses, and driving innovation in the areas of agri-tech and health-tech in India.

“Small and medium sized businesses are often the engine and the lifeblood of

economies and I think it’s true in India as well. And we are very passionate about trying to enable acceleration of SMBs in fuelling innovation and the economy in India,” Amazon Web Services CEO Andrew Jassy said. Building on last year’s announcement, Amazon is announcing a new USD 250 million Amazon Smbhav Venture Fund, Jassy, who will take over as the CEO of Amazon Inc later this year, said.

Private equity inflow in India realty up 19% in FY21

Mumbai: Bucking the pandemic private equity investments into the India real estate sector rose around 19 per cent in FY 2020-21 to over \$6.27 billion, according to an Anarock report. During the previous financial year, PE investments into the realty sector stood at \$5.8 billion. Indian real estate recorded its highest-ever private equity investments in the last fiscal since FY16.

FY22 prospects uncertain, insurers wish for an insurance cover

IANs ■ CHENNAI

Insurance is basically a business based on uncertainty of events. Curiously, the general insurance industry officials while hoping for a growth, are uncertain about the prospects for FY22, as they are faced with negative consumer sentiment; the reduction in cash flow due to withdrawal of long-term motor policy; lower

investment yield and muted growth owing to economy affected by Covid-19 pandemic.

The 34-member Indian general insurance industry closed last fiscal with 5.2 per cent growth with a premium of Rs 198,734.68 crore up from Rs 188,916.61 crore logged in FY20.

“The uncertainty is high owing to the Covid-19 pan-

demie. The consumer sentiment is negative.

The health insurance portfolio will continue to do well. The motor insurance business should do well if the economy doesn’t deteriorate further. Some sport utility vehicles (SUV) have waiting periods,” Roopam Asthana, CEO and the Whole Time Director, Liberty General Insurance Ltd told IANs.

NIFTY 50

SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE
NIFTY 50	14522.40	14597.55	14533.20	14581.45	76.65
TCS	3160.30	3237.25	3087.45	3227.00	122.95
WIPRO	418.90	424.45	415.00	433.70	14.75
Cipla	898.80	935.40	883.90	914.00	28.80
ONGC	104.25	106.75	103.80	104.95	2.90
ICICIBANK	565.95	576.75	554.15	575.75	15.15
HDFCBANK	1405.00	1436.70	1391.00	1442.35	33.90
ADANIPORTS	735.90	754.50	725.00	747.00	15.95
TATASTEEL	892.00	911.50	879.50	894.00	15.00
IOC	88.20	90.35	88.10	90.25	1.45
SILIFE	895.00	912.00	890.00	911.50	13.70
DIVISLAB	3745.50	3819.90	3695.55	3773.00	54.55
DREDDY	4842.90	4875.05	4785.00	4843.00	65.70
HDFC	2540.00	2555.00	2493.00	2543.95	31.00
AXISBANK	666.45	671.35	662.30	668.85	7.85
HINDALCO	354.00	366.80	349.75	352.40	3.90
HCLTECH	968.90	994.70	958.75	994.00	10.60
SUNPHARMA	633.60	641.50	626.50	632.30	4.95
HINDUNILVR	2497.00	2497.00	2421.10	2469.90	15.50
RELIANCE	1926.30	1961.00	1913.00	1943.00	11.20
NTPC	101.20	103.00	99.30	101.15	0.55
UPL	61.00	62.90	59.40	60.75	2.90
SRIN	342.10	347.55	336.10	342.55	1.55
ASIANPAINT	2590.00	2593.55	2537.00	2581.60	10.90
COALINDIA	127.95	130.00	126.95	128.40	0.45
BHARTIARTL	540.00	546.15	530.25	538.05	1.90
ITL	1378.95	1391.10	1358.10	1376.20	2.30
TITAN	154.05	155.40	151.55	153.00	2.40
SHREECE	3069.00	3086.05	2951.40	3040.00	43.95
BAJAJ-AUTO	3604.50	3655.55	3526.10	3599.95	-22.90
KOTAKBANK	1800.00	1809.50	1752.60	1774.25	-1.60
TATAMOTORS	303.00	307.55	296.50	302.20	-0.65
HEROMOTOCO	2852.00	2890.00	2820.00	2855.00	-10.35
BAJAJFINSV	9751.70	9834.00	9597.00	9760.00	-46.70
TATACONSUM	662.80	674.00	647.15	660.50	-3.45
POWERGRID	207.90	211.40	207.05	207.65	-1.10
JSWSTEEL	638.00	644.00	616.00	626.05	-4.30
M&M	805.00	808.90	785.10	801.05	-6.15
ITC	209.00	210.45	206.00	207.10	-1.60
TECHM	1001.85	1007.80	997.30	992.00	-9.85
BPLCL	409.00	416.40	403.30	404.10	-5.30
BRITANNIA	3751.00	3799.90	3673.00	3696.25	-49.75
ULTRACEMCO	6649.00	6700.00	6393.65	6515.00	-89.45
NESTLEIND	17325.00	17400.00	1675.00	16935.00	-233.85
BAJFINANCE	4780.00	4750.00	4656.00	4650.00	-78.75
HDFCLIFE	713.15	713.70	688.00	693.20	-12.90
INDUSINDBK	867.50	883.80	841.25	859.00	-18.40
INFY	1342.00	1366.40	1320.00	1363.30	-33.85
MARUTI	6846.00	6846.85	6551.00	6646.00	-172.80
EICHERMOT	2475.00	2489.90	2378.00	2419.00	-74.85
GRASIM	1393.00	1399.95	1325.00	1349.00	-43.20

NIFTY NEXT 50

SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE
NIFTY NEXT 50	34082.40	34326.85	33701.65	34273.25	209.75
ADANITRANS	889.90	942.00	880.00	942.00	44.95
DMART	2844.00	2952.95	2828.10	2929.05	96.35
CADILAH	494.95	513.00	486.20	505.50	15.55
DABUR	565.00	577.00	560.75	577.00	16.75
SIEMENS	1760.00	1821.00	1722.50	1820.40	50.60
VEDL	221.55	226.40	218.00	224.65	6.20
INDUSTOWER	245.05	252.95	242.20	251.55	6.50
HDFCAMC	2855.25	2959.00	2855.25	2943.50	70.50
HINDPETRO	228.65	237.90	228.65	236.50	4.95
ICICIGI	1364.00	1395.65	1334.55	1390.00	26.00
NMDC	140.10	142.85	138.15	140.95	2.55
GODREJCP	729.95	738.90	720.30	735.10	11.60
ADANIEN	1095.00	1144.90	1081.35	1124.00	17.65
LUPIN	1002.25	1056.75	1020.05	1049.95	13.95
COPAL	1545.00	1565.00	1531.55	1560.00	20.35
PIDILITIND	1803.65	1839.90	1778.00	1822.55	23.60
GAIL	136.50	141.00	136.45	140.50	1.60
NAUKRI	4560.00	4618.80	4372.55	4602.00	45.15
SBCARD	900.50	909.80	883.35	906.65	8.65
JUBLFOOD	2772.00	2795.80	2715.00	2786.65	28.00
BAJAJHLNG	3315.05	3360.00	3270.00	3359.00	24.00
MARICO	421.60	425.20	417.20	424.50	3.20
PGHL	1369.95	1371.00	1340.00	1363.00	9.70
BERGEPAINT	724.00	731.25	711.00	729.50	4.30
AUROPHARMA	917.00	923.00	900.00	914.00	4.75
IGL	521.00	528.50	512.00	524.00	1.80
ALKE	2751.80	1995.85	2681.50	2760.00	8.25
ANDIANGREEN	1115.95	1144.00	1085.40	1119.20	2.95
INDIGO	1575.00	1619.95	1565.60	1609.00	3.25
APOLLINDIA	15000.00	15082.15	14855.00	14988.85	28.95
BIOTEC	3037.00	3038.95	2932.00	2985.00	4.25
HEROMOTOCO	2568.80	2644.15	2552.95	2566.10	-0.55
UBL	1101.00	1111.00	1094.45	1100.00	-1.00
PEL	1715.00	1738.00	1682.10	1709.00	-5.10
ICICIPRULI	458.50	462.85	444.10	457.00	-1.90
MCDOWELLN	529.00	529.00	517.00	522.00	-2.20
BIOCEN	411.90	419.00	400.00	404.30	-2.65
PNB	34.60	35.35	34.15	34.75	-0.35
YESBANK	14.70	14.70	14.40	14.55	-0.15
PETRONET	224.00	227.60	221.45	223.30	-2.65
ITI	4110.00	4111.40	3962.20	4050.00	-88.25
HAVELLS	1031.10	1038.00	1003.85	1007.35	-16.40
SCHLITD	13859.00	13866.70	13575.00	13660.00	-227.95
MRF	81700.00	82499.95	80500.00	81165.00	-1506.60
MOTHERSUMI	209.75	213.85	207.00	207.60	-4.00
BANDHANBNK	330.60	335.80	320.00	325.60	-6.40
MUTHOOTFIN	1180.00	1183.50	1136.65	1150.00	-23.35
ACC	1890.00	1896.30	1812.00	1839.90	-42.25
AMBUJACEM	303.00	306.20	293.00	295.00	-7.30
DLF	256.10	258.80	246.00	247.80	-7.90

BSE 500

Script	Open	High	Low	LTP
HDFC	2542.00	2552.20	2493.15	2547.00
TCS	3145.00	3240.55	3086.20	3218.95
INFY	1354.70	1366.60	1320.35	1361.50
JSWSTEEL	633.10	645.00	616.00	628.90
SBIN	341.20	347.60	335.85	342.40
ICICIBANK	564.20	577.00	554.35	575.50
TATAMOTORS	303.20	307.50	296.55	303.50
ADANIPORTS	730.00	754.45	725.00	750.50
TATASTEEL	885.05	911.75	875.75	897.85
ADANIEN	1099.00	1144.80	1082.85	1129.70
RELIANCE	1920.50	1960.65	1913.60	1943.90
KOTAKBANK	1781.10	1808.80	1753.00	1772.70
SAIL	91.85	95.30	90.00	92.80
DREDDY	4850.00	4877.00	4784.20	4842.45
CIPLA	900.00	925.15	882.60	914.20
BAJFINANCE	4778.00	4778.00	4568.00	4660.25
MARUTI	6800.00	6825.00	6551.45	6652.00
ATGL	1012.10	1129.95	980.00	1113.90
GENMARK	514.70	553.00	511.95	536.80
INDUSINDBK	863.00	883.85	841.25	858.30
HDFCBANK	1401.00	1392.50	1372.55	1430.15
CALIALHC	498.35	513.00	486.50	504.00
LT	1372.70	1390.50	1358.10	1374.65
WIPRO	420.40	434.00	415.00	431.00
IDEA	8.95	9.09	8.68	8.93
HINDALCO	352.10	366.75	349.75	353.75
BREALEST	78.05	79.60	76.70	78.15
AXISBANK	664.00	671.00	652.45	668.80
BALRAMCHIN	237.40	272.05	230.20	260.45
SUNPHARMA	630.00	641.45	622.35	632.95
HINDUNILVR	2470.00	2493.10	2426.15	2457.00
HCLT	209.00	210.50	206.00	206.70
CCITTECH	972.00	995.00	950.05	991.40
INDUSINSEL	410.00	423.50	402.95	414.25
BAJAJFINSERV	9701.00	9837.55	9512.40	9747.75
GRAPHITECH	619.90	654.15	619.90	646.55
TATAPOWER	95.00	96.70	93.30	94.05
IRBBLANK	192.40	197.40	184.20	189.55
AUROPHARMA	907.95	931.50	900.45	914.65
TATACHEM	755.00	760.00	731.15	747.95
ADANITRANS	890.30	944.60	865.10	944.40
ASHOKLEYA	112.50	114.75	110.05	112.00
BANKBARODA	67.90	69.30	66.30	68.25
HALDIPATHLAB	3065.00	3065.00	2900.00	2932.65
IRCTC	1586.50	1632.55	1586.50	1607.75
PILITINDIP	1861.00	1836.40	1767.80	1826.30
HFED	2061.00	2209.00	2061.00	2173.65
SANOFI	8095.00	8118.85	8000.00	8039.15
TECHM	1005.00	1007.50	970.65	993.90
PNB	34.70	35.35	34.15	34.75
EICHERMOT	2436.40	2488.10	2379.00	2411.65
ASIANPAINT	2581.00	2595.75	2537.00	2586.45
MININDTREE	2044.00	2080.50	1978.75	2064.50

‘US troops pulling out of Af worrying for India’

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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



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

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

Oz to withdraw last 80 troops from Afghanistan

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

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

Blinken in Afghanistan to sell Biden troop withdrawal

AP ■ KABUL

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

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

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



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

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

Later, in a meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, who heads

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

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



Myanmar's ambassador to the United Kingdom, Kyaw Zwar Minn, speaks to the media outside his residence in London on Thursday

Ousted Myanmar envoy appeals for UK Govt help

London: The ousted Myanmar ambassador to Britain has appealed to the British government to help him as he faced eviction from his London residence.

Kyaw Zwar Minn had to spend a night in his car last week after his country's military attache barred him from the embassy in central London.

He told reporters from behind the padlocked gates of his residence in northwest London on Thursday that he is "not going to go today" and intends to stay despite orders from his former staff that he has to move out.

The former diplomat had called for the release of former elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was detained after the military took power in a coup on Feb. 1.

Asked what he would do over the next few days, he replied: "Who can tell? The last time they seized the embassy without warning, so I need to be careful."

He did not elaborate on what kind of help he wanted from the British government.

Britain Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said last week he condemned the "bullying actions of the Myanmar military regime in London." AP

‘Terrorist forces’ may take advantage: China

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

Beijing also slammed Washington for linking the

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

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

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

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

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

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

Top associate of Navalny convicted of trespassing in Russia

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

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

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

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

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

tweet. Navalny, Russian President Vladimir Putin's fiercest critic, fell sick during an August 20 flight in Russia and was flown to Berlin while still in a coma for treatment two days later. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that he was exposed to a Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.

The 44-year-old politician

has blamed the poisoning on the Kremlin, accusations Russian officials have rejected.

In December, while still convalescing in Germany, Navalny released a recording of a phone call he said he made to a man he identified as Konstantin Kudryavtsev and described as an alleged member of a group of officers of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, who purportedly poisoned him with Novichok and then tried to cover it up.

Weekend lockdown in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the Covid-19 situation in the national Capital turned grimmer with the number of daily cases rising to staggering over 17,000, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced imposition of weekend curfew to break the chain of coronavirus infection. The Chief Minister announced that weekend curfew will be implemented in Delhi along with a closure of malls, gyms, swimming pools, and auditoriums. The cinema halls will function at 30 per cent capacity and restaurants will not be allowed to cater to dining — only home delivery and take-aways will be allowed.

The weekly markets will be allowed at one weekly market per-day-per-zone format and the Delhi Government will also monitor crowds at weekly markets

and the markets and public places will see stricter implementation of Covid norms.

Kejriwal appealed to the people of Delhi to not insist on getting admitted to a particular hospital as beds will be made available in other facilities if required as Delhi has more than 5000 beds vacant. Addressing the media, he said, "Corona cases are rising in Delhi but the hospital management in Delhi is under control.

There is no dearth of beds in Delhi as more than 5,000 beds are available. We met with the Lieutenant Governor and have unanimously decided to put a weekend lockdown in place. Our understanding is that people need to travel during weekdays for work and other essential activities; however, weekends are usually reserved for leisure and entertainment activities — activities that in the given situation can be curtailed and restrict-

ed," he said.

Keeping in mind the essential nature of work and jobs done during weekdays, the Government has decided to issue curfew passes.

"We will also monitor crowds at weekly markets and release guidelines pertaining to this as well. Dining at restaurants will no longer be allowed, one can avail of the home delivery and take-away method for now. Markets, public places etc. will see a stricter implementation of Covid norms," he added. Kejriwal said, "We have been noticing a callous attitude in terms of wearing masks, observing social distancing, this is not good for safety and security."

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

Work from home, 50 per cent attendance: MHA to officers

New Delhi: In view of the "unprecedented rise" in number of Covid-19 cases in Delhi, the Union Home Ministry on Thursday said its officers up to the level of Under Secretary can work from home and only 50 per cent staff need to attend office.

In an office memorandum, the Home Ministry said all officers who attend the office can stagger timings with entry into the office spread between 9 am to 10 am with corresponding office exit timings and those living in containment zones be exempted from attending office.

"In view of the unprecedented rise in the numbers of Covid-19 cases in Delhi, it has been decided to take measures to prevent its spread," the home ministry said.

The home ministry said officers of the level of Under Secretary or equivalent and below be allowed to work from home and their physical attendance in office be restricted to 50 per cent of the actual overall strength.

Rosters for their attendance will be prepared by concerned divisional or wing

heads. Individual wing heads can, however, call for more than 50 per cent physical attendance of any of the categories of officials in their wings, if required on administrative grounds.

All officers of the level of Deputy Secretary, equivalent and above are to attend office on regular basis.

"All officers who attend office can stagger timings with entry into the office spread between 9 AM to 10 AM with corresponding office exit timings. This will also avoid rush in commuting, as also in lifts and corridors. Roster system by divisional or wing heads to take care of this aspect," the home ministry said.

All officials who do not attend office on a particular day are to make themselves available on telephone and other electronics means of communication at all times from their residence and work from home. All officials residing in containment zones shall continue to be exempted from coming to office till the containment zone is denotified, it said.

All officials who attend office shall strictly follow

Covid appropriate behaviour including wearing of mask, physical distancing, use of sanitizer and frequent hand washing with soap and water.

Crowding in lifts, staircases, corridors, common areas including refreshment kiosk and parking areas is to be strictly avoided and meetings, as far as possible, to be conducted through video-conferencing, the home ministry said.

Entry of outsiders or visitors to be curtailed appropriately and all employees of the age of 45 years and above are advised to get themselves vaccinated, the ministry said. "The above instructions or guidelines shall come into effect immediately and will remain in force until April 30,2021 or further orders, whichever is earlier," it said. Delhi recorded 16,699 fresh COVID-19 cases and 112 fatalities due to the disease on Thursday, according to data shared by the health department here.

This comes a day after the national capital registered 17,282 new infections, its highest single-day spike till date. The number of cases has been on an upward spiral in the last few days. PTI

FROM PAGE 1

NO PLAN TO CLUB REST 4 PHASES IN BENGAL: EC

Earlier, the Calcutta High Court ordered the chief electoral officer (CEO) of Bengal and all district magistrates to ensure strict implementation of COVID-19 protocol during the campaign for the remaining four phases. The court said that the administration should ensure that all the COVID-19 guidelines are strictly adhered to in the public interest.

Taking note of acts of violence, the poll body has increased the number of election observers from 60 to 66 for the next phase of polling and has given them the rights to take instant decisions if the situation goes out of control. The observers will be on duty from 5 am onwards. A stern warning has been issued to ADG L&O by top EC officials to ensure peaceful voting. In the case of Sitalkuchi-like situation, the CAPF can open fire but in keeping with the standard operation procedure (SOP), which is below the knee.

VACANT MIDDLE SEATS RAISE FLIERS' PROTECTION AGAINST COVID: STUDY

57 per cent exposure reduction was observed under the vacant middle seat condition in a scenario involving a three-row section that contained a mix of SARS-CoV-2 sources and other passengers, according to the researchers.

Based on this laboratory model, a vacant middle seat reduces the risk for exposure to SARS-CoV-2 from nearby passengers, they said.

Last year, a Harvard study, paid for in part by the US airline industry, claimed that the ventilation on planes, together with other measures, reduces the possibility of greater exposure to Covid-19.

The researchers acknowledge some limitations in the CDC study, including the fact that data were collected under higher relative humidity conditions in the laboratory than would be present during flight.

Droplet evaporation into aerosol is more rapid under lower relative humidity, they said. Because aerosols travel farther than droplets, the current study might underpredict the aerosol spread in an actual cabin environment, according to the researchers.

FOREIGN VAX APPLICATIONS TO GET DCGI DECISION WITHIN 3 DAYS

As per the DCGI, vaccine shall be used as per the guidelines prescribed under National Covid-19 Vaccination Programme while first 100 beneficiaries of such vaccines shall be assessed for 7 days for safety outcomes before it is rolled out for further Vaccination program," said the statement.

As per the existing protocol of CDSCO for batch release of vaccines, each batch of the vaccine will be released by Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL) Kasauli before it can be used as per the guidelines prescribed under the National Covid-19 vaccination programme, it added.

Applications for restricted use in emergency situations for such vaccines may be accompanied by bridging trial protocol, application for import registration certificate and application for import license, according to the pathway issued.

COAST GUARD, GUJARAT ATS SEIZE PAK BOAT WITH ₹300 CR HEROIN

In the last one year, the Coast Guard has seized more than 1.6 tonnes of narcotics worth approximately Rs 5,200 crore, it noted.

On March 18 this year, the ICG had apprehended SLB Ravihansi with about 300 kgs of heroin, five AK-47 rifles and 1,000 rounds of ammunition off Lakshadweep Island, which was suspected to have originated from Makran coast.

Prior to this, ICG had successfully apprehended SLB Akarsha Duwa which admitted to carrying 200 kgs of high-grade heroin and 60 kgs Hashish and jettisoning it at sea on the sighting of ICG ships on patrol.

US expels Russian diplomats, imposes new round of sanctions

AP ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

Russia or anyone else changed votes or manipulated the outcome.

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

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

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

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

States," the White House said Thursday.

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Initially the government had agreed that it would take action to fulfill the demand of expulsion of the French ambassador by February but later on

the two sides agreed to set April 20 as the new deadline.

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

After efforts of more than two days, the government has succeeded to clear the roads and restore traffic but French embassy issued an advisory for its citizens.

Speaking to Dawn.Com, the embassy's press attaché Veronique Wagner, said "We can confirm that we have sent a precautionary note to all our citizens in Pakistan advising them to temporarily leave the country if possible due to the recent protests that have caused graver security threats and put its citizens at risk."

She added, however, that the embassy has not been closed but was working with limited staff.



HAVE A SAFE JOURNEY

Urgent travel plans amid the pandemic? Here are a few things to keep in mind while booking your tickets

India is a land of varied culture and one of the best ways to explore its beauty is by experiencing a train ride. As soon as you enter a train station, you are greeted by the site of multiple vendors selling their products, different types of trains entering and leaving the platforms and people running back & forth to drop/receive their relatives. To match the needs of modern times, trains in India are equipped with CCTV cameras, bio-toilets and internet connectivity, ensuring the highest level of comfort to passengers. Though all this may excite you to hop on the train right away, much of the train travel experience has changed due to COVID-19.

With the pandemic not willing to take a beating, Indian Railways had to come up with a certain set of rules to promote social distancing and keep a check on the spread of infection. Because of this, the glam and charm of the train journeys are not what they used to be. That means a ban on entry of hawkers selling food, fewer pit-stops in between to take a joy ride, etc, are the new normal. Even after knowing all this, if you have urgent travel plans and have chosen 'train' as your medium for the ride, there are a few things you need to do or know while booking your ticket.

PLAN YOUR TRAVEL AHEAD OF TIME

COVID is not a hoax and shouldn't be considered otherwise. If you wish to stay at a hotel in your chosen destination, you should scan through the COVID protocols and go with the safest option. It's also recommended to go for off-season dates (weekdays) to avoid mixing with the heavy crowd. Further, you should map the places you wish to visit and be prepared to tackle the infection like a champ.

NO MORE 'UNRESERVED TRAVEL' FOR YOU

To avoid overcrowded trains and minimise the spread of infection, trains no longer allow unreserved

travel. Reserved bookings are the only way to board the trains without security saying 'no entry' to your face. So, make sure you have a confirmed train ticket to travel to your destination.

GO THROUGH THE COVID PROTOCOLS

To ensure the safety of its citizens and passengers, several state governments have updated their COVID protocols. For instance, the Tamil Nadu government has made it mandatory for train passengers from several Indian territories to register online a few days before coming to the state. You should check all the guidelines listed by your chosen destination to avoid breaking any rules and spoiling your journey.

SHARE YOUR COMPLETE ADDRESS

Earlier, there was no need to share your address details while booking train tickets. But now with COVID hovering over our heads, the risk of an outbreak/new red zone is quite imminent, even on trains. So, passengers have to provide their correct and complete address details to the Indian Railways so that they can trace them when needed.

GET YOUR RT-PCR TEST DONE

As more and more COVID+ cases surround our country, Indian Railways have requested passengers to get their RT-PCR tests done within 72-96 hours of boarding the train, which guarantees that a person is safe to travel (after getting a negative result), without posing a health risk to other passengers. The listed timeline varies from one Indian state to another. It's recommended that a passenger gets familiar with the rules laid by the chosen destination to avoid any trouble.

The COVID pandemic has indeed introduced a few roadblocks in the train travel industry. But as we try to overcome these and prepare for a post-COVID world, passengers have to



carefully follow the rules laid down by the government. So, whether you are travelling for work or pleasure, just

make sure to remember the above details while booking your train ticket to experience a safe journey ahead.

(The writer, Dinesh Kumar Kotha, is the co-founder and CEO of Confirmtkt.)



'Busy exploring shades of myself'

Actor KRITI SANON shares that no set or film is like the other

Kriti Sanon is the busiest bee of tinsel town currently with more than six films in her kitty. What makes these even more interesting is the range of her films in terms of their genres. From a horror comedy to an action film, the actor will be seen leading multiple genre films.

Talking about having so many different genres in her lineup Kriti says, "My work is so exciting because no set, no film is like the other. Doing such varied genres is helping me explore different shades of myself as an actor."

She adds, "From *Bhediya* being a horror comedy to action in *Ganpath*, mythology in *Adipurush* and an entertainer like *Bachchan Pandey*, I have many genres that I am working on right now which makes all the work even more exciting and interesting. It does also keep me on my toes."

Sanon has a bag of big budget films in her lineup for which she has been shooting non-stop for a while with all safety measures being taken as per government guidelines. She has been shooting in Arunachal Pradesh for *Bhediya* with Varun Dhawan, which is a horror comedy.

She will be seen playing Sita in Om Raut's mythological drama *Adipurush* with Prabhas. She has also signed an entertainer film *Bachchan Pandey* with Akshay Kumar and the drama - *Mimi*, which will star her as the solo lead. The actor also has a quirky comedy, *Hum Do Hamare Do* with Rajkumar Rao and her first action film, *Ganpath*.

Hollywood action superstar Vin Diesel has opened up about what makes his *Fast & Furious* franchise so popular globally. He also spoke of the biggest difference between the first film, which was released in 2001, and the ninth installment that is all set to release.

"I think the greatest difference is when the first film came out, you had no idea who these characters were. You had no idea what world you were entering when you came into the theatres to see this movie. Now, people feel that they have grown up with this saga. People feel like this is their franchise," said he.

Fast & Furious 9: The Fast Saga also stars John Cena, Michelle Rodriguez and Dwayne Johnson. The film is directed by Justin Lin. Diesel stressed that each time the makers embark on a new chapter they always thought of how to reach higher.

"How do we dazzle the audience or engage the audience even more? As John (Cena) articulated these are characters that are very familiar to the moviegoer, and the moviegoer has their own relationship with this family of characters that live in the saga. I will just say there is a familiarity," said Diesel.

He added: "I remember when the cast members used to say the release of *Fast And Furious* is like a holiday the world expects to see it every two years."

Fast & Furious 9 is the penultimate film in the franchise, and the next part will be done in two films. As of now, it has been decided the two-

'I am proud'

VIN DIESEL opens up about what makes his *Fast & Furious* franchise so popular globally. He says that people feel they've grown up with the saga



part tenth film would wrap up the series.

"When my daughter heard that ten would be the last, broken into two films, she started crying and I can't tell you how bad I felt. I tried to console her but she just didn't want to hear that this world saga could finally have a finale," Diesel, whose real name is Mark Sinclair, said.

He finds it incredible that the fans can finally have a look at the ninth installment.

He said: "It feels incredible to be a part of something that will bring the world together again. There is something I think we as society never antic-

ipated we'd be losing by not being able to be entertained together as a community."

"There is something special that happens when people see *Fast And Furious* in a packed audience with your family, friends and your loved ones, and you can feel the rumble of excitement and you can feel the emotions in the theatre building," he said.

"To be a part of the return to the theatrical experience is something so right, and I feel so proud of. To do it with my family that has been doing it for two decades is a dream come true," he concluded.

—IANS



KUSHAN MITRA



Recently, I got my hands on the refreshed BMW 6-series, it takes this very nice sportback sedan to another level of refinement. Driving it in the 630i M Sport trim is extremely engaging. I have always liked BMW's two-litre turbocharged petrol engine with the 30i moniker and 250 horsepower. This particular one, running the longer-wheelbase variant of the 5-series platform, will go up against the recently refreshed E-Class sedan from Mercedes-Benz. Honestly, in this segment, the Mercedes wins out, not because it is the better vehicle but because of the badge value. The E-Class is the standard luxury sedan of choice for the companies and governments alike. It is the car, once you hit a certain age, that you want to be seen in.

But, as the title of this piece suggests, I have a preference for BMWs. While I am not alone among automotive writers here because other than a few dastardly misses with exterior design, they are all very engaging to drive, and we will not get into the mad-cap super-sedans that all the German companies put out. But sitting behind the wheel of the 6-series, I realised why I really enjoy driving a BMW even bumper-to-bumper traffic in the city. I love BMW's iDrive system, and one major reason is because it has been most consistent in terms of functionality among all the luxury car manufacturers. I experienced this system over a decade ago, there has been a consistency to the way it functions.

There has been no sudden dramatic change between generations of the iDrive system. Although it has come a long way from the very basic system that I first experienced on the E65 7-



Why I like BMWs

More than performance, BMW has always been on the ball when it comes to their infotainment system — the fabled iDrive

series years ago, the fact that the click-wheel, despite touchpads and touchscreens being added over the years, and the button layout on the centre console added in the third iteration of the system, remain the same. Of all the infotainment and car control systems of any manufacturer, I can find my way around the iDrive system just by feel. While it was called 'iDrive' because the 'i' was then in vogue, thanks to Apple. I must admit that the system, like iOS, has evolved without drama over the years.

On top of that, BMW's integration with iOS is among the most compre-

hensive of any carmaker and over the years, they have taken out the kinks. For example, BMW was the first carmaker to have wireless connectivity for Apple CarPlay. And initially working one's way through the menus to connect an iPhone through CarPlay could take a reasonable amount of time even if you knew your way around the system. On cars like the 6-series that run the eighth-generation iDrive system, it takes under 30 seconds. Honestly for the life of me I do not understand why other luxury carmakers haven't done wireless connectivity as yet, particularly since every new iPhone or even mid-

spec Chinese Android phone has wireless inductive charging and all cars come with a wireless charging bay.

There are many good reasons to choose a BMW, after all, they are great to drive like this 630i is. And while the large kidney grilles on some of the latest cars such as the X7 and the forthcoming 4-series may not be to your aesthetic choices (they do look better in real life than on the wide-angle handout photos), BMW's iDrive system is strangely enough, becoming a top reason to choose the car, because just like the driving, it really does bring a smile to your face.

TRENDBLAZER



DON'T BELIEVE IN A B&W WORLD: VIDYA

Actor VIDYA BALAN shared a monochrome picture on social media, saying she does not believe in a black and white world except for a picture.

Vidya posted the picture on Instagram, where she is seen sitting on a chair dressed in a black outfit. She completed her look by leaving her long hair open with a middle parting.

"I don't believe in a black and white world, except for a picture maybe," she wrote as the caption.

fairtalk

FATIMA SANA



'Every day you go through your own journey of asking questions to yourself. There are your own challenges and weaknesses. You have to overpower and overcome them. You'd cross those and then you have more challenges and insecurities. That is a constant journey. Everyday, there is a new mindset.'

dailytalk

URVASHI RAUTELA



'India is a diverse nation and lately many festivals of different cultures and religions happened to be on the same day. Some parts of the country celebrated Ugadi, while others had Navratri. But amid all the festivals, I request everyone to be safe and follow all the precautions to avoid COVID-19.'

JLO AND ALEX RODRIGUEZ BREAK UP

Singer JENNIFER LOPEZ and baseball star ALEX RODRIGUEZ have officially ended their relationship. The two called off their engagement.

"We have realised we are better as friends and look forward to remaining so. We will continue to work together and support each other on our shared businesses and projects," they jointly said in the statement.

They said they "wish the best for each other and one another's children."



Man City beat Dortmund for Champions League semis

AP ■ DORTMUND

Pep Guardiola shared an emotional moment with goal scorer Phil Foden as Manchester City ended its run of failure in the Champions League quarterfinals, beating Borussia Dortmund 2-1 for a 4-2 aggregate win.

Jude Bellingham scored to put Dortmund on course for an upset win on Wednesday before City hit back through a penalty by Riyad Mahrez and Foden's goal.

Guardiola reached the semifinals with City at the fifth attempt, matching the club's best ever result under his predecessor Manuel Pellegrini in 2016. City goes on to face Paris Saint-Germain.

"For the club it's so important, we cannot deny," Guardiola said.

"Of course we want more." He praised PSG for knocking out "the best team in the world" Bayern Munich in the quarterfinals, "so we will see what will happen."

Guardiola on Tuesday said he expected to be labeled "a failure" if Dortmund became the fourth club in a row to eliminate City in a Champions League quarterfinal, after Lyon last year and before that Tottenham and Liverpool. Monaco beat City in the round of 16 in 2017 in Guardiola's first season.

"We are incredibly happy today to reach the semifinals," Guardiola told broadcaster Sky.

"The guys deserve it because what they have done in this season is incredible."

Guardiola added that City would celebrate with "a lot of wine tonight" before preparing to face Chelsea in the FA Cup semifinals on Saturday.

Bellingham, Dortmund's 17-year-old English midfielder, put the German club ahead when he scored in the 15th minute after City defender



Ruben Dias blocked Mahmoud Dahoud's shot. That levelled the aggregate score 2-2, with Dortmund ahead on away goals.

Bellingham became the second-youngest player to score in a Champions League knockout game at 17 years, 289 days. Bojan Krkic was 72 days younger when he scored for Barcelona against Schalke in 2008.

City then laid siege to the Dortmund goal, with Kevin De Bruyne hitting the crossbar. And Dortmund handed City the breakthrough early in the second half when Emre Can gave away a penalty by heading a cross onto his arm. Mahrez put City back in control when he blasted the 55th-minute spot kick into the top right, past

stand-in goalkeeper Marwin Hitz.

Dortmund was unhappy with the penalty call against Can, a week after Bellingham had a goal ruled out in the first leg in disputed circumstances.

"If you head onto your own arm, it's not seen as a breach of the rules," coach Edin Terzic said. "We haven't had much luck with referee decisions in the last week."

Chasing another goal to force extra time, Dortmund pushed up, but could only muster an off-target header from Mats Hummels at a free kick. City took advantage of the space which opened up to pressure Dortmund.

Foden, who also scored in the first leg last week, made sure of the win in the 75th with

a low shot past Hitz from the edge of the box off a short corner routine. He ran straight to Guardiola on the touchline to celebrate with a hug.

"You have the feeling he's a guy who never hides and, he always creates something, he is dynamic defensively, offensively," Guardiola said of Foden.

"He scored two important goals, the second goal in the Ethihad (in the first leg) and today and helped us to the semifinals."

The loss means Dortmund could face an exodus of talented young players at the end of the season. Part of the appeal to talents like striker Erling Haaland and forward Jadon Sancho the latter injured for this game has been Dortmund's consistent Champions League

appearances as a way to develop their skills and show off to potential buyers. With Dortmund sitting fifth in the Bundesliga, it's on course for the far less appealing Europa League.

Haaland played his part holding up the ball in the run-up to Bellingham's goal, but the Norwegian was otherwise kept quiet by the City defense. He has now gone four scoreless games for Dortmund and three for Norway since his last goal on March 20.

"Through our passes, through our control, we minimized the influence of Haaland," Guardiola said. "This player is almost unstoppable and the best way to defend talented players is (for them) not to have the ball."

Madrid down The Reds for S/F berth

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Zinedine Zidane has shown Jürgen Klopp just how to turn a season around.

Zidane is leading Real Madrid into the semifinals of the Champions League. Klopp will finish the season without a trophy.

A 0-0 draw at Anfield in the quarterfinals on Wednesday protected a 3-1 advantage from the first leg for Madrid. The record 13-time European champions are back in the semifinals where Chelsea awaits for the first time since 2018 when Zidane lifted the European Cup for a third consecutive season by beating Klopp's Liverpool in the final.

"We're all pulling together," Zidane said, "and this side always does that and it always wants more."

The victory in the 2018 final was Zidane's last game before ending his first stint in charge. He was tempted back in 2019 following disappointing results, but this season looked to be unraveling just a few months ago.

Trailing Atletico Madrid by 10 points in La Liga in January, the defending champions are now just a single point behind and the double is on.

"We have to be really happy with what we're doing at the moment," Zidane said.

"It's been a complicated season."

For Liverpool, it's turning into a miserable season which is now sure to end without a trophy.

It's quite a comedown for Klopp's side, which won the Champions League in 2019 after losing the 2018 final to Madrid and ended a 30-year English championship drought by winning the Premier League by an 18-point margin in 2020.



Now Liverpool is struggling to even make the Champions League places, sitting three points outside the top four with seven games to go.

Liverpool created chance after chance but Mohamed Salah, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane could find no way past goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and a makeshift defense that stifled a front three that has endured a season of frustration.

"We knew we had the first leg advantage, but we played to win," Madrid midfielder Casemiro said.

"They played with a lot of intensity, they've got a great team and coach, but we worked hard. We didn't rest on our laurels, and that's ultimately what decided it."

A scene of many memorable European comebacks, Anfield lacked the fans who have so often inspired

Liverpool in similar situations.

"You can't not take the chances we had tonight," said Liverpool midfielder James Milner, who had an early shot pushed over by Courtois.

"We had more than enough chances to do what we needed to and we didn't take them."

The only way Liverpool supporters could make their presence felt was outside the stadium with a red haze of flares greeting the teams before the game and one of the Madrid buses being hit by an object that smashed a window.

"We condemn unequivocally the actions that led to Real Madrid's team bus being damaged during its arrival to Anfield this evening," Liverpool said in a statement.

"It is totally unacceptable and shameful behavior of a few individuals. We sincerely apologise to our visitors for any distress caused."

ASIAN WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Sarita retains title; Seema, Pooja settle for bronze

PTI ■ ALMATY

Scripting a sensational comeback, an aggressive Sarita Mor reeled off nine straight points in the summit clash to retain her Asian Championship title in 59kg while Seema Bisla (50kg) and Pooja (76kg) settled for bronze medals at the continental Championship, here on Thursday.

Sarita, who won gold at the 2020 championship in New Delhi, lagged 1-7 after a botched up challenge but turned it around with a tremendous fight back against Mongolia's Shooovdor Baatarjav.

Attempting a move at 1-3 on the edge of the mat, Sarita lost her balance, allowing her rival to get one point. However, the Mongolian's coach challenged the call to get her ward four points.

From there on, there was no stopping Sarita. She effected a take-down, following it up with an expose and then one more take down on the edge of the circle to make it 7-7.

At that juncture, time running out fast, the Mongolian camp challenged the call and lost that to give an extra point to Sarita, who won 10-7.

Sarita had lost her opening bout to the same Mongolian rival by 4-5 margin but came back strongly in the next round against Kazakhstan's Diana Kayumova, winning by technical superiority in the first period.

The lanky Kazkah had good reach but Sarita was agile and aggressive. After earning a



SARITA HAD LOST HER OPENING BOUT TO THE SAME MONGOLIAN RIVAL BY 4-5 MARGIN BUT CAME BACK STRONGLY IN THE NEXT ROUND AGAINST KAZAKHSTAN'S DIANA KAYUMOVA, WINNING BY TECHNICAL SUPERIORITY IN THE FIRST PERIOD

passivity point, Sarita unleashed a flurry of moves, starting with a take-down and followed that up with a gut-wrench and a couple of expose moves.

Against Kyrgyzstan's Nuraida Anarkulova in the semifinal, Sarita was again

aggressive from the beginning and finished the bout in a jiffy with quick expose moves after getting hold of her opponent.

In the 50kg competition, Seema had a terrible start as she lost her opening bout by fall against Kazakshstan's Valentina

Ivanovna but made a strong comeback in the next round against Mongolian Anudari Nandintsetseg.

Trailing 0-2, Seema got on board with a passivity point and a take-down. She never looked back after that winning more points by employing gut-wrench and eventually won 7-3.

She faced a stiff challenge from Uzbekistan's Jasmina Immaeva in the semifinal which she lost 2-3. The Indian then beat Taipei's Yung Hsun Lin by technical superiority to win the bronze medal.

In 76 kg, Pooja won her first bout 2-0 as the Korean Seoyeon Jeong was too passive and followed that up with a victory by fall against Uzbekistan's Ozoda Zaripboeva.

Mostly earning points through right-leg attacks, Pooja found a move -- again a right-leg attack -- in the beginning of the second period which led her to pinning her rival.

She, though, was no match to Elmira Syzdykova in the semifinals as the Kazak pinned her with a stunning move.

Pooja clinched the bronze after winning 5-2 against Korea's Seyeon Jeong.

In the 68kg, Nisha was ousted after losing both her bouts by fall.

Despite dominating a major part of her second round bout that she led 6-0 with right leg attacks, Nisha lost to the Korean Eun Sun Jeong. She had lost her first round to Mongolia's Delgermaa Enkhsaikhan.

Rahil Gangjee gets off to a disappointing start in Japan

PTI ■ NAGOYA

Indian golfer Rahil Gangjee opened with a below-par 5-over 77 to make a disappointing start to his campaign at the season-opener Token Homemate Cup on the Japan Golf Tour here on Thursday.

Gangjee, who was playing on his domestic Tour in India till last month, had to spend two weeks in quarantine before joining the Tour here, which got off to a start this week at the Token Tado Country Club.

Leading the field after the first round was Ryosuke Kinoshita, who shot a bogey free 6-under 65. He led by one shot over Mikiya Akutsu, Tomohiro Ishizaka and Shintaro Kobayishi, who all carded 66 each.

Young Japanese star Takumi Kanaya shot 4-under 67 and was among four players at tied-fifth.

Starting on the tenth tee, Gangjee ran into trouble early on with a bogey on 11th and a triple bogey eight on Par-5 12th. At 4-over through three holes, he was fighting all the way after that. He birdied 15th, bogeyed 18th, then birdied third and dropped another shot on seventh. Gangjee struggled with his driving and found only five fairways.

The event which is being held without spectators and with strict COVID-19 regulations also cancelled the popular Pro-Am before the tournament.

Aditi gets off to season's best start at Lotte Championship



KAPOLEI: Indian golfer Aditi Ashok carded three birdies in her first five holes to get off to her best start of the 2021 LPGA season with a 3-under 69 in the first round of the Lotte Championship.

Aditi, playing her fifth event of the year, was under 70 for the first time this year and that should augur well for the 23-year-old from Bengaluru, who has made the cut in all four previous starts this year.

Teeing off from the tenth, she birdied the 10th, 13th and 14th and turned in 3-under. A birdie on second put her at 4-under, but she dropped a shot on Par-4 sixth and finished the rest with pars.

In her four previous starts in 2021, Aditi has made the cut in all, but the T-23 at LPGA Drive On

Championship has been her best.

Aditi was four shots behind co-leader Britanny Altomare and Filipina Yuka Saso, who shot 64 each.

Altomare, starting on the 10th, was one-under through her first nine and then had seven consecutive birdies from first to seventh and closed with two pars for 64.

Yuka Saso, 19, playing on a sponsor invitation, had a bogey free card that included four successive birdies from sixth to ninth on her second nine.

Saso plays on the Japan LPGA where she has two wins and this is her sixth LPGA start and she was 50th at ANA Inspiration.

So Yeon Ryu and Ally Ewing shot 67 each and were tied third.

Officials say Olympic cancellation, no fans still an option

AP ■ TOKYO

Two officials in Japan's ruling LDP party on Thursday said changes could be coming to the Tokyo Olympics. One suggested they still could be canceled, and the other said even if they proceed, it might be without any fans.

Toshihiro Nikai, the No. 2 and secretary general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, mentioned the cancellation only a day after Tokyo reached the 100-days-to-go mark on Wednesday.

He made his comments in a show recorded by Japan's TBS TV.

If it seems impossible to go on with the games, they must be definitely canceled, Nikai said.

If there is a surge in infections because of the Olympics, there will be no meaning to having the Olympics.

Asked if a cancellation was still an option, Nikai said: Of course.

But he also added: It is important for Japan to have a successful Olympics. It is a big opportunity. I want to make it a success. We will have many issues to resolve and prepare, and it is important to take care of them one by one.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said in a statement there was "no change to the government position to do everything to achieve safe and secure Olympics."

Tokyo organizers said they, the IOC and the International Paralympic Committee are

fully focused on hosting the games this summer.

They said Suga has repeatedly expressed the government's commitment to holding the Olympics.

COVID-19 cases have been rising across Japan. On Thursday, Japan's second-largest metropolitan area of Osaka recorded 1,208 new cases. It was the third straight day that new cases surpassed 1,000. Tokyo hit 729, its highest total in more than two months. Japan has attributed 9,500 death to COVID-19, good by world standards but poor by results in Asia.

Tokyo and Osaka have been under an alert status since earlier this month, but officials are concerned there is little sense of urgency. Experts



on a Tokyo metropolitan government taskforce warned that the new variant could replace the conventional virus and trigger explosive infections by early May. Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike urged residents to take maximum protection and asked non-Tokyo residents not

to visit the area.

Taro Kono, the government minister in charge of Japan's vaccine rollout, said even if the Olympics go on, there may be no fans of any kind in the venues. He said it's likely that the Olympics will have to be held in empty

venues, particularly as cases surge across the country.

That means only television cameras and still cameras will be around to record the action, joined by some reporters, judges and match officials.

The delayed Tokyo Olympics are to open in just over three months on July 23, and the Paralympics follow on Aug. 24. Fans from abroad have already been banned. Now even Japanese spectators could be kept away.

I think the question is how to do the Olympics in a way that is possible in this situation, Kono said Thursday on a television talk show.

That may mean there will probably be no spectators.

Kono did not suggest the Olympics would not go ahead,

but he said they could be held under only certain conditions.

The way these Olympics will be held will be very different from past ones, he said.

Tokyo organizers have said they expect to announce a decision this month on the number of fans allowed into each venue.

Organizers had expected to receive about 800 million from ticket sales, their third-largest source of income. Any shortfall will have to be made up by Japanese government entities, which are already footing most of the bills.

The official cost for the Olympics is 15.4 billion, but several government audits have suggested it might be twice that much, and all but 6.7 billion is public money.

Uphill task for India against Latvia

JURMALA: The Indian players have an onerous task at hand to compete against higher-ranked Latvians, including 2017 French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko, when they strive to clear the World Group Play-offs hurdle at the Billie Jean King Cup, here from Friday.

By her own admission, Ankita Raina plays her best tennis at this event, formerly known as Fed Cup, and India would again expect her to punch above her weight when she takes on Ostapenko in the tie-opening match of the Play-offs where India are competing for the first time.

Though odds are against them, what may go in favour of the Indians is that the tie will be played on indoor hard court as the Latvians surprisingly did not choose clay courts, more suited to their players, and the absence of crowd support for the hosts.

Ankita (ranked 174) and Karman Kaur Thandi (ranked 621), who takes on host number one player Anastasija Sevastova (ranked 47), both said they are ready for a good fight.

Ankita played against Sevastova way back in 2015 at home in Ahmedabad, losing an ITF final to her. Their journeys have been contrasting since then with Sevastova getting into top-50 with a crushing backhand.

She even beat Serena Williams when Latvia played against US in 2020 Fed Cup Qualifiers.

"We mostly play on hard courts, so I am ready and excited for it. I give my best when I represent my country, I am more than ready," Ankita said at a virtual press conference.

Karman, who is making a comeback after an injury lay-off, said she is physically prepared for the big challenge.

"Fast or slow, it does not matter, both Ankita and I prefer hard courts. It's a good opportunity for us," she said. Asked why he chose Karman over higher-ranked Rutuja Bhosale (419), captain Vishal Uppal said he has gone by his "gut feeling".

"All my five players have worked hard. I felt Karman can give us some extra on day one. I have gone with my gut," he said. Sevastova said she knows Ankita well but watched a few Youtube videos of Karman to get an idea about her game.

Hardik gets promotion

Pandya finds place in A category of BCCI central contracts; Virat, Rohit, Bumrah remain in top bracket; Kuldeep, Chahal demoted

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The star trio of India captain Virat Kohli, his white-ball deputy Rohit Sharma and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah retained their top bracket BCCI contracts, worth ₹7 crore each, while all-rounder Hardik Pandya earned a promotion despite an injury-plagued season.

A total of 28 cricketers were awarded central contracts in four categories on Thursday.

At this moment in Indian cricket, there are only three certainties across formats and the scenario hasn't changed with Kohli, Rohit and Bumrah being the elite of elites.

All-rounder Pandya is one of the notable promotions to Grade A, which is worth ₹5 crore, despite the fact that he endured a back injury which has prevented him from bowling for much of the last year. He was in Grade B last year.

"Hardik is very much in line to play Test matches in England and will be one of the most important players after our A+ cricketers when we play the T20 World Cup. So Hardik's promotion is about what he brings to the team. That's what the selectors have fac-

LIST OF BCCI'S ANNUAL CONTRACTS (2020-21)

GRADE A+ (₹7 CRORE)	GRADE A (₹5 CRORE)	GRADE C (₹1 CRORE)
Virat Kohli Rohit Sharma Jasprit Bumrah	Ravichandran Ashwin Ravindra Jadeja Cheteshwar Pujara Ajinkya Rahane Shikhar Dhawan KL Rahul Mohammed Shami Ishant Sharma Rishabh Pant Hardik Pandya	Kuldeep Yadav Navdeep Saini Deepak Chahar Shubman Gill Hanuma Vihari Axar Patel Shreyas Iyer Washington Sundar Yuzvendra Chahal Mohammed Siraj
Losers: Kuldeep Yadav (A to C), Bhuvneshwar Kumar (A to B), Yuzvendra Chahal (B to C).	Winners: Hardik Pandya (A from B), Shardul Thakur (B from C).	Miss out from last year's list: Manish Pandey and Kedar Jadhav.
	GRADE B (₹3 crore) Wriddhiman Saha Umesh Yadav Bhuvneshwar Kumar Shardul Thakur Mayank Agarwal	New addition: Mohammed Siraj, Shubman Gill and Axar Patel in Grade C.

tored in," a senior BCCI official told PTI.

Rookies Shubman Gill and Mohammed Siraj have got their maiden central contracts worth ₹1 crore in grade C while Shardul Thakur has been elevated to group B.

The trio has been rewarded for lion-hearted performance during India's historic Test triumph in Australia this year.

Among the demotions, pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar has dropped to Grade B, which is worth ₹3 crore, while Kedar Jadhav has been dropped for good.

Bhuvneshwar's

demotion from A to B comes in the wake of prolonged absences due to different injuries and he is no longer an all-format regular.

The biggest setback has come for left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav, who has been pushed down two notches from Grade A to C.

"Kuldeep is slowly slipping down the radar and he should consider himself lucky that he has managed to retain his contract," said the source.

However Shikhar Dhawan, who is now a certainty in only one format (ODI), has managed to remain in category A along with Test specialists Ravichandran Ashwin and Cheteshwar Pujara.

Axar Patel's 27-wicket haul against England at home has also got him back in the central contracts fold.

Rishabh Pant, who is certainly a future A+ candidate, has retained his grade A position after a dream four months where he has singlehandedly won Test matches against Australia and England.

Morris proves his worth ... as Rajasthan Royals beat Delhi Capitals



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Chris Morris produced a timely 36-run Cunebeaten knock as Rajasthan Royals defeated Delhi Capitals by three wickets in their Indian Premier League (IPL) match here on Thursday.

Jaydev Unadkat took three wickets upfront to rattle DC after RR elected to bowl. DC skipper Rishabh Pant scored 51.

South African batsman David Miller produced a combative knock of 62 runs in Royals' chase while Chris Morris scored 36 to take the side over the line.

Earlier, Unadkat (3/15 off 4 overs) dismissed Prithvi Shaw, Shikhar Dhawan and Ajinkya Rahane to trigger DC's top-order collapse from which they never recovered fully.

Captain Rishabh Pant's blistering 32-ball 51, studded with nine fours, was not enough as DC could only post a modest total after being put in to bat. DC made a disastrous start as they were two wickets down for 16 runs in the fourth over with Unadkat dismissing the opening duo of Shaw (2) and Dhawan (9) cheaply. Shaw was the first to go in the second over, caught at backward point before Dhawan perished while attempting a ramp shot with RR captain and wicketkeeper Sanju Samson taking a stunning diving catch to his

right. Ajinkya Rahane's (8) underwhelming IPL form continued as he offered an easy caught and bowled chance to Unadkat with a slow ball that clocked just 110km per hour.

DC were 36 for 3 at the end of power-play but the slump continued as Marcus Stonis (0), foxed by a Mustafizur Rahman (2/29) delivery, checked his shot at the last minute to offer a running catch to Jos Buttler.

The run rate started increasing once captain Pant came to the crease but still DC were 57 for 4 at the halfway mark.

Once he had a full measure of the pitch, Pant opened up and hit four boundaries, three of which were consecutive, to take 20 runs from the 11th over bowled by Rahul Tewatia.

Pant, in excellent form this year, reached to his fifty off 30 balls in the 12th over, with a four off Mustafizur but he was run out the next over with bowler Rryan Parag's throw crashing onto the stumps.

Delhi were 88 for 5 then. After Pant's exit, Tom Curran gave some respectability to the DC innings with a 16-ball 21.

BRIEF SCORES:
Delhi Capitals: 147 for 8 in 20 overs (Rishabh Pant 51; Jaydev Unadkat 3/15).
Rajasthan Royals: 150 for 7 in 19.4 overs. (D Miller 62, C Morris 36 not out, R Tewatia 19; A Khan 3/32).

Bowlers take centre stage in Kings face-off

KEY PLAYERS	
	CHRIS GAYLE Wankhede wicket suits his game and Gayle will be eager to make full use of the conditions
	SAM CURRAN The English all-rounder is capable enough to chip quick runs in death over's besides getting wickets

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Chennai Super Kings would look for inspiration from skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni and a much-improved bowling effort when they take on a power-packed Punjab Kings at Wankhede Stadium on Friday.

The two sides experienced contrasting fortunes in their respective tournament opener.

While CSK lost by seven wickets against Delhi Capitals, Punjab Kings eked out a four-run win over Rajasthan Royals in a high-scoring thriller.

With the dew playing a crucial role at Wankhede, the side winning the toss would want to bowl first.

In their first match here, despite failures from the opening duo of Rituraj Gaikwad and Faf du Plessis besides skipper Dhoni, CSK managed to put up a decent total on the board.

But the Chennai outfit's bowling unit looked completely out of sorts and clueless against Shikhar Dhawan and Prithvi Shaw, who were ominous from the word go and stitched a 138-run stand to take the game away from CSK.

The likes of Deepak Chahar, Sam Curran, Shardul Thakur, Jadeja and Moeen Ali all went for big runs and looked rusty.

And come Friday, the onus would be on master tactician Dhoni to inspire his teammates to lift their performance and give Punjab a run for their money.

Punjab Kings, on the other hand, had a narrow escape against RR the other despite posting a mammoth 221 for 6 on the board.

Opening the batting, KL Rahul played a captain's knock of 91 off just 50 balls. He was ably supported by big-hitting Chris Gayle (40 off 28) and Deepak Hooda (64 off 28).

For Punjab Kings and Rahul, batting is not at all area of concern as they showed with their performance in the opener, but just like CSK, the bowling unit remains a major worry despite

VENUE: WANKHEDE STADIUM, MUMBAI	
HEAD TO HEAD	
Matches	23
Punjab Kings	09
Chennai Super Kings	14
LAST YEAR'S MATCHES	
Chennai Super Kings beat Kings XI Punjab by 10 wickets in Dubai	
Chennai Super Kings defeated Kings XI Punjab by 9 wickets in Abu Dhabi	

67

KL Rahul who scored 4933 runs in 140 innings of 153 matches, needs 67 runs to become the 11th Indian and 70th batsman overall to score 5000 runs in T20 matches

70

Faf du Plessis who scored 5930 runs in 224 innings of 240 matches, needs 70 runs to become the sixth South African and 45th batsman overall to score 6000 runs in T20 matches

Faisel Features

spending big money at the auction.

And Rahul definitely won't be a happy man with the performances of his bowlers against Rajasthan Royals.

Young Arshdeep Singh (3/35) eventually emerged as Punjab's saviour. Needing 13 runs off the last over, the left-arm pacer gave away just eight runs to pull off a fine win for his team.

Besides Arshdeep, veteran Mohammad Shami (2/33) too had a decent outing with the ball but the performance of Australian pace duo of Jhye Richardson (1/55) and Riley Meredith (1/49) should be a concern for Punjab, having shelled out ₹22 crore for their services.

Katich impressed with mature Maxi

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Glenn Maxwell is proving to be a multi-utility player for Royal Challengers Bangalore besides showing ominous form with the bat early in the IPL, feels head coach Simon Katich.

The 32-year-old, who was snapped by RCB for ₹14.25 crore after a massive bidding war with CSK, already has justified the faith shown in him by playing two match-winning knocks in their back-to-back wins this season.

The Australian is also looking to shed the perennial under-performer tag in the IPL.

"He's shown a lot of maturity, particularly today (against SRH on Wednesday), when wickets were falling around him... He summed up the conditions really well, and took the game deep, that's credit to him for his experience for summing it up and then executing right at the end when we

needed some quick runs," said Katich.

In the 2020 edition held in the UAE, Maxwell endured a dismal run with then Kings XI Punjab, scoring 108 runs from 13 matches at 15.42.

He failed to hit a single six and also struggled to get the team over the line on many a times as the Punjab franchise finally gave up on the Aussie ahead of this year's auction.

But Katich said he has been multi-faceted with RCB franchise this season.

"He's been magnificent. He's had a big role for us, first in the field helping Virat out there with field positioning to have the right guys in the right places at the right time. He has really embraced it," Katich said in a video

posted on their website.

"He's taken a lot of the young guys under his wing at fielding practice, worked with him on that aspect of our game because we know that's an area we have to keep being good and really open up opportunities for run out and catches.

"He's been brilliant there but the big thing is obviously being with the bat. Both the times he's given himself a chance to get in stick to his game plan."

The head coach also hailed the spirit shown by the team in defending the modest total against SRH.

"It's certainly obviously gets tense, but I think spirit with which we played that was fantastic in both games, so regardless of result we're really proud of the way they go about it.

"The fact that we got over the line both times is great. If we hadn't got over the line, then the fact that we fought really hard and stayed in the contest as long as we did, particularly tonight, when Warner and Pandey were putting on a very good partnership, and things were in their favour."

Indians enjoy second consecutive all-win day at youth world c'ship

NEW DELHI: It was a second successive all-win day for Indian boxers at the youth world championships in Kielce, Poland with two from the women's contingent advancing to the quarterfinals after clinching dominating triumphs.

Poonam (57kg) and Vinka (60kg) won their bouts comprehensively to make the last-eight stage on Wednesday. While Poonam defeated Hungary's Beata Varga, Vinka sailed past Bosnia and Herzegovina's Tara Bohatjuk.

Both the bouts were stopped by the referee before the three rounds could be completed.

In the men's draw, Asian youth silver-medallist Ankit Narwal (64kg) advanced to the second round after a comprehensive 5-0 win over Slovakia's Miroslav Herceg.

Next up for him is

Uzbekistan's Akhmadjon Akhmedov, who got a bye in the opening round.

In the 91kg category, Vishal Gupta notched up a comfortable unanimous victory over Bulgaria's Georgi Stoev to enter the round of 16. He will square off against Croatia's Borna Loncaric.

Also entering the pre-quarters was Vikas (52kg) after getting the better of Bulgaria's Yassen Radev. His was also a 5-0 win.

Radev is the reigning European champion and also a gold-winner from the recent Adriatic Pearl Tournament in Montenegro.

Vikas will now square off against Mongolia's Sukhbat Enkhzorig.

India have fielded a 20-member team -- 10 men and as many women -- in the competition, which features 414 boxers from 52 countries.

Proteas women rewarded for beating India



JOHANNESBURG: The South African women's cricket team will be rewarded with a cash prize of R 500,000 for winning the twin bilateral away series against India last month, country's sports minister Nathi Mthethwa announced.

The Proteas women beat India 4-1 in the five-match one-day series and also won the T20Is by 2-1 margin.

At the Sports Excellence Awards, Mthethwa announced that the amount R500,000 (INR 26.28 lakh) will be equal-

ly distributed among the members of the squad.

"The Proteas women's cricket team once again made history by winning the ODI Series and the T20 Series (in India)," Mthethwa said.

"Before the India tour, the team reached the semi-finals of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, which was held in Australia last year.

They also beat visitors Pakistan in both the T20 and One-Day-International series 3-0 in February and

March, which Mthethwa described as "an exceptional performance."

"Whilst we continue to battle the pandemic, South African athletes have continued to do battle in international sporting competitions. These soldiers have been flying the South African flag high and continued to entertain and bring joy to South Africans," Mthethwa said.

Several other athletes also received an award of R20,000 each.

PLAYER	RUNS
1. Nitish Rana (KKR)	137
2. Sanju Samson (RR)	123
3. Manish Pandey (SRH)	99
PLAYER	WKTS
1. Harshal Patel (RCB)	7
2. Andre Russell (KKR)	6
3. Avesh Khan (DC)	5
MOST SIXES	
1. Sanju Samson (RR)	7
2. Deepak Hooda (PBKS)	6
3. Nitish Rana (KKR)	6



SURFING THEIR WAY: Mumbai Indians' foreign recruits — Trent Boult, left, and Chris Lynn spend time in Chennai beach on Thursday enjoying water sport

@mipaltan

MULANI 1ST COVID BACK-UP









Delhi Capitals on Thursday roped in young Mumbai left-arm spinner Shams Mulani as IPL's first short term Covid-19 replacement as he was brought in for Axar Patel, who is yet to recover from the dreaded virus and is still in a medical care facility. DC also has substituted injured captain Shreyas Iyer with Karnataka off-spinner Aniruddha Joshi. Mulani is a left-handed lower middle-order batsman and a slow left-arm orthodox bowler. The 24-year-old has an economy rate of 6.92 in 25 T20 games and a highest score of 73. He will not be permitted to represent another IPL franchise this season once he leaves the Delhi Capitals.

KOHLI REPRIMANDED FOR DISSENT

RCB captain Virat Kohli has been reprimanded for breaching the IPL's Code of Conduct after he was seen kicking a chair in frustration following his dismissal in the game against SRH. He was not at his fluent best in the game and ended up with 33 off 29 balls.

SHAHBAZ JUSTIFIES HIS SELECTION

RCB pacer Mohammad Siraj feels that spin bowling all-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed has justified his selection in the playing eleven, following a match-winning performance against SRH. Ahmed picked up three wickets in an over to stage a remarkable turnaround for RCB on Wednesday night. "Both Shahbaz Ahmed and Rajat Patidar (who played the last game) have been brilliant in the practice games," Siraj said in the post-match conference. "Shahbaz, as an all-rounder, gives us that extra option with his left-arm spin. The wicket was slow and turning also. Shahbaz Ahmed fitted into it for this game and did the job for us," he added.

POINTS TABLE						
		P	W	L	NRR	PTS
1	 RCB	2	2	0	+0.175	4
2	 MI	2	1	1	+0.225	2
3	 PBKS	1	1	0	+0.200	2
4	 DC	2	1	1	+0.195	2
5	 RR	2	1	1	-0.052	2
6	 KKR	2	1	1	+0.000	2
7	 SRH	2	0	2	-0.400	0
8	 CSK	1	0	1	-0.779	0