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Kumbh ends after Modi's appeal

After PM's urge, opinion grows in favour of holding rest of Shahi Snans symbolically

PNS ■ HARIDWAR/NEW DELHI

After Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to keep the remaining part of Kumbh Mela symbolic considering the surging Covid-19 cases, the Juna Akhada Acharya Mahamandaleswar Swami Avdheshanand Giri on Saturday announced the formal conclusion of the Maha Kumbh for the Akhada.

Panch Dash Nam Juna Akhada is the largest of the 13 Akhadas.

Swami Avdheshanand Giri said the remaining Shahi Snan of the Kumbh should be observed symbolically on April 27 and later tweeted that protecting the lives of Indians is "our first priority".

"Considering the rising threat of Covid-19, we have formally immersed the various deities invoked for the Kumbh Mela," he said.

Earlier in a tweet in Hindi, the PM said, "I prayed that two 'Shahi Snan' have taken place and Kumbh (participation) should now be kept symbolic. This will boost the fight against this crisis."

Later, Modi thanks all the saints for cooperation with the administration and expressed his gratitude for their gesture.

Thousands of Kumbh visitors have tasted Covid-19 positives and dozens of seers have



Har Ki Pauri Ghat wears a deserted look during Kumbh Mela 2021 following a surge in Covid-19 cases in Haridwar on Saturday

PTI

succumbed to the virus during the last two weeks inviting both domestic and international outrage for allowing such massive gathering at the time when the second wave of Covid-19 was spreading like wildfire across the country.

Earlier, addressing the media here, Giri said the PM had telephoned him to enquire about the Kumbh Mela and the health of the seers. The PM had also requested that since the main Shahi Snans have concluded, the remaining Kumbh should be observed symbolically. The Juna Akhada head said he would request devotees from across the nation to visit Haridwar only in small numbers, adding that the remaining Shahi Snan will be observed

only symbolically.

The remaining Snans are to be observed mainly by the Bairagi Akhadas. Earlier, the Niranjani Akhada had asked its Sadhus to leave for their respective destinations on April 17 considering the Covid surge. The Anand Akhada had also supported this view.

A majority of the 48.51 lakh people who took part in the last two royal baths (Shahi Snan) held on the occasion of Somwati Amavasya on April 12 and Mesh Sankranti on April 14 were seen openly violating Covid norms like face masks and social distancing.

The Kumbh has already been shortened this year to just one month from April 1 to 30 due to the pandemic.

Covid test, quarantine to welcome returning devotees back home

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The ordeal of Covid-19 test and quarantine awaits thousands of devotees who are returning home after attending the Maha Kumbh at Haridwar. As India grapples with a devastating second wave of the coronavirus and States imposing lockdown, several States and UTs, including Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Delhi and Gujarat, have made Covid-19 test mandatory for Kumbh returnees. Some States are also keeping the returnees in mandatory quarantine.

Thousands of Kumbh visitors and hundreds of "sadhus" who attended Kumbh Mela in Haridwar have tested positive for the coronavirus disease. On Saturday alone, 175 "sadhus" who attended Kumbh Mela have been found infected from coronavirus.

Gujarat on Saturday declared that all devotees returning to the State from Kumbh Mela will have to undergo a mandatory RT-PCR test before they are allowed to enter their respective cities and villages.

Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani said those found



infected will be isolated for 14 days.

Maharashtra Minister Anil Parab has announced those coming into the State from Kumbh Mela will be quarantined. Nasik district administration is also taking necessary steps for quarantining those coming from Kumbh.

Earlier, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) mayor Kishori Pednekar claimed on Saturday that the devotees returning from the Kumbh Mela will distribute coronavirus like "Prasad" and said they should be quarantined "at their own cost" on their arrival.

The Madhya Pradesh Government has issued order to put those returning from Kumbh in quarantine or self-isolation.

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10 lakh new cases in just 7 days in India

Record over 2.6L cases in a day; Delhi, Maha too see highest rise

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India added nearly 10 lakh cases in just seven days ending April 17 as the country recorded over 2.6 lakh new Covid-19 infections and a record 1,493 deaths during the last 24 hours on Saturday.

The addition of nearly 25,000 new cases over the previous day count amounts to a rise of nearly 10 per cent, which shows that the growth of Covid-19 has more than doubled during the last two weeks.

Maharashtra, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh are registering newer peaks and the situation remaining equally grim in the rest of the country.

The country had 1.52 lakh daily cases on April 10 when the death count stood at 838. A relative comparison shows that the death rate is steadily climbing up vis-a-vis new infections.

Amid the alarming rise in new infections and deaths, the country is battling a paucity of hospital beds, oxygen supply, ventilators, and life-safe antiviral drug Remdesivir. A major-



Health workers and family members carry the body of a patient who died of Covid-19 for cremation amid surge in coronavirus cases in Jammu on Saturday

PTI

ity of the State have also complained of a shortage of vaccines and shut down several vaccination centres.

Several States have belatedly imposed lockdown restriction to tackle the surge, but it is too early to see if these are going to work effectively at this stage on the ground.

Delhi and Maharashtra recorded their biggest single-day rise in coronavirus cases since the beginning of the pandemic in January 2020. The national Capital registered over 24,375 new cases, taking its tally to 8,27,998, while Maharashtra's count rose to 3,70,707 with 67,123 new infections. The death count in Delhi rose to 11,960 with 167 new fatalities on Saturday.

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Covid-19 IN INDIA	
TOTAL CASES:	1,47,82,461 (+2,60,533)
DEATHS:	1,77,168 (+1,493)
RECOVERED:	1,28,03,791 (+1,36,853)
ACTIVE:	17,95,278
MAHARASHTRA:	37,70,707
KERALA:	12,21,168
KARNATAKA:	11,41,998
TAMIL NADU:	9,80,728
DELHI:	8,27,998 (+24,375)

Maha threatens to seize Remdesivir exporting stocks

CM complains of shortage of liquid oxygen, anti-viral drug

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

After a bitter stand-off over the alleged discrimination in the distribution of vaccines, the Maharashtra Government on Saturday flagged the shortage of liquid medical oxygen and Remdesivir in the State and even threatened to seize the stocks of Remdesivir from the exporting firms and supply them to the needy people.

On a day when Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray charged that he could not speak to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the immediate requirement of liquid medical oxygen and Remdesivir vials as the latter was pre-occupied with West

Bengal Assembly elections, senior Minister Nawab Malik accused the Modi Government of meeting out "step motherly" treatment to the State over the supply of Remdesivir vials.

Not to be outdone, Minister of Railways, Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal launched a virulent attack on Uddhav whom he accused of indulging in "petty politics" and said "he (the Chief Minister) needs to stop his daily dose of shameless politics and take responsibility."

Earlier in the day, Uddhav said, "Yesterday evening, I dialled him (Modi) but I could not speak to him as he was busy in West Bengal elections." Uddhav said he wanted to discuss the issue of shortage of liquid medical oxygen and Remdesivir injection vials, both life-savers in case of critical Covid-19 cases. He, however, said the State Government was receiving cooperation from the Centre.

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Remdesivir price drastically cut on Govt intervention

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the wake of increasing demand for anti-viral drug Remdesivir from across the States, the Centre on Saturday urged the injection makers to slash its price considerably. The Union Health Ministry in its "Clinical Management Protocols for Covid-19" has recommended the use of Remdesivir in patients in the moderate stages of the illness.

According to a statement from the Government, the Union Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilisers, Department of Pharmaceuticals, NPPA - Advisor (Costs) NI Chowdhury on Saturday ordered all pharma companies to comply with the revised norms with immediate and retrospective effect.

Pharmaceutical companies have reduced the price from 25 per cent to up to 68 per cent.

According to the details shared by the NPPA, Cadila



Healthcare has reduced the price of its REMDAC injection to ₹899 from ₹2,800 earlier. Similarly, Syngene International has cut the price of its brand RemWin to ₹2,450 from ₹3,950 earlier. Hyderabad-based Dr Reddy's Laboratories has cut the price of REDYX, which used to cost ₹5,400 earlier to ₹2,700 now. Similarly, Cipla has reduced price of its CIPREMI brand to ₹3,000 from ₹4,000 earlier. Jubilant Generics has cut the price of its remdesivir brand to ₹3,400 from ₹4,700 earlier.

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120 more Covid deaths in UP Guidelines issued for weekly closure

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh continues to single in the coronavirus fire with the state, on Saturday, reporting 120 COVID-19 deaths and 27,357 new infections during the past 24 hours.

There are about 1.5 lakh active COVID-19 cases in the state and about 75 per cent of these patients are in home isolation. Four districts — Lucknow, Varanasi, Prayagraj and Kanpur Nagar — have 60 per cent of the state's active case while the remaining 71 districts have 40 per cent cases.

State capital Lucknow reported 5,913 new positive cases during the past 24 hours. Along with Lucknow, the Covid situation remained grim in Varanasi, Kanpur Nagar and Prayagraj.

Additional Chief Secretary (Medical and Health) Amit Mohan Prasad said here on Saturday that the state was expanding the scope of investigation. A total of 2,23,307 samples were examined on Friday. A total of

3,78,14,182 samples have been tested in the state so far, he added.

In Lucknow, Additional Chief Secretary (Information) Navneet Sehgal and District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash have tested positive for novel coronavirus infection along with DGP HC Awasthi.

A report from Agra said that 398 new cases of novel coronavirus infection were detected during the past 24 hours. The Taj City has 1,906 active cases and its COVID-19 death toll reached 188 on Saturday evening.

In Gonda, MP Kirtivardhan Singh and former state ministers Yogesh Pratap Singh and Pandit Singh have tested positive. Now all the big leaders of the district are in home quarantine.

In Ballia, 476 new coronavirus infected people were detected during the past 24 hours. The district now has 2,538 active cases.

Earlier on Friday, 27,426 new cases of coronavirus infection were found. The highest number of 6,598 pos-

itive cases was reported in Lucknow, followed by 2,344 in Varanasi, 1,758 in Prayagraj and 1,403 in Kanpur Nagar.

Meanwhile, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Awanish Kumar Awasthi inspected Covid hospitals in Lucknow. He inspected Integral, Era and TS Mishra Medical Colleges, which are now dedicated Covid hospitals. He was accompanied by the principal secretary (medical education) and commissioner of police of Lucknow. Awasthi inspected the medical colleges with a team and watched the system.

Meanwhile, people employed with continuous process industries and those producing essential items like medicines and sanitiser in Uttar Pradesh will be allowed to go to their workplaces during the 35-hour "weekly closure" form Saturday 8 pm till Monday 7 am, an official said.

The state government also said that marriages on Saturday and Sunday will take place amid restrictions with only 50 people allowed in

closed spaces and 100 in open spaces, and organisers have to ensure COVID-appropriate behaviour.

Amid a surge in COVID-19 cases, the government on Friday had announced the closure during this period of every week till May 15 and also said those caught for the second time not wearing a mask will be fined ₹ 10,000. The first time fine was doubled to ₹ 1,000.

All examinations like that for the National Defence Academy will be allowed during the "weekly closure". Examiners and candidates have to show their identity cards to authorities to go to their exam centres, the official said in the statement.

Public Transport shall be allowed to run with 50 per cent capacity, especially state transport buses, Awasthi said.

For funeral services at cremation or burial grounds not more than 20 persons shall be allowed, he said.

Medical and health-related emergency services will remain open during this "weekly closure".

CAPSULE

BENGAL: 78.09% POLLING AMID SPORADIC VIOLENCE



Kolkata: West Bengal recorded over 78 per cent turnout in the fifth phase of its Assembly poll amid incidents of violence and attack on a candidate on Saturday after the bloodshed in the previous round of election. An EC official said around 78.09 per cent of the 1.13 crore voters exercised their franchise till 5 pm in 45 seats.

POPULAR TAMIL COMEDIAN VIVEKH DIES

Chennai: Popular Tamil comedian Vivekh who won the hearts of millions of people by his sharp wit and noted for his social work, promoting environmental protection died on Saturday.

Resume talks with protesting farmers, Dushyant urges PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala on Saturday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to resume talks with the farmers protesting against the Centre's controversial three farm laws at Delhi borders.

Chautala said a team of three to four Cabinet Ministers may restart discussion with the farmers who have been camping at the Delhi borders for over 100 days. The Deputy Chief Minister wrote the letter days after State's Home Minister Anil Vij's missive to Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, saying talks with peasants should be resumed to resolve the issue.

Vij had said he was concerned as a large number of farmers were sitting on

Haryana's borders amid a surge in Covid-19 cases in the State.

Haryana Chief Minister ML Khattar had also urged farmers and the Centre to resume talks.

"I would like to bring to your kind attention that our 'Annadattas' are on roads at Delhi border agitating in respect of newly enacted three farm laws of the Central government. It is a matter of concern that such agitation is going on for more than a hundred days," Chautala wrote in the letter. Chautala said he believes every problem has a solution by way of mutual discussions.

"The earlier discussion between the Central Government and farmers' union brought a few solutions to the concerns raised by Samyukt Morcha," he wrote in his letter dated April 15.

4 Sikhs among 8 killed in mass shooting in US

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The distraught families of Indian-Americans working at a FedEx facility in the US state of Indiana have expressed their anger, fear and anxiety in the aftermath of the latest mass shooting incident in the country that killed eight people, including four Sikhs.

Brandon Scott Hole, 19, a former employee at the facility in Indianapolis, carried out the mass shooting on late Thursday before allegedly committing suicide.

About 90 per cent of the workers at the FedEx delivery service facility are said to be Indian-Americans, mostly from the Sikh community.

On Friday night, the Marion County Coroner's Office and Indianapolis



A body is taken from the scene where multiple people were shot at a FedEx Ground facility in Indianapolis on Friday

AP

Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) released the names of the victims: Amarjeet Johal (66), Jasvinder Kaur (64), Amarjit Skhon (48) and Jaswinder Singh (68). The

first three deceased are women. Four others were Karl Smith (19), Samaria Blackwell (19), Matthew R. Alexander (32) and John Weisert (74).

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Lalu to walk free after serving half fodder sentence

Jharkhand HC grants bail in Dumka treasury case; release from jail expected tomorrow

MRITUANJAY KUMAR ■ RANCHI



The Jharkhand High Court on Saturday granted bail to former Bihar Chief Minister and RJD Chief Lalu Prasad in a fodder scam case involving illegal withdrawal of funds from Dumka treasury, paving his release from jail on completion of half the sentence period. Lalu is presently being treated at AIIMS, Delhi.

The court granted bail to Lalu on bail bond of ₹5 lakh and a personal bond of ₹1 lakh.

Lalu's lawyer Devarshi Mandal told PTI that they will move Special CBI court in Ranchi after it opens on Monday to seek his release following High Court order.

Explaining the release procedure, Mandal said, they have send an application to Lalu for his signature which will be submitted to the CBI court here on Monday along with the High Court order.

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CM for more equipment at hosps

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In order to dilute emergency situations due to the surge in COVID-19 cases, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed officials to equip government hospitals, medical colleges and medical institutes with new machines on an urgent basis.

A fund of Rs 4.16 crore has been released to the dedicated Covid hospital of Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences in Lucknow, Motilal Nehru Medical College in Prayagraj and BRD Medical College in Gorakhpur.

The funds received from the Yogi government will strengthen medical resources, including procurement of BiPAP machines, defibrillators, multipara monitors, table top pulse oximeters, ABG machines, ECG monitors, suction machines etc.

A sum of Rs 1.59 crore has been released to RML Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow for proper treatment of Covid patients. This will ensure additional availability of 40 BiPAP machines.

Similarly, Rs 1.30 crore has been released to Motilal Nehru Medical College in Prayagraj to purchase 100 para monitors, two ABG machines, five ECG monitors, two defibrillators and nine suction machines.

The 500-bed Paediatric Institute of BRD Medical College had been converted into a 300-bed dedicated Covid hospital on the instructions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during the first wave of coronavirus infection in Gorakhpur.

For the dedicated Covid hospital of BRD Medical College, the Yogi government has released more than Rs 1.27 crore, out of which Rs 77.50 lakh for 50 multipara monitors (high end) and Rs 49.50 lakh for purchase of 50 table top pulse oximeters.

Multipara monitor (high end) is the latest device and is very effective in treating serious patients. This is a device in which BP, ECG, etc. will be monitored continuously



while an alarm will ring if the patient's pulse rate falls or there is difficulty in breathing.

Regular monitoring of oxygen

levels is indispensable in the treatment of COVID-19 patients. With the availability of 50 multipara monitors and 50 table top pulse

AN AMOUNT OF RS 1.59 CRORE HAS BEEN RELEASED TO RML INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES, LUCKNOW FOR PROPER TREATMENT OF COVID PATIENTS. THIS WILL ENSURE ADDITIONAL AVAILABILITY OF 40 BIPAP MACHINES

oximeters at the dedicated Covid hospital of BRD Medical College, the additional facilities are being created.

10 oxygen plants to be set up across state

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amid the rising cases of novel Acoronavirus infection in Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has decided to set up 10 oxygen plants for uninterrupted supply of medical oxygen to the hospitals.

While holding a virtual meeting with senior officials to review the Covid situation, the chief minister issued instructions to set up 10 oxygen plants at different locations in the state.

He asked the health minister and additional chief secretary (health) to identify the locations and start the process immediately for setting up the oxygen plants. Later, the additional chief secretary said that these plants would be in place in a week.

The Yogi government has asked the departments concerned to keep an eye on the oxygen supply and availability of Remdesivir injection in the state so that there is no dearth of oxygen and the life-saving injection.



A 24x7 control room has been made active for this purpose where the officials will review the availability of the stock on a daily basis.

Ahead of the Sunday Covid curfew, the chief minister instructed the officials to ensure the availability of oxygen for the next 36 hours in all hospitals of the state. He also assured people that there is no shortage of any essential medicine in the state, including Remdesivir.

Yogi directed the DG medical education to provide oxygen cylinders to the institutions where there were no ICU beds due to lack of oxygen.

To provide immediate treatment to the COVID-19 patients, HAL in collaboration with the state government will be setting up a new COVID hospital equipped with all facilities at Awadh Shilpgram in Lucknow.

Big relief to labourers, workers during 35-hour Covid curfew



People rushing to catch the bus at Alambagh bus station in Lucknow on Saturday

Pioneer

Lucknow (PNS): The Uttar Pradesh government has given a big relief to labourers and workers during the 35-hour Covid curfew which started from 8 pm on Saturday and will continue till 7 am on Monday with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath saying that none of the industries will remain closed during the curfew.

The problem of workers will be taken care of by the government. There will be no restriction on the movement of workers to and from their workplaces.

The chief minister has issued instructions to the officials that along with the arrangements for the prevention of the disease, the foremost job of the government is to take full care of the livelihood of the

workers.

"Therefore, during the Covid curfew, make sure no inconvenience is caused to the labourers and workers of the state," Yogi said.

He said that strict action would be taken against the official concerned if there was any complaint in this regard.

The Yogi government clarified that weddings will take place on Saturday and Sunday during the 35-hour Covid curfew.

The chief minister has asked officials to allow only 50 persons in weddings held inside closed spaces and 100 guests in open places. Along with this, the use of masks, sanitisers, social distancing and other Covid precautions have to be followed. The Uttar Pradesh govern-

ment has also given permission to conduct all the exams scheduled on Sunday. The government has issued directions in this regard. The admit cards of the candidates will be valid pass for the candidates.

The government has also ordered officials to run state transport buses with a capacity of only 50 per cent passengers. In the state capital, public transport services like auto-rickshaws, tempos, e-rickshaws will not run

The government has also banned the presence of more than 20 people in funeral processions during the 35-hour Covid curfew. It has also appealed to the people attending cremation to fully follow the Covid protocol, including use of masks, PPE kits and sanitisers.

CITYBRIEFS

ABACUS CHAMP

Akshara Tathagat, a talented student of class VIII, City Montessori School, Aliganj Campus I, brought laurels to the institution by being recognised as the champion in an international online abacus competition. The competition was held under the 'Brainobrain Fest-2021', organised by educational institute Brainobrain. Students from various countries took part in the competition to showcase their analytical skills. Amidst a tough competition, Akshara opted for various abacus tricks to solve mathematical problems and was declared the champion.



CEE POSTPONED

The common entrance exam (CEE) for the Recruitment Rally for Soldier General Duty (Women Military Police), held at AMC Centre and College from January 18-20 for all districts of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand was scheduled for April 25 at AMC Centre and College. Due to the prevailing situation with Covid-19 pandemic, it has been postponed. Fresh dates, modalities and instructions will be issued subsequently on improvement of the situation.

JEE-BED POSTPONED

An online meeting of the advisory committee of JEE-BED (2021) was held by Lucknow University. LU spokesperson Durgesh Srivastava said it was resolved that due to the prevailing situation of Covid-19 in the country, the entrance test scheduled for May 19 has been postponed. "The new date of the entrance test will be declared later. Applicants are advised to keep visiting the Lucknow University website for updates regularly," he said.

Govt: ODOP items huge hit in foreign countries

Lucknow (PNS): The Uttar Pradesh government claimed that the products produced under the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme had started yielding results and had become a 'huge hit abroad'.

"Terracotta products of Gorakhpur, chikankari of Lucknow and kalamamirak of Siddharthnagar are in great demand in Britain, Germany and the US. Besides, ODOP items are a major attraction at Hong Kong Handloom Fair and Textile Expo in Istanbul (Turkey)," a government spokesperson said on Saturday. "Earlier, the ODOP products made their mark at the Cairo Fashion Week in the Egyptian capital in September last year. International level exhibitions were organised in around 19 countries, including the US, the UK, Hong Kong, Turkey, Egypt and Germany among others," the spokesperson said. According to the ODOP website, 23 national exhibitions were organised between March 2020 and March, 2021. "Several international companies also participated in these exhibitions. Besides, state-level fairs also played a big role in popularising products," the official said. The ODOP scheme under the MSME Department aims to popularise local products from different districts.

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Email- cos@ner.railnet.gov.in , Fax No. 0551-2200721						
TENDER NOTICE No. 02 DATE 16.04.2021						
Invitation of tenders through e-Procurement system						
Principal Chief Material Manager, North Eastern Railway, Gorakhpur, and on behalf of The President of India, invites tenders through e-procurement system for the supply of the following items. Complete description of the item and other condition are available on website www.irops.gov.in						
Item No.	Tender Number	Due On	Brief Description of Stores	Reserved to be procured from	Qty. Required	Earnest Money (Rs.)
1	29211038	11.05.2021	Set of Molding Item etc.	...	92133 Set	423070/-
2	29211044	11.05.2021	Fasteners Set etc.	...	99405 Set	318410/-
3	29211043	11.05.2021	Set of Magnetic Path Assembly etc.	...	19391 Set	253100/-
4	29211041	11.05.2021	Set of Magnetic Path Assembly etc.	...	54570 Set	894950/-
5	22201313	27.05.2021	Speed sensor with cable etc.	...	108 Nos.	103230/-
CPRO/S=02			Principal Chief Material Manager, Gorakhpur			
About any passenger amenity complaint SMS on Mob. No. 09794845955 Do Not smoke Bid/Cigarette in train						

कार्यालय नगर निगम, भरतपुर	
क्रमांक :- न.नि.स. / निर्माण / 2021-22 / 02-07	दिनांक :- 05.04.2021
ई-निविदा सूचना- 01/2021-22	
नगर निगम, भरतपुर द्वारा नगर निगम, भरतपुर में उपर्युक्त श्रेणी में एवं अन्य विभागों के "A" & "AA" श्रेणी में पंजीकृत संवेदकों से निर्धारित प्रपत्र में ई प्रोक्वोरमेंट प्रक्रिया से वेबसाइट http://neproc.rajjasthan.gov.in पर ऑनलाइन निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा की महत्वपूर्ण शर्त एवं विवरण वेबसाइट http://sppp.rajjasthan.gov.in एवं http://neproc.rajjasthan.gov.in पर देखा जा सकता है।	
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वेब साईट http://neproc.rajjasthan.gov.in से निविदा डाउनलोड करने की समय व तिथि	दिनांक 15.04.2021 से 05.05.2021 तक एवं सायं 6.00 बजे
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नगर निगम में प्रोसेसिंग शुल्क निविदा शुल्क की सूचीआर स्विच एवं अमानत राशि का घोषणा पत्र का मूल स्टॉप भौतिक रूप से जमा करने की तिथि	दिनांक 06.05.2021 दोपहर 12.00 बजे
निविदा खोलने की समय व तिथि	दिनांक 07.05.2021 दोपहर 12.00 बजे
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राज.संवाद/सी/21/815	आयुक्त नगर निगम, भरतपुर



NOTICE

I have changed my name from Ashok Fatwani to Ashok Kumar Fatwani, Ashok Kumar Fatwani S/O Kanhaiya Lal R/O 117/802 M - Block Kakadev Kanpur

NOTICE

I have changed my daughter name from KAASHVI GOEL to AISHAVI GOYAL in future my daughter should be known by the name Aishavi Goyal D/O Himanshu Gupta R/O 3/59 Flat No.D-1 Sai Shraddha Apartment Vishnupuri Kanpur

Wheat procurement clocks three lakh MT despite Covid scare

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has so far purchased close to three lakh metric tons of wheat directly from farmers at minimum support price (MSP) in the ongoing 2021-22 marketing year that began on April 1. The government increased the MSP of wheat from Rs 1,925 in 2020-21 to Rs 1,975 in 2021-22. Besides, the number of procurement centres have also been increased from 5,000 last year to 6,000 this time. Despite the pandemic wreaking havoc, the state government has ensured smooth procurement of the grain.

About 2.98 lakh MT of wheat was procured till April 16 as against 1, 86, 80.50 MT



in the previous year during the same period. Till date, 55,718 farmers from various districts of the state have benefitted," said Commissioner, Food and Civil Supplies, Manish Chauhan, in Lucknow on

Saturday.

To prevent farmers from getting infected with the coronavirus, Covid help desks have been set up at each wheat procurement centre and entry to the centres without wearing

masks is banned.

Those who come without masks are provided masks through the help desk. Social Distancing is strictly being followed and the centres are also providing hand wash, water, sanitiser, thermometer and oximeter to keep a check on the spread of novel coronavirus.

"Uttar Pradesh is arguably the first state in the country to initiate procurement by providing biometric authentication through e-POP devices in wheat purchase. It is aimed at benefiting farmers and eliminating the role of middlemen and unauthorised persons under the price support scheme," said the Commissioner, Food and Civil Supplies.

Sanitation, sanitisation drive in revenue villages

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

To bring down the transmission level of various infections including novel coronavirus and to ensure proper cleanliness in rural areas, the Uttar Pradesh government is carrying out rigorous cleanliness campaigns in all the revenue villages of 75 districts in the state.

Under the special sanitation drive, cleaning, sanitisation and fogging is being carried out at a rapid pace in all the 58,194 gram panchayats of UP.

As of now, the drive has been successfully conducted in almost 58,254 revenue villages of the state. In fact, the cleanliness drives and frequent cleaning of drains has started showing positive results as the rate of infection has decreased remarkably in villages.

It is worth noting that the state government is putting all energy to ensure the safety of voters in the ongoing four-phase panchayat elections of Uttar Pradesh. The drive is aimed at curbing the spread of novel coronavirus and other vector-borne diseases in rural Uttar Pradesh.

As per the order of the chief minister, the government officials carry out an inspection on a daily basis in all the villages to check if the sanitisation, fogging and cleaning work is done properly or not.

According to the daily reports, in around 19,826 revenue villages of the state, bleaching powder and sodium hypochlorite was sprayed and fogging was done in almost 12,530 revenue villages of the state during the last 24 hours itself.

So far, on the instructions of the chief minister, out of the total 97,409 revenue villages, around 58,254 revenue villages have been sprayed with street-bleaching powder, sodium hypochlorite and fogging is also being done.

The drive includes cleaning of the drains along with removal of the garbage from the village areas. Fogging is being done and pesticides



are also being sprayed as per the requirement to protect the people from getting infected. About 76,004 personnel have been engaged in this special campaign under the supervision of the Rural Development Department. During this time the villagers are also being made aware of cleanliness.

"This special sanitation drive will help us contain the COVID-19 infection and other diseases like dengue, malaria and chikungunya", the officials said.

The move came on Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's directive to intensify cleanliness and sanitisation in the state during the review meeting. The chief minister said that the months from April to August was the time of spread of many types of infectious diseases and there was often an increase in cases of dengue, chikungunya, Japanese encephalitis and other infectious diseases.

"In such a situation, cleanliness and sanitisation is necessary. It will also prevent the spread of COVID-19," he said.

This campaign, which has been

going on for the past one week, has also seen positive results. Generally, during the months of April-May, where patients of infectious diseases used to come in abundance to hospitals, these days these patients are few or less.

Appealing to the people to be vigilant towards cleanliness, the chief minister said that the cleanliness campaign was a big weapon in fighting not only COVID-19 but other diseases as well.

To prevent communicable diseases, cutting of bushes, marking of shallow hand pumps and removal of water-logging from the pits were done on a priority basis. Waterlogging problems were also addressed to reduce the outbreak of mosquitoes.

Spraying of anti-larvae was carried out in the drains of all gram panchayats. On the instructions of the higher officials, all the sanitation workers stayed in their gram panchayat daily from 7 am to 2 pm and engaged themselves in cleaning work. A special monitoring team has been formed to ensure that no sanitation workers are absent.

36 die as active cases in Lucknow climb to 44,485

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the detection of 5,913 fresh coronavirus infection cases in Lucknow on Saturday, the active cases climbed to 44,485. The state capital recorded the highest single-day toll with 36 deaths. Lucknow had 235 active cases on March 11 after which the cases started rising after Holi.

Preparations also began for a dedicated Covid facility at Awadh Shilp Gram under HAL's corporate social responsibility. A district administration official said they carried out the inspection and the site will also be inspected by the HAL officials. However, the number of beds has yet to be decided. The Covid facility will be set up in the multipurpose halls of Awadh Shilp Gram.

Meanwhile, SGPGI strengthened its oxygen supply on Saturday with the inauguration of an oxygen plant by director Dr RK Dhiman.

"Earlier, the Rajdhani Covid hospital was getting a supply from 600 cylinders everyday, but now we have established a 20,000-litre capacity of liquid oxygen plant and it will be a sufficient stock for the patients," the director said.

Long queues of people were witnessed at Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences for Covid testing on Saturday. Director Dr AK Singh said they have three counters for testing.



Barricades put up in a containment zone in Lucknow. (Right) People in queue for Covid testing at Indiranagar CHC



Pioneer

"The rush is because some of the private labs have stopped testing. We are testing 6,000 people everyday," he said. He added that they faced problems related to oxygen supply on Saturday.

"Earlier, our requirement was for 100 oxygen cylinders, but now it has increased to 350 cylinders which are in rotation. Although the supply of oxygen to the Covid hospital is sufficient, we also require it for the

non-Covid hospital. We have 18 Covid patients in the triage area of the non-Covid hospital and we want to shift them to the Covid facility but cannot do so at the moment. The CMO is able to shift one or two patients to the Covid hospital. These patients are being given oxygen in the triage area itself. They came with the negative report and later tested positive," he said. He added that the supply is required mostly in ventilators

and they got cylinders on an emergency basis to meet the demand.

The district administration remained flooded with requests for beds, injections and hospitals. There was also a request for a 47-year-old patient who was admitted to a level-2 Covid facility and needed to be shifted to a level-3 hospital. "Please send the rapid response team for my aunt in Indiranagar as she is not feeling well," a caller said.

ing well," a caller said.

There were some residents who said that the helpline of the Integrated Control and Command Centre did not work. A 60-year-old resident of Chinhat said he was trying the numbers of the Covid command centre and while one number was not connecting, the other was engaged. "My daughter has tested positive and I need to get her treatment started," he added.

Meanwhile, nodal officer for Covid at Lok Bandhu Hospital Dr Arun Tewari said they have 225 active beds after adding more beds.

"The problem is that patients are coming in severe condition but have to be given level-2 beds because ICU beds are completely full. This is a big problem because the instructions are we cannot deny admission even if it is a serious patient. These are the patients

who ultimately succumb," he said. A senior government official said that because the demand for oxygen was high, they banned oxygen for industrial use and allowed the industrial suppliers by giving them a green signal for supplying oxygen to the hospitals.

He said they are continuously monitoring the supply of oxygen in the state. The supply of oxygen is coming from Modinagar, Gautam Buddha

Nagar, Ghaziabad, Bokaro, Kashinagar and from a firm in Panipat. On reports regarding hoarding of cylinders, he said there is no such scene.

"Some patients may have kept some cylinders for any patient at their homes or because of any emergency purposes, but there is no case of hoarding," he said. He added that the priority is to cater to bigger Covid hospitals.

He said the officials of his department are looking into the issues of blackmarketing of oxygen cylinders, if there are any reports.

Meanwhile, president of People's Health Organisation Dr Ishwar Gilada said the country has to augment testing and bed usage. "The only saviours are oxygen and steroids. There is also a role for managing co-morbidities and Remdesivir. Even after the wave is over, there is no room for complacency and lowering our guards, as subsequent waves will always be in the offing," he said.

Meanwhile, KGMU has started telemedicine OPD services through e-Sanjeevani application. "Specialists from different departments of KGMU are providing teleconsultation services from Monday to Saturday from 9 am to 2 pm. One can download the e-Sanjeevani OPD app on mobile phone from Google Play Store or get access through the website," KGMU spokesperson Dr Sudhir Singh said.

Roshan Jacob takes over as DM incharge

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Senior IAS officer Roshan Jacob on Saturday took charge as DM incharge in Lucknow Lucknow after Abhishek Prakash tested positive for coronavirus infection late on Friday night. Prakash isolated himself after he was diagnosed with Covid-19.

After taking charge, Jacob said much of problem can be solved by following home isolation and treatment properly. "The responsibility of the administration is to allocate beds to patients in need and monitor the bed capacity and oxygen supply. It will be my priority," she said. She added that she would also try to ensure that the Integrated Control and Command Centre functions properly and responds to the calls by people so that they don't panic.

She pointed out that shortage of beds and oxygen supply has been the main issues for some time. "The Integrated Control and Command Centre is there but it is important to see how to make its functioning smoother and how to improve the testing paraphernalia in Lucknow," she said.



Jacob said the hospitals are overburdened and the focus will be on how to reduce the caseload so that the patients genuinely need can get the beds. "Those who can be managed through home isolation should not be shifted to hospitals and proper prioritisation is the need of the hour," she said.

As for the number of beds to be increased in the district, she said she is reviewing the availability of beds in both private and government hospitals. "There is some shortage of beds and the hospitals have assured us that the capacity will be increased. Besides, oxygen supply is erratic but there is no need to panic because we are here to look into these things," said Jacob, who is also the special secretary and director of Geology and Mining.

LMC carries out extensive sanitisation drive

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In view of the surge in coronavirus infection cases, Lucknow Municipal Corporation on Saturday carried out a special sanitisation drive at Indiranagar, Aliganj and Alambagh containment zones.

Municipal Commissioner Ajay Kumar Dwivedi said the drive started from Kapoorthala crossing in Aliganj and covered 60,000 buildings, 6,000 commercial establishments, 14 main markets such as Gol Market, Purania, Mahanagar, Ram Ram Bank, Sector Q, Engineering College, Tedhi Pulia, Mama crossing, Kursi road, Sitapur, Lekhray Market, Lekhray Dollar and various hospitals and CHCs.

He said that in the residential areas, they covered Tulsi Vihar, Manas Enclave, Chandan Gaon, all sectors of Indiranagar, Luv Kush Nagar, Kamta, Matiyari, Bastauli, Zarhara etc. "For each shift, 30 tractor-mounted spray machines and 100 hand-held machines were used with a 300-strong staff," he said.

He said that from 9 pm onwards in Zone 5, they covered Alambagh, including 52,000 buildings, 5,000 com-



Sanitisation drive held in major containment zones on Saturday

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mercial establishments, Natkheda road, Talkatora road, Vijaynagar, Krishnanagar, Gauri Bazaar, Bangla Bazaar etc.

The sanitisation campaign was started at Aliganj because it was the most contaminated

area. "The massive campaign was carried out in an area of 50 kilometres under the directions of the chief minister. We hope that in three days, we will be able to stop the spread of coronavirus with the help of sanitisation," he added.



RERA defers physical hearing of cases till end of this month

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Owing to the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the state, the Uttar Pradesh Real Estate Regulatory Authority has deferred the option of physical hearing of complainants. It has now proposed to start physical hearing of complaints from May 1, 2021.

"It is to be noted that UP RERA in its 59th meeting on

March 19, presided over by its Chairman Rajiv Kumar, had decided to provide the opportunity of physical hearing to parties concerned on their request with effect from May 1, 2021 subject to strict compliance of Covid protocol as applicable," said a release.

For the time being, the UP RERA will continue to hear cases virtually. UP RERA has been hearing complaints

through virtual mode under the e-courts system in order to maintain social distancing norms amid the novel coronavirus pandemic.

"Further decision about offering the option of physical hearing to parties will be taken in future depending on the situation of the pandemic and directions of Central and state governments in this regard," said the UP RERA release.

Youth found dead under mysterious circumstances

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 20-year-old resident of Jamalpur Daduri village under Nagarm police station died under mysterious circumstances. He was identified as Vimal. The body was found hanging from a tree in a nearby field on Friday morning. Father Shiv Shanker said his son was killed. However, he failed to explain the reason.

Investigating officer OP Dubey said Vimal committed suicide by hanging himself. Police said that Shiv Shanker lives with his wife Shiv Kumari, sons Vimal, Jitendra, Nitin & Kamlesh and daughter Madhu in the village and ekes out his livelihood through watermelon farming. Vimal was in the field to scare away stray cattle to protect the crop during the night. The police said that Vimal had dinner with his family on Thursday before going to the field some yards away from the house.

Shiv Shanker, along with his elder son Jitendra, left for the field around 5:30 am but found Vimal missing. They tried to search for him, but in vain. Shiv Shanker raised an alarm after which other

reached the spot. Vimal was found hanging from a tree. There were injury marks on the neck.

In another case, a 30-year-old man, identified as Chand Babu of Talkatora, hanged himself. He was a gardener at Muneshwarapuram temple in the area. The body was found hanging in the temple premises in the morning. Police said Chand Babu was alcoholic and would often have verbal duels with his wife over his drinking habit. The couple had a fight on Wednesday afternoon and the wife was so disgusted that she left the house and refused to come back. Chand Babu's wife refused to come back even as he reached her house on Friday evening.

Meanwhile, a youth drowned in Indira Canal in Gosainganj area on Saturday evening. He was identified as Aman Kumar, who was a resident of Ahiran Dhakwa village under Sushant Golf City police station. The police said he was a farmer and was working in a nearby field. He went for a bath in the canal after finishing his work. The police said he was swept away towards the middle and drowned.

Asthma patients susceptible to corona infection: Dr Surya Kant

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With Asia Pacific Association of Allergy, Asthma and Clinical Immunology (APAAACI) celebrating Allergy Week, the department of Respiratory Medicine, KGMU, organised a virtual conference on allergy on Saturday.

Honorary national secretary of IMA Dr Sanjeev Singh Yadav, who was the guest of honour, inaugurated the academic session and congratulated head of the department Dr Surya Kant for celebrating the platinum jubilee of the department and taking it a step forward by organising 75 activities. Dr Surya Kant, who is also the brand ambassador of Covid-19 vaccination, presented his perspective regarding allergy practice in the Covid -19 era. He said that severe and uncontrolled asthmatic patients are more susceptible to coronavirus infection.

"Known asthma patients should continue their prescribed inhalers and other therapies in order to prevent any sort of exacerbation," he said.

Dr Surya Kant advised such patients to avoid allergy testing, pulmonary function

test and allergy immunotherapy during Covid-19 times in order to prevent the transmission of virus.

"Tele-OPD can be utilised in a full-fledged manner in view of the current situation to get virtual advice and prescriptions. Taking steam inhalation twice a day and staying indoors is the need of the hour. All asthma patients should avoid places of ongoing fumigation as the chemical used in it can trigger exacerbation. All severe asthma patients who are on biologics like Omalizumab are required to avoid such a therapy during these times," he added.

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70 pc attendance in UPMRC exams

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Seventy per cent attendance was registered in the UPMRC examinations which were held at 103 centres in 16 cities in three shifts on Saturday. A senior official said the exams were held as per schedule and with all Covid protocols. In one shift, there were 20,000 candidates across the state. The exams were held for the posts of station controllers and maintainers.

UPMRC incurred a cost of approximately Rs 120 per applicant due to Covid protocols. The amount was spent on sanitisation dispensers, sanitiser, sanitisation of examination centres, thermal scanners and maintaining overall hygiene, he said.

"The students had to wear masks and keep sanitisers with them. UPMRC had already made arrangements for sanitisation dispensers and thermal scanners. Keeping all the Covid protocols in consideration, the examination centres were sanitised and students were instructed to adhere to the Covid protocols," he added.

Meanwhile, the official pointed out that the ridership of metro has dipped to 12,000-13,000 per day due to the surge in Covid cases. However, he maintained that metro is the safest option.

"We want to assure the commuters that in this pandemic times, we are more conscious than ever about their safety and security. The body temperature of all the passengers coming to all the stations is checked and only those with normal temperature are allowed to travel by metro," he said.



Floral tributes being paid to former Prime Minister Chandrashekhara on his birth anniversary outside Darul Shafa Vidhyapeeth on Saturday

Pioneer

2,272 more test positive, five deaths in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The district has recorded another biggest spike. As many as 2,272 more have tested positive on Saturday evening increasing the total number to 40,706 crossing the 40K-mark. With five more deaths during the last 24 hours, the death toll increased to 427. During the last 24 hours, 842 patients have been recovered and all of them in home isolation. The total number of patients cured in the district is 25,741 including 22,728 in home isolation and 3,013 in COVID-19 hospitals. The number of active cases has jumped up to 14,538 crossing the 14K-mark.

In the first report of the day, 858 positive patients were found out of 2,012 reports received and this figure increased to 2,272 as per report provided by the Health department in the evening increasing the active cases to 14,538. Earlier, in view of finding hundreds of new positive cases, with 35 new hotspots, the number of active hotspots has increased to 532 with 14 green zones having been converted to red zones by a day ago. Out of total 2,935 hotspots, 2,403 are green zones and 532 are red zones.

The Health department continued the vaccination at vaccination centres including



The vaccination drive at BLW.

Pioneer

government hospitals and health centres and the beneficiaries with the age above 45 years took vaccination. The number of persons with the age above 60 years was seen more at vaccination centres to get the shot of vaccines. Earlier, a total of 5,225 beneficiaries were vaccinated a day ago including 3,842 beneficiaries who got the first shot, while 1,053 got the second dose.

Meanwhile, the Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) management sped up the vaccination and testing drive at its central hospital and workshop respectively. The team of doctors conducted both the antigen and RT-PCR tests under the supervision of Principal

Chief Medical Officer Dr Sujit Mallik. From February 1 to last Friday evening, as many as 5,697 railway and 3,593 non-railway employees took the first dose of vaccine, while as many as 1,090 railway and 1,017 non-railway employees took the second dose. The General Manager Anjali Goyal monitored the vaccination and testing drive.

In the meantime, the facility of 60 COVID-19 beds has been enhanced in the newly constructed Mahila Hospital situated in the premises of district government hospital. The facility of 60 beds will also be enhanced in Heritage hospital. The BJP MLC Ashok Dhawan gave ₹ 25 lakh to Pt

Deendayal Upadhyay Government Hospital to purchase 10 oxygen machines (HFNC machine).

Showing strictness against those indulge in making black marketing of oxygen cylinders, the district administration deployed police personnel at such oxygen suppliers.

The DC Deepak Agrawal and DM Kaushal Raj Sharma had already made it clear to the dealers of oxygen that the oxygen cylinders will be supplied to COVID-19 hospital first and to non-COVID-19 hospitals thereafter.

The DM Sharma and CMO In-charge) Dr NP Singh appealed to the beneficiaries to get their name registered on Arogya Setu and other app before going to vaccination centres to avoid inconvenience.

The sharp increase in corona cases and reports of dead cases have made each and every person worried. The family members have to wait for hours to cremate the bodies of their dear and near at Manikarnika Ghat and Harishchandra Ghat. But unfortunately, the wood sellers at crematorium have hiked the price of wood for the cremation showing their highly insensitivity as the number of bodies at both ghats for the cremation is increasing every day.

11 infected from COVID-19 succumb

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

In the district on Friday night, while 11 infected from corona succumbed during treatment, 2,236 fresh cases of COVID-19 were reported during 24 hours. According to CMO Dr Prabhakar Rai, a total of 11,969 people were screened in the district on Friday. A total of 55 people were discharged from Covid hospitals. At the same time 808 people completed home isolation. A total of 863 people beat Corona. The CMO reported that 11 of the infected died during treatment in 24 hours.

Due to the ever increasing number of Covid patients, all Covid hospitals in the city have become full. The number of active patients is staggering. The situation in the city is such that the infected are not getting beds in hospitals. Government Covid hospitals



do not have beds to admit patients, the same is the case with private Covid hospitals.

During the treatment, attendants are compelled to put in utmost efforts to get their patients admitted to the empty beds of those who lost their lives and the patients being discharged. In order to cover up the clutches, the

total number of testing and data of the infected is barely being made public late at night.

Divison's two major SRN and Beli Hospitals have normal OPD stagnation. Covid patients are being treated in many large private hospitals. It is becoming difficult to treat general patients in other

private hospitals and clinics. Ramsray of Sadiyapur said that he is suffering from stomach ailment. Treatment was underway at the Gastroenterology Department of the SRN Hospital. Now that OPD comes to a standstill, he is wandering for treatment. In private hospitals and clinics, the same patients are seen from far away who are already registered.

Hariram Shukla of Kaurihar was taken to nearby CHC for chest pain. It was said that he had a heart-attack. Private hospitals have also not admitted him. After being examined and treated in the emergency of SRN, he was somehow admitted to the ICU of the Department of Cardiology and survived. These cases are speculative, numbering thousands of people who are not getting treatment.

15 PWD engineers on poll duty infected with coronavirus

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Around 15 engineers of Public Works Department (PWD) who were engaged in the three-tier Panchayat elections as Assistant Election Officer and Presiding Officer in various development blocks of the district were also infected with COVID-19. All of them tested positive as there was no arrangement for following the Covid guideline.

It is alleged that Bharat Chaurasia, a 36-year-old engineer posted in Jasra block, urged the district administration to get the number of beds increased in the hospital in critical condition, but no result was found. Eventually, he was admitted to a private hospital with his personal efforts.

Similarly, Assistant Election Officer posted in Saidabad block and Assistant

Election Officer of many other blocks have also come under the virus. Along with these junior engineers, the family members in their homes have also been affected by their contact.

It is being said that despite using the mask and sanitiser PWD's Junior Engineers came under the grip of corona pandemic and the reason for this was to also come in contact with the voters. In this Akhilesh Yadav Diploma Engineer Union's Regional General Secretary has demanded from the district administration to provide corona kits for all members engaged in election duty, beds for admission in emergency, as well as Regional President Engineer BK Pandey from Departmental officers demanded to create a temporary Covid centre of at least 50 beds for emergency and sanitise

the entire campus twice a week.

SOME AU HOSTELS TO BE MADE COVID WARDS: Some hostels of Allahabad Central University will now be made Covid wards for corona patients. For this, the hostel inmates have been directed to vacate rooms immediately. On the instructions of Vice-Chancellor Prof Sangeeta Srivastava, Assistant Registrar Devesh Kumar Goswami has also sent a letter to DSW Prof KP Singh in this regard.

The letter sent to DSW states that the corona is spreading rapidly in Uttar Pradesh everyday. In this context, the Disaster Management Act has been implemented in the state. This act has been enacted to deal with disaster. In such a situation, in this hour of disaster, all the students residing in the hostels have been appealed to vacate the hostel immediately

and go home.

It is because hospitals are also going through a lot of trouble due to a sea of corona patients being reported everyday. In this regard, the Vice-Chancellor has taken an important decision. Due to corona pandemic, all classes will also be conducted in online mode.

DSW has been given clear instructions to strictly follow this order. However, only teachers and staff will be admitted here.

The cases of corona are increasing day by day in Uttar Pradesh. Students are instructed by the university administration to immediately vacate the hostel and go home. Some hostels will be converted into Covid wards for teachers and staff. All classes will be conducted online said, Dr. Chittaranjan Kumar, Assistant PRO, AU.

All business establishments barring a few medicine shops remain closed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Barring a few retail medical shops, all the business establishments remained closed and thus, the important markets were a deserted look on Saturday. The police officers conducted patrolling to ensure the corona protocol on the roads.

Due to rapid speed of corona cases, the Divisional Commissioner Deepak Agrawal, Commissioner of Police A Satish Ganesh and District Magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma had held meetings with the office-bearers of traders' associations two days earlier and made an appeal to shut down their business establishments to break the chain of the deadly virus. The appeal had yielded positive results and the traders came forward and themselves decided to close the shops for two days in a week on Saturday and Sunday. The district court has already been closed till April 19, while the office & court of the Divisional Commissioner have been closed till April 20. The collectorate also remained closed.

As, the decision regarding the closure of business estab-



lishments had already been taken two days earlier, and thus, the people were aware about this and preferred to remain inside the home instead of going outside. So, all the important markets were a deserted look. There was no movement in the busiest markets in Godowlia, Maidagin, Chowk, Orderly Bazar, Pandeypur, Sagra, Lanka, etc.

Though, the district administration has not directed for the closure of the government and private offices but the number of employees in the maximum offices remained handful. The district court and collectorate were already closed and thus, these two places of

crowd also wore a deserted look. The ghats also witnessed a deserted look as there was no movement of the people there.

The district administration has directed for closing the wholesale market of medicines in Sapsagar and thus this market, also wore a deserted look. Though, there was no restriction on opening the retail medical shops but the most of the shopkeepers preferred to close the shops while some medical shops remained open and the rush of people was also seen for the purchasing the requisite medicines. The shops of milk, bread and other essential commodities remained open till 10 am as per relaxation but there-

after, these shops also remained closed.

Though there is no restriction on the movement of railway and bus passengers with tickets but they faced severe inconveniences as they have to wait for auto-rickshaws and other conveniences for hours to go to their destinations. Though, the district administration has allowed the auto rickshaw to carry maximum four passengers one time but the auto rickshaw driver avoided taking their vehicles on the road. There was no restriction of the selling of petrol and diesel and also supply of domestic gas cylinders.

The DCP, Varuna Zona Vikrant Veer along with cops conducted a route march in Nadesar area to ensure the corona protocol. The other police officers also came on the road to ensure the implementation of corona guidelines. Earlier, the police made challan of 980 persons for not following the corona guidelines and made realisation of ₹ 85,000 from them as penalty on Friday last. The police also made challan of 773 vehicles besides making the challan of 65 auto, e-rickshaws for defying the protocol of pandemic.

Electioneering for Panchayat polls ends

VARANASI (PNS): The electioneering for the Panchayat polls in the district ended on Saturday. The polling parties will move for the polling booths on Sunday. As many as 850 polling centres and 2,594 polling booths have been made to ensure the smooth polling. The vice chairperson of Varanasi Development Authority (VDA) has been appointed as the poll observer to ensure the polling peacefully. The election in Varanasi is scheduled to be conducted on April 19 under the second phase of three-tier Panchayat bodies.

Before the 48 hours of voting, the electioneering for the gram pradhan and members of gram panchayat, kshetra panchayat and zila panchayat ended this evening. The candidates intensified their election campaigns. They started establishing personal contact to the voters by visiting door to door. But the electorate have maintained silence leaving the candidates merely to speculate.

The Election Commission has appointed the VDA VC Isha Duhan as poll observer who is currently living in room number-1 of Circuit House and her mobile number is 8004584463 while telephone number is 0542-2500105. She will meet in her room for one hour between 10 and 11 am.

The district has been divided into 28 zones and 105 sectors to ensure peaceful and smooth election.

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 completed all the preparations to ensure the peaceful and free & fair elections and 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 also directed to ensure the action against the anti-social elements.

As many as 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 including the maximum 145 in Aarajiline and minimum 80 in Kashi Vidyapeeth while 132, 107,

101, 101, 95 and 89 polling centres in Pindra, Cholaapur, Sevapuri, Badagaon, Chiraigaon and Harahua block respectively.

Similarly, a total of 2,594 polling booths have been made including the maximum 433 in Aarajiline and the minimum 291 in Kashi Vidyapeeth, while 378, 317, 308, 308, 305 and 254 in Pindra, Cholaapur, Sevapuri, Badagaon, Chiraigaon and Harahua block respectively. As many as 75 polling centres have been identified as the most-sensitive polling centres while 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

A total of 17,53,588 voters 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, Cholaapur, Badagaon, Sevapuri, Kashi Vidyapeeth and Chiraigaon block respectively.

A total of 10,749 candidates are in election fray including 554 for 40 members of zila panchayat, 4,338 candidates for 694 seats of gram pradhan and

4,530 candidates for 986 members of kshetra panchayat. As many as 4,772 candidates have been elected unopposed on various seats as they were only candidates who submitted the nomination papers for the various seats.

The election in the district is scheduled on April 19 under the second phase of three-tier Panchayat polls. The voting will take place from 7 am to 6 pm, while the counting will be held on May 2 from 8 am onwards.

DEVOTEES THROG SKANDMATA TEMPLE: On the fifth day of auspicious occasion of Chaitra Navratri, the devotees thronged the temples of Goddess Skandmata and Maha Gauri to have darshan and perform puja on Saturday.

The temple of Goddess Skandmata is situated in Jaipur 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 Maha Gauri situated near Annpurna Mandir. The temple management allowed entering the temple premises for the worship to only those devotees who were wearing face masks.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

District Magistrate Bhanu Chandra Goswami appealed to the denizens to cooperate to prevent the growing infection of coronavirus. He asked the citizens to break this chain and follow physical distancing as well as applying mask with repeatedly sanitising the hands.

He urged the city dwellers to be safe and keep motivating others to protect themselves from corona. Awareness can only win us over corona. The

same things are also said by IG KP Singh and SSP Sarvshresth Tripathi. The voice of all these officers is being heard by every moving person from the loudspeaker next to all the red light signals of the city.

Everyone's senses are blown away by the way corona has spread his feet. Police-administrative officers have given full strength to protect people from infection. Every step is being taken to ensure that the rules are appropriate. With this, the sound of the traffic rules from the loudspeaker

on the red light signal has disappeared. Now the rules of protection against corona are being urged. On this, the voice of District Magistrate Bhanu Goswami and IG KP Singh is heard, in which they teach the lesson of awareness to the people.

In addition to the red light signal, loudspeakers have also been installed in all the markets and crowded areas of the city, where the said officials tell the people how to avoid the disease.

The shopkeepers them-

selves are now removing the crowd at the shops. Customers no longer have to wait to pick up the goods. As soon as two to three people gather, the shopkeepers themselves start urging them not to rush, they will come after some time and get the goods. Realising the fragility of the occasion, people are also not having any dispute now. At the same time, some vendors are negligent about putting vegetables on the handcart. They are avoiding applying even to the mask.

Gangsters Act to be invoked against those who indulged in poll violence

ALLAHABAD (PNS): Prayagraj police have started preparations to clamp down on those who were indulged in rioting on the day of the three-tier panchayat election. Gangsters Act will be invoked against those who have committed violence. Also, they will be arrested and sent to jail. The names of the accused who have created a ruckus will also be kept safe in the police records, so that during future elections, all these actions can be taken against them in advance. At the same time, the search for the accused named in the case registered in Soraon, Utraon and other police stations is going on. Others are also being identified on the basis of the video. During the voting on Thursday in Dandupur gram panchayat of Soraon police station area, some people had created a furore alleging collusion with polling personnel. Simultaneously, two ballot boxes were picked up and thrown into the pond. A case has been filed on behalf of the presiding officer Rajnikanth against the unidentified persons that his duty was engaged as a presiding officer at booth number 17 of Dandupur alias Rajapur town. At around 6.30 pm, some people came in and

started quarreling, accusing the presiding officer of booth number 18. An attempt was made to pacify them, but they refused to budge considered the two ballots were lifted. One vote was cast in the ballot, while the other was vacant. The second case was registered against Kamlesh Patel, Ram Lakhani Patel, Manoj Pasi, Sheel Mathur, Monu Yadav, Rajendra Yadav, Santosh Yadav and many unknowns, resident of Dandupur following the written complaint given by the head constable Sanjay Kumar Rai. SHO Soraon Ashutosh has lodged a report against candidate Arvind Patel contesting for the post of pradhan, his family and supporters and many unidentified persons. All of them are accused of stone pelting, sabotage and misbehaviour, added the SHO.

3 HELD FOR PLANING TO KILL ROHIT KESARI: With the arrest of the three sharp shooters, the Special Task Force (STF) unearthed the conspiracy to assassinate Rohit Kesari, the district secretary of the trans Ganga unit of the BJP. The arrested shooters were identified as Shanu alias Vakil alias Lambu, Manoj Soory and Dilshad Ali. The plot of murder was hatched by Jaunpur Jail

by imprisoned Siraj alias Sonu along with his comrades. Siraj's wife, Baba, Adil and two others residents of Phoolpur are still absconding. Teams are conducting raids in search of their whereabouts.

STF Lucknow unit in-charge Deputy SP Lal Pratap Singh said that BJP leader Pawan Kesari, resident of Lochanganj, Phulpur, was shot dead in the electoral fray on the night of May 8, 2018. In that murder, 11 accused including Siraj were arrested and sent to jail by the police. A few days later Siraj was transferred from Naini Jail to Jaunpur while Rohit was pleading for the punishment of the killers of his brother Pawan. Rohit has also got the security of the government gunner. Meanwhile, it was found that Siraj, who is in the Jaunpur jail, is plotting to kill the witness of his case. Then on the instructions of ADG STF Amitabh Yash, the team of Deputy SP Lal Pratap and Inspector Anjani Kumar Tiwari were deployed to expose the conspiracy and arrest the accused. Lucknow STF team came to Prayagraj and then gathered information about the shooters with the help of Prayagraj STF. After this, Mohammad Shanu of Phulpur, Manoj and Dilshad Ali of

Soraon were arrested. A case has been written against all in Phulpur police station. The STF said that Siraj, through his friends, had given a supari of Rs 5 lakh for the murder. An advance of Rs 75,000 was put in the account of his acquaintance, while the remaining amount was said to be given after work. Arrangements were made for car and money. Adil was also continuously doing Reiki of Rohit along with his teammates. Simultaneously, he used to stay in Siraj's house and his in-laws' house in Jhansi. Sanu and Manoj, who were caught, were also wanted in the murder trial in Bhiwandi, Mumbai. The shooter used to call Rohit as Kalua instead of his real name. Not only this, hardened criminals also used fake SIM cards. It has also been learned in the investigation that absconding Baba had kept the goods, cartridges and bikes with his companions. There was a plan to kill Rohit while he was getting his haircut at a salon, but before that the shooters were nabbed by the STF. Siraj's wife is also involved in the conspiracy to assassinate and help the shooters. Deputy SP Lal Pratap Singh said that she used to tell the shooters about the place of feeding and keeping them alive.

Covid awareness and CAB enforcement a must: DC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Dr Raj Shekhar, addressing a meeting at the commissionerate here on Saturday, said a massive Covid awareness and Covid Appropriate Behaviour (CAB) enforcement of wearing masks, social distancing and sanitisation must go hand in hand for effective results in COVID-19 prevention.

He visited a few sites and monitored the ongoing sanitation campaign. He was accompanied by Kanpur Municipal Commissioner Akshay Tripathi and other KNN officials.

The divisional commissioner also visited the Chunniganj bus station, Chunniganj shelter home, Kalyanpur area and Rawatpur railway station. He said the KNN had deployed more than 300 sanitisation staff and 156 different kinds of vehicles for this massive sanitisation campaign that had 41,000 litres of sanitiser dispensing capacity. He said on an average daily 5,000 to 6,000 households were covered in around 40-45 wards, including around 700 containment zones, also on a daily basis.

Dr Shekhar directed the municipal commissioner to ensure that the sanitisation drive was more effective and to cover every day all important public places like bus stations, railway stations, market places (especially fruits & vegetables), parking areas, public parks where thousands of people visit every day.

He also asked Tripathi to cover every day all important government offices like collectorate, Vikas Bhawan, CP office, nagar nigam office, KDA, power corporation office etc where people visit in large numbers



Kanpur Divisional Commissioner, Dr Raj Shekhar, supervises the sanitisation work at Chunniganj on Saturday

Pioneer

He also requested Mayor Pramila Pandey to involve and motivate all ward members for carrying out a massive awareness campaign and enforcement of Covid appropriate behaviour like wearing masks and maintaining social distancing.

He also reviewed the preparations of KNN for Sunday's scheduled weekend sanitisation campaign and advised all the officials and staff to cooperate in the drive.

PANCHAYAT POLL MEET: While addressing the three-tier panchayat election meeting at the commissionerate, the divisional commissioner said in the entire district, a total of 827 polling centres had been made and a total of 1,624 polling booths have been set up. He said at all the centres there need to be proper electricity, water supply and clean toilet facility and the sector magistrate should verify it.

He said in the district 173 booths were sensitive and 83 centres were in the sensitive

plus category, and said the sector magistrates had been directed to ensure they took regular rounds at these centres. He said in the district, a total of 10,468 arms have been deposited in safe custody while a total of 760 were still to be deposited by the owners. He directed the officials to ensure that in the next 48 hours these firearms were deposited. He said the firearms which had been deposited at armoury should be verified and if a firearm belonged to a person from a sensitive or sensitive-plus area, then it had to be deposited in the police station.

The divisional commissioner said the district had been divided into 30 zones and 173 sectors and sector magistrates and master trainers should constantly tour the areas and in case of any polling problem, settle it amicably. He said in all the polling centres there must not be any person with criminal antecedents. He said special security arrangements need to be ensured at the strong rooms.

He said as per the election officer, a total of 264 buses and 444 heavy vehicles would be required. He said apart from this 252 light vehicles had also been deployed. He added that the officials concerned would have to ensure that at the polling centres, the Covid protocol was strictly followed.

He said thermal screening, sanitisers, hand wash and social distancing had to be maintained. He said the booths need to regularly be sanitised and those standing in queue should maintain the desired distance.

He said no one would be allowed into the premises without a mask. He said once the polling was over it may be late for depositing ballot boxes thus transport should be available and frugal refreshment should also be made available for the polling party.

He said the police force coming from other districts should have proper lodging facilities, electricity and water. He said laxity would certainly not be tolerated.

Postal directorate shifts SSP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Senior Superintendent of Post Offices who had suspended deputy postmaster and postal assistant for releasing a postal stamp on under-world dons Chhota Rajan and Munna Bajrangi under the 'My Stamp' scheme, has been transferred to Lucknow Circle.

He has been replaced by the Senior Superintendent of Post Offices of Prayagraj Circle.

The new incumbent is likely to assume the charge in Kanpur Circle within a week.

It may be recalled that the My Stamp ticket office situated in the General Post Office at Bara Chauraha here had released postal stamps for underworld dons Chhota Rajan (Rajendra S Nikhlaje) and mafioso Munna Bajrangi (Prem Prakash) through postal assistant Rajneesh Kumar.

With the issue being highlighted in the media, the then Senior Superintendent of Post Offices Himanshu Mishra had suspended postal assistant Rajneesh Kumar forthwith.

The next day, Deputy Post Master Shiv Kumar Yadav was also suspended. Thereafter, the role of SSP Himanshu Mishra had come to light. In its orders of April 6, the Postal Directorate has transferred him to the office of Chief Post Master (General), Lucknow Circle, as assistant director. The directorate deputed Sanjay Akhare of Prayagraj Circle in place of Himanshu Mishra here.

Senior Superintendent of Post Offices RS Sharma of Kanpur Dehat and Unnao has also been shifted to the office of Post Master General, Kanpur Circle.

Red Cross Society appeal to donate plasma

KANPUR (PNS): Honorary Secretary of Red Cross Society, RK Saffad, has appealed to people to donate plasma for the critical patients. He said those who volunteered to donate plasma would be felicitated by the Red Cross Society.

He said those who wished to donate plasma could call on the number 9839030279. He said once the information was received a medical team would take quick action so that the donated plasma could be utilised to save life.

Saffad said that every day, family members and friends of COVID-19 patients were tapping into all their contacts hoping to find a recovered person who was willing to donate plasma. He said convalescent plasma therapy was one of the options explored to save some patients.

Dr RK Srivastava from a private blood bank, said plasma from those who had recovered from COVID-19 contained antibodies that neutralised the coronavirus. He said it was expected that the mortality rate might come down and patients would recover when plasma filled with the neutralising antibodies were infused into them.

He said, however, not all virus survivors could donate plasma and added that antibodies in very mild symptomatic patients might protect them from second infection but it would not be enough to protect others.

He said usually the level of antibodies against coronavirus in a willing donor was checked before initiating the procedure and then doctors asked for COVID-19 positive report from donors. He said once this was confirmed, a few diagnostic tests were performed before donation and said the entire process of diagnostic tests and donation took around three hours.

Dr Srivastava said that a person who had recovered from COVID-19 could donate plasma around 30 to 40 days after testing positive as they would have an adequate number of antibodies. He, however, said that only people between the age group 18 and 55 could donate plasma.

He said people with hypertension and diabetes were also eligible to donate plasma if all other conditions were under control.

Vindhyavasini temple to remain closed till end of Navratri

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

In view of Corona pandemic priests related to Vindhyavasini temple announced that the temple will remain closed till the end of Navratri.

A meeting of Shree Vindhya Panda Samaj in this regard was held and a resolution

was unanimously and voluntarily passed to close the temple for devotees till Navmi and a further decision will be taken as per the need of the hour. The meeting was attended by MLA (City) Ratnakar Mishra, office-bearers along with members of the organisation. A copy of the resolution has been sent to the authorities

concerned, including the MLA City. Meanwhile City Magistrate and secretary of Vindhya Vikas Parishad Vinay Kumar Singh said in fact the administration was already not in favour of holding the mela but the decision of Shree Vindhya Panda Samaj made it easy for it to keep the temple closed till Navratri.

Gkp-Pune spl to run on Apr 18, 25 & May 2

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

The railway administration will for the convenience of passengers run 01453/01454 Pune-Gorakhpur-Pune summer special train from Pune on April 23 and 30 and from Gorakhpur on April 18 and 25 and May 2. It will also run 01197/01198 Lokmanya Tilak Terminus-Chhapra-Lokmanya Tilak Terminus summer special from Lokmanya Tilak Terminus on April 21 and from Chhapra on April 19. All coaches in this train will be of reserved category and passengers travelling in them will have to follow the Covid-19 guidelines.

PUNE-GKP SPL: The 01453 Pune-Gorakhpur summer special will on April 23 and 30 depart from Pune at 20.20 hrs, from Daund Chord Line at 21.20 hrs, Ahmednagar at 22.48 hrs, on second day from Manmad at 01.55 hrs, from Bhusaval at 04.25 hrs, from Itarsi at 09.10 hrs, from Jabalpur at 13.00 hrs, Satna at 16.25 hrs, Banda at 22.25 hrs, Kanpur Central at 01.25 hrs, Lucknow at 03.25 hrs, Gonda at 06.05 hrs, Basti at 07.40 hrs and reach Gorakhpur at 09.40 hrs.

GKP-PUNE SUMMER SPL: In the return journey the 01454 Gorakhpur-Pune summer special will on April 18 and on 25 and May 2 leave Gorakhpur at 13.00 hrs, Basti at 14.20 hrs, from Gonda at 16.00 hrs, Lucknow at 19.00 hrs, Kanpur at 21.00 hrs, the second day from Banda at 00.55 hrs, Satna at 06.40 hrs, Jabalpur at 10.10 hrs, Itarsi at 13.50 hrs, Bhusaval at 18.15 hrs, Manmad at 22.15 hrs, third day at Ahmednagar at 02.03 hrs, Daund Chord Line at 03.42 hrs and reach Pune at 05.00 hrs. A total of 22 coaches, including 20 of general second class chair car and two of generator-cum-luggage van will be attached in this special train.

LTT-CHHAPRA SPL: The 01197 Lokmanya Tilak Terminus-Chhapra (CPR) summer special train will on April 21 depart from Lokmanya Tilak Terminus at 14.55 hrs, from Bhiwandi Road at 15.30 hrs, from Vasai Road at 16.25 hrs, from Surat at 19.50 hrs, from Vadodara at 22.00 hrs, the second day from Ratlam at 02.20 hrs, from Kota at 07.40 hrs, Sawai Madhopur at 09.15 hrs, from Bayana at 11.35 hrs, Agra Fort at 14.30 hrs, Tundla at 15.35 hrs, Kanpur Central at 21.05 hrs, Aishbagh at 22.50 hrs, third day from Gonda at 03.10 hrs, Basti at 05.10 hrs, Gorakhpur at 07.50 hrs, Bhatni at 08.50 hrs, Siwan at 09.40 hrs and reach Chhapra at 10.50 hrs.

CPR-LTT SPL: The 01198 Chhapra-LTT summer special will on April 19 depart from Chhapra at 05.40 hrs, Siwan at 06.35 hrs, Bhatni at 07.10 hrs, Gorakhpur at 09.20 hrs, Basti at 10.25 hrs, Gonda at 12.00 hrs, Aishbagh at 15.30 hrs, Kanpur Central at 17.20 hrs, Tundla at 22.55 hrs, Agra Fort on the second day at 00.10 hrs, Bayana at 03.05 hrs, Sawai Madhopur at 05.25 hrs, Kota at 07.05 hrs, Ratlam at 12.25 hrs. Vadodara at 16.45 hrs, Surat at 18.50 hrs, Vasai Road at 22.30 hrs, Bhiwandi Road at 23.05 hrs, Thane at 23.58 hrs and reach LTT the third day at 00.40 hrs. A total of 21 coaches, including 10 of sleeper class, seven of ordinary second class, two of AC third class and two of SLRD will be attached in this special train.

MMCT-SAMASTIPUR SPL: The railway administration has increased the trips of 09049/09050 Mumbai Central (mmct)-Samastipur-Mumbai Central special being run for the convenience of passengers. The 09049 Mumbai Central-Samastipur special will as per revised timing on April 17, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, 27 and 29 leave Mumbai Central at 11.05 hrs, from Borivli at 11.46 hrs, from Vapi at 13.24 hrs, Valsad at 13.47 hrs, Surat at 14.43 hrs, Vadodara at 16.50 hrs, Godhra at 18.15 hrs, Ratlam at 20.55 hrs, Kota on the second day at 00.55 hrs, from Sawai

Madhopur at 02.02 hrs, Bharatpur at 04.35 hrs, Achhnera at 05.45 hrs, Mathura at 06.45 hrs, Hathras City at 07.07 hrs, Kasganj at 08.15 hrs, Farrukhabad at 09.45 hrs, Kannauj at 10.42 hrs, Kanpur Central at 13.10 hrs, Aishbagh at 14.17 hrs, Barabanki at 16.08 hrs, Gonda at 18.05 hrs, Basti at 19.17 hrs, Gorakhpur at 21.25 hrs, Deoria Sadar at 22.50 hrs, Siwan at 23.30 hrs, Chhapra at 01.10 hrs, Hajipur at 02.30 hrs, Muzaffarpur at 03.15 hrs and reach Samastipur at 06.00 hrs.

SAMASTIPUR-MMCT SPL: The 09050 Samastipur-Mumbai Central special will on April 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29 and May 1 will as per revised timing leave Samastipur at 20.10 hrs, Muzaffarpur at 22.05 hrs, Hajipur at 23.05 hrs, Chhapra on second day at 01.05 hrs, Siwan at 02.35 hrs, Deoria Sadar at 03.30 hrs, Gorakhpur at 04.30 hrs, Basti at 06.25 hrs, Gonda at 07.35 hrs, Barabanki at 10.02 hrs, Aishbagh at 12.25 hrs, Kanpur Central at 14.00 hrs, Kannauj at 16.42 hrs, Farrukhabad at 17.50 hrs, Kasganj at 19.40 hrs, Hathras City at 20.32 hrs, Mathura at 21.10 hrs, Achhnera at 22.25 hrs, Bharatpur at 23.30 hrs, from Sawai Madhopur on third day at 02.12 hrs, Kota at 03.20 hrs, Ratlam at 07.05 hrs, from Godhra at 10.37 hrs, Vadodara at 11.50 hrs, Surat at 13.50 hrs, Valsad at 15.07 hrs, Vapi at 15.32 hrs, Borivli at 17.38 hrs and reach Mumbai Central at 18.25 hrs.

CANCELLATION EXTENDED: The cancellation of the following special trains cancelled earlier by the railway administration due to unavoidable reasons will be extended, CPRO PK Singh said. The 05074 Tanakpur-Sigrauli special and 05075 Shaktinagar-Tanakpur special will remain cancelled till April 30. The 05076 Tanakpur-Shaktinagar special will remain cancelled till April 29 and the 05073 Sigrauli-Tanakpur special will remain canceled till May 1.

KNN to carry out fogging, sanitisation during curfew

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

District Magistrate Alok Tiwari said during the Covid curfew from 8 pm of April 17 to 7 am of April 19, the Kanpur Nagar Nigam would carry out a massive fogging and sanitisation drive all over the city.

He said the garbage removal and drain cleaning should be carried out on top

priority and strict action be taken against the erring staff on duty.

He said during the curfew period no one would be allowed on the roads except for the personnel on duty, especially the KNN staff.

He said during the curfew, all efforts would be made to ensure that the rotting garbage littered in the city and suburban areas was removed. He said

all JCBs need to be deployed to ensure that all the choked drains were cleaned and the silt was removed then and there. He said if the silt was found piled on roadsides, the official concerned would face strict action.

The district magistrate said the KNN sanitisation drive would be more rigorous in areas from where COVID-19 cases had been reported. He

said the KNN had already deployed six jetting machines which were working constantly for sanitising the city areas. He said the solution used for sanitisation needs to be monitored and there should be no compromise on the use of solutions meant for sanitisation. He said all the staff involved in the sanitisation work should be provided with proper PPE kits while on job.

Police tightening noose around Remdesivir blackmarketeers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Police have tightened the noose to ascertain the interstate link of three persons involved in black marketing of Remdesivir vials with the drug traders of Gurugram and Kolkata.

Acting Assistant Commissioner of Police, Babupurwa-Govind Nagar, Vikas Kumar Pandey, said the surveillance team had been deputed to minutely observe the activities of over a dozen mobile phone numbers recovered from the cell phones of the accused. He said the Kolkata police had also been contacted and on getting inputs from there, further investigations would be made. From the CDR of accused Mohan's cell phone, the police recovered the numbers of many drug traders of Gurugram, Kolkata and Chandigarh. Besides, efforts were on to ascertain the role of father-son involved in supplying the vials. It may be recalled that on the tip-off by Military Intelligence, the UP STF squad along with Babupurwa police had arrested three persons carrying 265 Remdesivir injection vials near Kidwai Nagar crossing on Thursday. They were identified as Mohan Soni of Bakhtauripurwa and Prashant Shukla of Pashupati Nagar. On their disclosures, police had also arrested Sachin Kumar of Yamuna Nagar (Haryana).

These injections were

being carried in a saree box.

According to the ACP Vikas Kumar Pandey, Mohan Soni was earlier employed in the sales department of a pharmacy company. During lockdown, he was working with a Gurugram company and had lost his job. Thereafter, he started supplying drugs to retailers after purchasing them from the wholesale market which fetched him around 10 per cent commission. Now, following the shortage of Remdesivir injection, he had asked one Apoorva Mukherjee of Kolkata to send these injections against payment of his dues. During interrogation, it was revealed that Apoorva and his father Shobhit Mukherjee of Kolkata were involved in the trade of these injections.

Now, efforts were on to ascertain the collection point of the injections and the firm on which the bill for the supply was raised, ACP Pandey said.

Commissioner of Police Asim Arun said, "It is a crime against humanity and we will invoke National Security Act against the three persons arrested with Remdesivir injections on Thursday. No illegal activity would be tolerated in this time of crisis and would invite strictest punishment".

CORONAVIRUS ALSO SPREADS THROUGH TEARS: There is a general myth among the masses that COVID-19 spreads through the respiratory system and the

nose and mouth then upper respiratory tract then the lungs get infected. Ironically it has been proved beyond doubt that coronavirus can spread through eyes. When an affected person coughs, sneezes or talks, virus particles can also enter one's body through eyes. People who have coronavirus can also spread the disease through tears. This was stated by Dr SK Nigam while addressing a Arogya Health Camp on Friday. He said touching tears or a surface where tears had landed was another way someone can become infected. He said one need not touch the eyes as it caused a pink eye infection (conjunctivitis). He said but chances were less and said if people develop pink eyes they need to call their ophthalmologist and follow the instructions. He recommended that if one had a cough or a fever, one must call a doctor. He said if one went to the doctor then one needed to put up a face shield that was the protective covering or mask, and to wait in a special room away from other patients.

He advised patients that if they needed to cough or sneeze they should bury their face in the crook of their arm or cover their face with a tissue. He advised them to wash hands with soap and water right away.

Dr Nigam said if one wore contact lenses they should try to switch to glasses as contact lens wearers touched their eyes

more often than the average person. He said substituting glasses for lenses could reduce eye irritation and reduce the need to touch the eye.

A total of 159 people attended the eye and general health camp.

PENSIONERS' FORUM WELCOMES CGHS DECISION: General secretary of Pensioners' Forum, Anand Awasthi, has hailed the decision of Directorate General of CGHS, New Delhi, for allowing the reimbursement of cost of OPD medicines as special sanction in view of COVID-19 pandemic till July 31 to CGHS beneficiaries. In his office memorandum issued by CGHS Director Dr Sanjay Jain said the matter had been reviewed by the ministry and it was now decided that in continuation of the earlier OM on the subject, CGHS beneficiaries getting medicines for chronic diseases shall be permitted to purchase medicines based on the prescription held/prescribed by CGHS Medical Officer/CGHS Specialists/other government specialists/specialists of empanelled hospitals till July 31 on the same conditions as per the earlier OM of March 27. He also clarified that the CGHS Wellness Centres were functional and CGHS beneficiaries also had the option to collect medicines through these Wellness Centres as per normal practice, instead of purchasing them from the market.

Rajbhasha Implementation Committee meeting held

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

The Gorakhpur Nagar Rajbhasha Implementation Committee's first half-yearly meeting of the year 2021 was held through virtual means under the presidency of General Manager (GM), North Eastern Railway (NER) Vinay Kumar Tripathi. The virtual meeting was attended by representatives of 51 Central government offices located in Gorakhpur city. While presiding over it, chairman of the committee, Vinay Kumar Tripathi said that the Corona pandemic has once again come into our lives in a much more serious way than before. While accepting it as a challenge we have to take full care of ourselves, our family members as well as our office workers. Keeping all this in mind, we have to strictly comply with the directions of the Government of India and also discharge our responsibilities. He said Hindi is the official language of the Union Government under constitutional provisions. Keeping it in mind, we have to execute all our office works in 100 per cent Hindi only. The responsibility of monitoring it has been given to all office heads. "I am sure that all of you must be ensuring its compliance in your respective areas of work," he said. From time to time the Parliamentary Rajbhasha Committee also inspects various offices, he said. In order to establish Gorakhpur Nagar Rajbhasha Implementation Committee as an excellent one,



he emphasised that all member offices should regularly hold their departmental Rajbhasha meetings, organise Hindi workshops, upload quarterly reports on web portal of Home Ministry's Rajbhasha department and publishing of e-magazine on behalf of the committee. Earlier, the Chief Rajbhasha Officer of NER Arvind Kumar Pandey while welcoming the members of the committee said Corona pandemic has created an atmosphere of fear all over

the world. He said today according to the demand of the time, we are holding all kinds of government meetings in a virtual form. Also, all the

office works are also being done through e-office. During the meeting for their outstanding performance in the use of Hindi for the year 2020-21 an announcement was made to give running shield and commendation certificate to the members of Gorakhpur Nagar Rajbhasha Implementation Committee — Khadi Gramodyog Ayog, The New India Insurance Company and Food Corporation of India besides a commendation certificate to Hindustan Petroleum for excellent Rajbhasha work. In the meeting, on behalf of Indian Meteorological Department (Radiosonde), officer incharge Jai Prakash apprised about the working of Meteorological Department through a PPT. The meeting was conducted by member secretary of Steering Committee and Rajbhasha Officer Dhruv Kumar.

DM's directive to officials

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

In view of the spread of Covid pandemic District Magistrate Parveen Kumar Laxkar



held meetings with officials and traders separately on Friday and visited places where L-1 hospitals were proposed to be set up. Addressing the meeting at Collectorate the DM made it clear that during the weekend lockdown, only shops of the vegetable will be allowed to open along with the other essential services and action will

be taken if prohibited activities were found in action. He further said that officers were expected to implement the guidelines and traders were expected to cooperate. He directed the officials to take proper action against those who were found on roads either without a mask or roaming purposelessly. On the complaint about the blackmarketing of masks the DM said that anybody could inform him directly and action would be taken keeping the name of the complainant a secret. After the meeting the DM visited the Ashram Paddhati Vidyalaya at Partiya and directed to the officials concerned to equip the rooms as L-1 hospital and six beds in each room. The DM visited Saai Law College at Lohandi and directed the officials to keep it ready for another L-1 hospital if it was needed. The meeting was attended by ADM/incharge Covid control room Amarendra Kumar, ADM(F&R) UP Singh, CMO Dr PD Gupta and traders.

Didi wanted to polarise certain vote bank: Modi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■
KOLKATA

Slamming Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for not sparing even the dead to further her political interests Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that her urge to secure votes by polarizing the population was so much that she would not even mind taking out political rallies with the corpses of people who were killed in CIsF firing at Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar last Saturday when fourth phase of polling was under way.

“Her intention was clear ... that she wanted to polarize the voters” by publicly exhibiting the dead bodies, the Prime Minister said referring to the leaked audio clip in which she was purportedly directing a TMC leader to postpone the burial of the dead till the next day so that she could take out a rally with the corpses.

“That Didi relies totally on vote bank politics and not development is clear” from the taped words, Modi said adding “due to this vote bank politics and politics of appeasement no development took place in the State.”

That the conversation itself revealed a “deep-rooted conspiracy” was proved by the contents of the tape the Prime Minister said adding the clipping also established her fondness to promote politics of vendetta.

The Chief Minister was however quick to respond attacking the BJP for being so afraid of its defeat that it had started tapping the telephonic conversations of the rival lead-

ers. She threatened legal action against those who taped her phone call.

Referring to how Banerjee’s politics was not limited to just political protests but had crossed all the limits of vendetta Modi said the people of Bengal had voted her to power to bring peace and prosperity of the people but her Government not only perpetrated the interests of nephews, extortionists and mafia but victimized the honest and right-minded people.

He was apparently referring to the audio tape in which the Chief Minister was allegedly asking Partho Pratim Roy a TMC leader from Sitalkuchi to employ professional people to draw FIRs against the central forces and also get the local SP and the circle inspector framed in that.

Referring to the alleged ballooning ego of the Chief Minister which stopped her from attending the meetings convened by the Centre on various important issues the Prime Minister said that his Government repeatedly invited her to join important meetings like the ones on reviewing the corona situation but she skipped them.

“Didi’s ego has ballooned so much that she sees nothing beyond it. The Central Government has invited the Chief Ministers to discuss a number of important issues like the pandemic situation ... most of the Chief Ministers attended but she would not come to these meetings on some pretext or the other,” the Prime Minister said.

Banerjee had earlier attacked the Prime Minister

and the BJP for importing people from outside Bengal to campaign in the elections as a result of which the number of cases in the State was increasing. Saying that though Asansol region was known for its industrial potency it had been continuously neglected by the local powers that be, Modi said that the double-engine BJP Government would convert the place into a national industrial hub.

“This region has the potential to become the industrial centre of India ... you have factories from aluminum to glass from cycle to rail, from paper to steel ... the people used to come here from all across India to work in these factories. ... but today these people are migrating ... because of the mafia raj perpetrated by Didi who came to power with the slogan of Ma-Mati Manush,” the Prime Minister said.

Banerjee said allegations that her phone calls were being taped had been proved true after the revelation of the tape. “I told earlier also about how the BJP tapes the conversation of rival politicians ... this one example of that,” Banerjee said adding she would take action against those responsible for telephone tapping. “I will order a CID investigation against those who are responsible for the tapping of my telephonic conversation,” Banerjee said roundly accepting that the voice was her own and the contents too. Saying that such “cheap tricks” would not let her spirits down Banerjee said “the police sent by Delhi killed the local people. ... I will not let that happen in Bengal ... I will not let Bengal go into the hands of Gujarat.”

DMK complains of unauthorised entry in strongrooms

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■
CHENNAI

The sudden turn around by M K Stalin, DMK president, who had claimed earlier that the alliance led by his party would sweep all the 234 assembly constituencies that went to the polls on April 6 has left his followers and cadre shocked. On Friday, Stalin submitted memorandums to Sushil Chandra, Chief Election Commissioner and Satyabrata Sahoo, Chief Electoral Officer

of Tamil Nadu alleging widespread lapses in security arrangements in the strong rooms all over the State where the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are kept. Meanwhile close relations of DMK leaders are calling on astrologers to know what is in store for Thalapathi (Stalin), young Thalapathi (Udhayanidhi) and Kanimozhi.

Stalin said in his memorandums that though the rules State that no vehicles including that of officials or ministers or

any other political functionaries should be allowed inside the secured campus where the EVMs are stored and alighting points for vehicles should be marked clearly ahead of the outer security perimeter itself, there were open violations of these rules by authorities and ministers.

“Despite these instructions there is a total lack of protocol in many strong rooms in campuses across the State where the polled EVMs are stored. Covered vehicles were brought

inside the premises during midnight in a suspicious manner. Our party cadre objected to these violations. But the officials said the vehicles were mobile toilets for women police officers,” said Stalin.

The DMK chief termed these actions as breach of protocol and asked the CEC as well as the CEO to ensure that protocols in strong room premises are not violated.

Saturday saw polling in one of the polling booths in Velachery assembly con-

stituency, a Chennai suburb. The repolling was ordered by the Election Commission of India based on reports submitted by observers and returning officer who caught three polling staff on duty transporting on a two-wheeler the EVM and the VVPAT machine after the polling hours.

The polling staff were suspended following complaints by the rival MNM and Congress candidates and the subsequent probe by the ECI officials.



Indian Naval Air Squadron (INAS) 330 or the “Harpoons” celebrated its golden jubilee on April 17, 2021. The squadron was commissioned on April 17, 1971 and received their baptism by fire when war between India and Pakistan broke out in December 1971. Initially equipped with Seaking Mk 42 ASW helicopters, acquired from British Westland Helicopters Ltd, the squadron is currently operating the Mk 42 B variant. Named as the “Flying Frigate”, the helicopter is among the most potent weapon platforms in the naval inventory capable of launching anti-ship missiles, anti-submarine torpedoes and depth charges. On July 26, 1971, Seaking landed on INS Vikrant for the first time and from that day on the indomitable team of Harpoons and the aircraft carrier Vikrant saw a series of firsts. The first operational ASW mission was flown on 18 Oct 1971. On Nov 30, 1971, the first vectored attack was carried out on a suspected submarine contact



Most political parties favour weekend curfew in Bihar

Patna: A majority of political parties in Bihar are in favour of a weekend curfew of 62 hours between Friday evening and Monday morning.

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, BJP state president Sanjay Jaiswal, among others, suggested the same during an all-party virtual meeting held in Patna under the chairmanship of governor Phagu Chauhan on Saturday.

CM Nitish Kumar also

hinted at the same by saying that the decision will be taken soon. During the all-party meeting RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav put 30 points including weekend curfew on the table and asked the state government to implement them immediately.

While addressing the governor, Yadav claimed the Constitution of state was under threat. “As you are sitting on constitutional post and you

have called the meeting. Hence, I am participating in it.

“The opposition parties have been giving suggestions on Covid management and developing health infrastructure in the state since last one year but unfortunately, the ruling parties have not implemented them. Now that the health infrastructure has completely collapsed in the state, ruling party leaders are trying to blame their failures on oppo-

sition parties,” said Yadav.

Sanjay Jaiswal, representing the BJP in the meeting, also backed the idea of a weekend curfew. “We have pointed out five days employment and two days of curfew in Bihar. The 62 hours curfew from Friday evening 6 pm to Monday morning 8 am needs to be implemented in Bihar to break the chain of Corona infection,” Jaiswal said.

He also said that the state

government must declare a summer vacation in schools from April 18 to June 1.

“If required, the state government should cancel Dussehra and winter vacations in schools and adjust the study loss of students,” Jaiswal said.

Mukesh Sahani, president of VIP, suggested that the Bihar government impose a lockdown similar to the Maharashtra government to break the chain of infection.

COVID TEST, QUARANTINE TO WELCOME RETURNING DEVOTEES BACK HOME

“District administrations should collect information about those returning to the state after taking part in the Kumbh and ensure that they “self-isolate or are quarantined”, said an order issued by Madhya Pradesh Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Rajesh Rajora. MP has reported 11,269 new Covid-19 cases (21.4 per cent positivity rate), 6,497 recoveries, and 66 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Karnataka had on Thursday made RT-PCR Test mandatory for the people returning to the State after taking part in the Kumbh Mela at Haridwar. Karnataka Health Minister K Sudhakar urged those returning from the mela to stay in home quarantine and get themselves tested. The Madhya Pradesh Government has also planned to quarantine kumbh returnees to check Covid-19.

According to Haridwar Chief Medical Officer Dr SK Jha, 229 “sadhus” who attended Kumbh mela in Haridwar tested positive for the coronavirus disease including Akhil Bharatiya Akhanda Parishad president Mahant Narendra Giri, who is admitted at the All India Institute Of Medical Sciences, Rishikesh.

Mahamandaleswar of Maha Nirvani Akhara from Madhya Pradesh, Swami Kapil Dev, who was under treatment for Covid-19 at a private hospital here, died on April 13. On Saturday, 175 “sadhus” who attended Kumbh Mela have found infected from coronavirus.

It is estimated that over 2,000 people had tested positive for Covid-19 in the Haridwar Kumbh Mela area from April 10 to 16 confirming fears that one of the world’s largest religious gatherings may contribute further to the rapid rise in coronavirus cases. But there are fears that the numbers could be even higher, and that many of those who have returned home could have taken the disease with them across the country.

A majority of the 48.51 lakh people who took part in the last two royal baths (shahi snan) held on the occasion of Somwati Amavasya on April 12 and Mesh Sankranti on April 14 were seen openly violating Covid-19 norms like wearing of face masks and social distancing. The Health Ministry SOP prescribes that all the visitors to Kumbh must produce a health certificate issued by a competent authority, which is a mandatory requirement for entering the Kumbh Mela area.

It said the pilgrims are required to mandatorily produce a Negative RT-PCR Test report for Covid-19, not older than 72 hours prior to the date of visit, at the time of entry to the mela.

10 LAKH NEW CASES IN JUST 7 DAYS

Maharashtra’s death tally climbed to 59,970 with the addition of 419 fatalities during the last 24 hours.

For Delhi, the previous highest spike was recorded on Friday when 19,486 cases and 141 deaths were reported in 24 hours. Maharashtra had reported over 63,000 vases on Friday.

The five most affected States by total cases are Maharashtra (37,70,707), Kerala (12, 21,168), Karnataka (11,41, 998), Tamil Nadu (9,80, 728), and Andhra Pradesh (9, 55, 455).

West Bengal, which went to the fifth phase of poll on Saturday amid massive mass mobilisation by political parties in violation of all Covid-19 norms registered the highest single-day spike of 7,713 cases taking the tally to 6,51,508, the health department said in a bulletin. The death toll also rose to 10,540 after 34 fresh fatalities were reported.

Uttar Pradesh on Saturday reported 120 deaths, its largest one-day toll from the pandemic pushing the fatality count to 9,703, while 27,357 fresh Covid-

19 cases raised the infection tally to 8,21,054, according to an official statement.

Of the new fatalities linked to the virus, 36 were reported from the State capital Lucknow, followed by 15 from Kanpur, eight from Varanasi, four each from Moradabad, Muzaffarnagar, and Jaunpur among other districts. Lucknow accounted for 5,913 of the fresh Covid-19 cases, Allahabad 1,977, Kanpur 1,826, and Varanasi 1,664, the UP Government said in a statement issued here. The number of active Covid-19 cases stand at 1,70,059 in Uttar Pradesh, the statement added.

Meanwhile, chairing a review meeting virtually, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said every hospital should have an oxygen backup of 36 hours.

REMDESIVIR PRICE DRASTICALLY CUT ON GOVT INTERVENTION

Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers Mansukh Mandaviya said the Government plans to double the production in the country and has given permission to 20 more plants recently to increase capacity to manufacture. Ensuring adequate supply of Remdesivir to the people of Maharashtra remains the priority of the Centre, he said.

As per the Government’s record, there is only one unit of EoU and one in SEZ. Government has reached out to all the Manufacturers of Remdesivir. No consignment is stuck, the Minister said as he asked concerned people to share the list of 16 companies, availability of stock and WHO-GMP with them.

The announcement came after the Centre held a meeting with all-existing manufacturers of the drug to discuss the increase in production and supply and also to reduce the price of Remdesivir injection. The Centre recently also banned the export of Remdesivir and its active pharmaceutical ingredients to ensure its smooth availability in the domestic market.

Presently, the current total installed capacity of the seven manufacturers of Remdesivir is 38.80 lakh vials per month.

Fast-track approval has been given for seven additional sites having the production capacity of 10 lakh vials/month to six manufacturers. Another 30lakh vials/month production is lined up. This would ramp up the production capacity for manufacturing to around 78 lakh vials/month, said the Government.

MAHA THREATENS TO SEIZE REMDESIVIR EXPORTING STOCKS

Thereafter, NCP chief spokesperson and State’s Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik led the charge and lambasted the Centre for its discriminatory attitude towards the Maharashtra Government over the supply of Remdesivir vials and also threatened to seize the stocks of Remdesivir from the exporting firms and supply them to the needy people.

State Health Minister Rajesh Tope flagged the shortage of medical oxygen in the State and asked the Centre to give permission to it for transporting liquid Oxygen in railway containers.

Reproducing a letter written by Food & Drugs Control Administration, Gujarat, asking an exporter to make available Remdesivir vials (meant for exports) for meeting Covid-19 needs in its state, Malik tweeted, “Here is the another proof of step motherly treatment given by Central Government to Maharashtra. This is the approval letter to one of the export companies to supply stock of #Remdesivir to the state of Gujarat Only. Can these double standards be

explained?”

In one of the series of tweets put out on the issue, Malik said, “It is sad & shocking that when the Government of Maharashtra asked the 16 export companies for #Remdesivir, we were told that the Central Government has asked them not to supply the medicine to #Maharashtra. These companies were warned, if they did, their license would be cancelled.”

In a significant tweet, Malik said, “It is a dangerous precedent and under these circumstances, the Maharashtra Government will have no choice but to seize the stock of Remdesivir from these exporters and supply it to the needy.” He tagged the Prime Minister’s Office and Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan in the tweet.

“There are 16 export oriented units in our country that have 20 lakh vials of #Remdesivir, since exports are now banned by the government, these units are seeking permission to sell this medicine in our country but the central government is denying the same,” Malik said.

“The Government says it should be sold only through 7 companies that are producing it. These 7 companies are refusing to take responsibility. This is a decision making crisis. While there is a requirement of this medicine and availability too, a quick decision is the need of the hour. This problem must be solved and the vials must be supplied to government hospitals in all States immediately.”

Talking to media persons separately, Malik also castigated Modi over the latter’s handling of Covid-19 situation in the country. He said if the Prime Minister wanted to take credit for Covid vaccine, he should also take responsibility for deaths too. He said if the vaccination certificates carried Modi’s photograph, then the death certificates of the Covid victims should also carry his image.

The way Modi’s photo is put on vaccination certificates, we demand that PM’s photo should be put on death certificates also. If they are taking credit for Covid-19 vaccination, then, they will have to take responsibility for deaths too,” Malik said.

“As the number of Covid cases are going up in the country, the number of deaths is also increasing on large scale. The funeral sites are running out of space to accommodate the dead and people are in queues. The Centre is answerable for the present situation arisen due to the circumstances and it cannot run away from answering it,” Malik said.

Miffed by a full-fledged campaign launched by the Maharashtra Government against the Modi dispensation over the discrimination against the State, Goyal put out a series of tweet contesting the “claims” by the Maharashtra Government over the discrimination in the supply of Oxygen and Remdesivir to the State.

“Saddened to see @OfficeOfUT’s gimmicks on oxygen. GoI, with all stakeholders, is ensuring maximum oxygen production in India. We are currently producing 110% of Oxygen generating capacity and diverting all available Oxygen from industrial use to medical use,” Goyal said.

“Maharashtra has so far received the highest quantity of Oxygen in India. Centre is in daily touch with State Governments to assess their needs & help them in best possible manner,” Goyal said.

“Just yesterday, the PM in his review told that Centre & States should work with synergy in this crisis. With this background, shocked and saddened to see petty politics being played by @OfficeOfUT. He needs to stop his daily dose of shameless politics and take responsibility,” the Union Minister said.

“Maharashtra is suffering from an inept & corrupt Government & the Centre is doing its

best for the people. People of Maharashtra are following ‘Majha Kutumb, Majhi Javabadari’ dutifully. It is time the CM also follows his duties in the spirit of ‘Majha Rajya, Majhi Javabadari,’” Goyal said.

Chemical and Fertilisers Minister Mansukh Mandaviya also hit back at Malik by charging that the latter stating “half-truth and lies”.

“He (Malik) is unaware of the ground situation. The Centre has been in active contact with officers of Maharashtra and is assisting with supply of Remdesivir in every manner. As per the Government’s record, there is only one unit of EoU and one in SEZ. We have reached out to all the Manufacturers of Remdesivir. No such consignment is stuck,” Mandaviya said, as he urged the state to share the list so that the needful could be done.

Meanwhile, Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Harsha Vardhan dialled Uddhav to reassure all help from the Centre but asked him to focus on the 5 pillars of combating Covid-19.

Vardhan said he discussed further stringent actions to be taken for containment, surveillance and treatment of Covid-19 cases.

“Reiterated the need to focus on the 5 pillars ‘Test, Track, Treat, Covid Appropriate Behaviour and Vaccination’ to tide over the emergent health crisis,” the Union Minister said.

Vardhan said he also assured the Maharashtra Government of adequate and uninterrupted supply of medical oxygen and all possible support with respect to healthcare infra, medicines and therapeutics. “Additional 1,121 ventilators are also being rushed to them given the surge in cases,” he said.

LALU TO WALK FREE AFTER SERVING HALF FODDER SENTENCE

Mandal said the court has granted bail to him on the basis of depositing a bond of ₹5 lakh and a personal bond of ₹1 lakh. He has also been asked to submit his passport and has been asked not to change his phone number and address. This case is related to RC-38A/96 in connection with the illegal withdrawal from Dumka treasury. There is a case of illegal withdrawal of about ₹3.13 crore.

Mandal said all the formalities are expected to be completed expeditiously and the release in all probability will happen on Monday. Llau will be freed after 39 months and 25 days of incarceration.

Earlier, taking the plea of the CBI as true, Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh had rejected Lalu’s bail plea. Lalu had then once again requested for bail from the Jharkhand High Court.

Lalu was serving jail sentences in four cases of fodder scam. Recently, Lalu’s bail plea was filed in the High Court on the basis of completing half of the sentence. According to Lalu’s Advocate, on April 9, half of Lalu’s sentence in the Dumka treasury case has been completed. Ranchi’s CBI Court had sentenced him to seven years in the Dumka treasury case. However, in the biggest and fifth case of fodder scam of illegal withdrawal from Doranda treasury, hearing is going on in Ranchi’s special CBI Court. In this case also, a decision can be made against Lalu and can go to jail once again.

The RJD chief is suffering from serious diseases and undergoing treatment at AIIMS in Delhi. Earlier, he was getting treatment in Rajendra Institute of Medical Science (RIMS) in Ranchi.

4 SIKHS AMONG 8 KILLED IN MASS SHOOTING IN US

“While we don’t yet know the motive of the shooter, he targeted a facility known to be heavily populated by Sikh employees, and the attack is

traumatic for our community as we continue to face senseless violence,” Satjeet Kaur, the Sikh Coalition Executive Director, said in a statement.

This is the worst Sikh massacre in the US after the Oak Creek Gurdwara mass shooting in Wisconsin on August 5, 2012, where seven members of the community were killed.

The attack marks at least the 45th mass shooting in the US since the Atlanta-area spa shootings on March 16, CNN reported. It is the deadliest shooting since 10 people were killed March 22 at a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado.

“Enough is enough - our community has been through enough trauma,” Komal Chohan, granddaughter of one of the deceased- Amarjeet Johal- was quoted as saying by the New York Post.

“I am heartbroken to confirm that my naniji (maternal grandmother), Amarjeet Kaur Johal, is among those killed in the senseless shooting at the FedEx facility in Indianapolis,” Chohan said.

She said that several of her family members work at the particular facility and are traumatised.

“My nani, my family, and our families should not feel unsafe at work, at their place of worship, or anywhere,” Chohan said.

Jaswinder Singh, who lost his life in the shooting, was due to get his first paycheck at the facility this month and was working on the night shift to sort out the mail.

“He was a simple man. He used to pray and meditate a lot, and he did community service,” said Harjap Singh Dhillon, a relative of Singh, in a New York Times report.

Amarjit Sekhon, another deceased in the incident who began working at FedEx about six months ago, leaves behind two teenage sons who are yet to come to terms with their mother’s death.

Rimpi Girn, Sekhon’s niece, said she is struggling to explain her loss of her younger son.

“We can’t even think of what to tell him. All of a sudden last night his mom went to work, and she never came back today,” she was quoted as saying in the report.

Jasvinder Kaur, who used to travel with Sekhon for her night shifts at FedEx, was to attend her granddaughter’s second birthday celebrations on Saturday. “And today we’re gathering to plan a funeral,” Girn, who is also Kaur’s relative, was quoted as saying by the NYT.

For Kamal Jawandha, it was a miracle that both of his parents, who worked at the facility and were present there at the time of shooting, escaped unhurt.

Jawandha said that his father had brought his mother food and was getting ready to go inside when the shooting started. His mother hid in the bathroom when the shooting started, the report said.

“She’s in deep sadness. She could not sleep. She just can’t stop shaking. She can’t believe this kind of thing would happen here,” Jawandha was quoted as saying by the NYT.

Maninder Walia, a community leader, expressed shock at the shooting incident, saying that it is very hard to understand that it can happen to the community. “We go everywhere. We are all one family. Tragedy has occurred in a particular side of the town and we are all together. Anybody who has been hurt or anything, we mourn for all,” Walia said while speaking to the local WRTV channel.

Replying to a question on concerns whether the community is being targeted, he said, “it is too early to say anything and folks who are in the law and enforcement, they are gonna do their thing.”

“Our community has a long road of healing physically, mentally and spiritually to recover from this tragedy,” Walia told CNN.

Although Sikhs began settling in Indiana more than 50 years ago, the first gurdwara was established in 1999. In the last two decades, the Sikh population around Indianapolis has experienced significant growth. Now there are 10 gurdwaras across the state and an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 Sikh Americans who have made Indiana their home.

Facing shortage of oxygen, Remdesivir, ventilator: States



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Grappling with the surge in Covid-19 cases, various States in a meeting with the Centre on Saturday highlighted the shortage of oxygen cylinders, Remdesivir in hospitals, ventilator stocks and poor supply of vaccine doses. Eleven States and Union Territories, including Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, account for 79.32 per cent of the new coronavirus cases in the country were present at the meeting. The high-level meeting was chaired by Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan with the Health Ministers of 11 States and Union Territories to review measures taken by them for prevention, containment and management of the recent surge in Covid-19 cases.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to meet top officials of several ministries later in the evening to review the overall covid situation and vaccination drive. Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, West Bengal, Delhi, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh have been reporting an unprecedented surge in new infections. In a statement here, the Ministry said "Many of them (States) raised the issue of dovetailing the medical oxygen supply lines and capping of



US must lift export ban on raw materials for production of vaccines, says CPM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CPI(M) polit bureau on Saturday said that the United States must lift their export ban on raw materials for the production of vaccines. In a statement, the Left party pointed out that the export ban by the US is a doublespeak, citing US President Joe Biden's assurances in the recently convened Quad Summit. "The ban on exports of materials used in vaccine production goes completely against these stated aims. The Modi government, which sets

prices of essential drugs like Remdesivir which has been sold in the black market at exorbitant prices. "Double mutant strain in Maharashtra was a key point of concern. The Delhi Government requested for additional beds in Central Government hospitals as was done in 2020 to help tide over the emergent health crisis," the Ministry said. The notification of the Home Ministry, granting permission to states to utilize up to 50 per cent of their annual allocation of State Disaster

much store on the Quad alliance, must ensure that the Biden administration keeps to its committed word and immediately ensures supply of essential vaccine material to India. This is the least that must be done when India is facing vaccine shortage in the face of an unprecedented surge of Covid infections," said CPI(M). The CPI(M) also pointed out the concerns raised by Serum Institute of India head Adar Poonawala on hampering of production in India due to the US Government's ban on export of raw materials of

Response Fund, and that of the Union Health Ministry, allowing utilisation of unspent pending balance under National Health Mission as on April 1, 2021 for COVID management purposes, were reiterated, it said. Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan informed the states on the steps taken to provide medical grade oxygen and augmenting Remdesivir stocks in the country. The states were also informed about the issuance of the calendar of medical oxygen supply from different oxygen

vaccine. "The scaling up of vaccine production in India is being hampered by the shortage of the intermediate material required for vaccine production. Much of this material such as filters, solutions and plastic bags come from the United States. But the U.S. Administration has banned the export of vaccine material under its Defence Production Act. Despite requests by the Indian authorities, no relaxation or exemption has been given for export of these items," the CPI(M) said in a statement.

manufacturers in the country. The steps taken for unhindered movement of oxygen cylinders from their manufacturing units across states were also detailed, the Ministry said. Taking note of the active surge in cases witnessed since last February in which most states have now crossed their highest tally, Harsh Vardhan urged the states to give special focus on the prominent five to six cities in their administration and map medical colleges to either these cities or adjoining 2-3 districts. The states were asked to seek out positive

Cong's 14-point attack on Govt over Covid 'mismanagement'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Maintaining that India has been caught off guard in its fight against the deadly coronavirus once again despite having a year to prepare, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Saturday urged the Government to ramp up its strategy to tackle the menace as she pointed out to the overwhelmed medical infrastructure and shortage of vaccines and drugs.

Sonia was speaking during the meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting, which was attended by former party chief Rahul Gandhi, general secretaries and State in-charges of the party.

She reiterated her insistence on lowering the immunisation age to 25 years and above "as also all younger persons with at-risk health disorders like asthma, angina, diabetes, kidney & liver diseases and other similar ailments."

The Congress came out with a 14-point attack on Government over 'grave errors' in Covid-19 management. Sonia also spoke about her letter to Prime Minister



Narendra Modi after her meeting with chief ministers of Congress-ruled states to take a jibe at the Centre.

Both Sonia and Rahul earlier have written to Modi asking him to expand the country's vaccination drive against Covid-19.

"I have written to the Prime Minister after meeting with them. Our Chief Ministers have spoken to the Prime Minister and written to the concerned minister from time to time pleading for relief. Some of them were left with only a few days of vaccine, no oxygen or ventilators. But there has been thundering silence on the part of the Government. On the contrary some other states have received preferential treatment/relief," she said.

"Instead of listening to the constructive suggestions of the opposition, Union Ministers are pressed into service to attack leaders of opposition for giving those sugges-

tions. This convoluted "me versus you" debate is childish and totally unnecessary," she added.

Sonia said Goods and Services Tax (GST) on all equipment, instruments, medicines and support required to prevent and treat Covid-19 should be made free. "It is a matter of grave concern that life saving drugs like Remdesivir etc. and medical oxygen as also other basic supplements are subjected to GST @ 12%. Even basic equipments like Oxymeters and life saving critical equipment like ventilators are subjected to 20% GST. In the current state of affairs, this is inhuman and untenable," she added.

The Government must provide financial support for the poor in the form of monthly income support and transfer ₹6,000 in the account of every eligible citizen, who have been hit by the partial curfews, travel restrictions, closure and lockdowns put in place by authorities, she said in her CWC meeting statement.

"Similarly, with reverse migration of labour already having started, it will be critical to immediately address

their need of safe transportation as indeed their suitable rehabilitation in host as well as home States," Sonia said.

At the meet, she said that the Modi government was unprepared in evaluating and managing the crisis. She added that the Congress believed that fighting the pandemic was national challenge and that it should be kept above party politics. She said that the government did not listen to constructive suggestions made by the Opposition on the management of the pandemic, and that Union ministers attacked leaders of opposition for giving suggestions.

"This convoluted 'me versus you' debate is childish and totally unnecessary," Sonia asserted accusing the Centre of giving preferential treatment to some states while maintaining "thundering silence" on requests of states ruled by the Congress and opposition parties.

"As the central and state governments move ahead to control the situation by resorting to partial curfews, travel restrictions, closure and lock downs; we will again be restricting economic activity that will hit the already beleaguered people, especially the poor and the daily wagers," she said.

Taking on these challenging times as Indians rather than as political opponents will be true 'Rajadharma', Sonia stressed.

population, Vardhan also addressed the issue of vaccine shortage.

"The total consumption of vaccines so far (wastage included) has been approximately 12.57 crore doses against the 14.15 crore doses provided by the Centre to the states," he said.

Vardhan said about 1.58 crore doses are still available with the states while another 1.16 crore doses are in pipeline, to be delivered by next week.

Emphasizing that there is no shortage of vaccines, he strongly pushed for further ramping up the vaccination exercise.

Wearing 2 face masks more effective in beating Covid: Study



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Wearing two face coverings or masks can nearly double the effectiveness of filtering out SARS-CoV-2-sized particles, preventing them from reaching the wearer's nose and mouth and causing Covid-19, as per a recent study.

The findings published in JAMA Internal Medicine also states that the reason for the enhanced filtration is not about adding too many layers of cloth but eliminating any gaps or poor-fitting areas of a mask.

"The medical procedure masks are designed to have very good filtration potential based on their material, but the way they fit our faces isn't perfect," said Emily Sickbert-Bennett, PhD, associate professor of infectious diseases at the UNC School of Medicine and lead author of the study.

To test the fitted filtration efficiency (FFE) of a range of masks, UNC researchers worked with James Samet, PhD, and colleagues in the USEPA Human Studies Facility on the campus of UNC-Chapel Hill. There they filled a 10-foot by 10-foot stainless-steel exposure chamber with small salt particle aerosols and had researchers don combinations of masks to test how effective they were at keeping particles out of their breathing space.

A transmission electron microscopic image that shows SARS-CoV-2 also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes Covid-19, isolated from a patient in the US, as the Virus particles are shown emerging from the surface of cells cultured in the lab - the spikes on the outer edge of the virus particles give coronaviruses their name, crown-like.

Each individual mask or layered mask combination was fitted with a metal sample port, which was attached to tubing in the exposure chamber that measured the concentration of particles entering the breathing space underneath the researcher's mask. A second tube measured the ambient concentration of particles in the chamber. By measuring particle concentration in the breathing space underneath the mask

Lack of Covid-suitable behaviour, virus mutation cause Covid spurt: AIIMS head



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lack of Covid-appropriate behaviour and mutation of the virus are the two main reasons behind the rapid spread of coronavirus infections in the country, AIIMS director Dr Randeep Guleria on Saturday said even as he expressed concern over the religious and political activities taking place in a few States, cautioning that they must be done in a restricted manner.

"The cause for the surge ... is multifactorial. But two main causes are that people have stopped following Covid-appropriate behaviour during January-February when the vaccination started and cases went down. Also, at this time, the virus mutated and spread more rapidly," Dr Guleria said to a news agency.

"This is a time when a lot

of religious activities happen in our country and polls are also underway. We must understand lives are also important. We can do this in a restricted manner so that religious sentiment is not hurt & Covid appropriate behaviour can be followed," said Dr Guleria. He also highlighted that India was witnessing a huge strain in the healthcare system and efforts need to be stepped up to keep increasing our hospital beds/resources for the increasing number of cases.

We also have to urgently bring down the number of Covid-19 cases, he added.

"This is a time when a lot of religious activities happen in our country and polls are also underway. We must understand that lives are also important. We can do this in a restricted manner so that

religious sentiments are not hurt and Covid-appropriate behaviour can be followed," he said.

His remarks come in the backdrop of the ongoing Kumbh mela in Uttarakhand, which has attracted people from different parts of the country in large numbers.

Talking about the immunisation drive, Dr Guleria said that India should gradually lift or lower the age bar for beneficiaries to widen the vaccination ambit. "We should gradually lift or lower the age bar so that more and more people come into the pool of people who can be vaccinated. That will happen in the coming few weeks.

"We will have more and more vaccines that will come into the common pool which will allow us to open up the vaccination to a larger population," he said.

undergo a series of range-of-motion activities to simulate the typical motions a person may do throughout their day - bending at the waist, talking, and looking left, right, up and down," said Phillip Clapp, PhD, an inhalation toxicologist in the UNC School of Medicine who has been testing mask FFE with Sickbert-Bennett since the pandemic began.

According to their findings, the baseline fitted filtration efficiency (FFE) of a mask differs from person to person, due to each person's unique face and mask fit. But generally, a procedure mask without

altering the fit is about 40-60 per cent effective at keeping Covid-19-sized particles out. A cloth mask is about 40 per cent effective.

Their recent findings on doubling of face masks show that when a cloth mask is placed over a surgical mask, the FFE improved by about 20 per cent, and improved even more with a snug-fitting, sleeve-type mask, such as a gaiter. When layered over procedure masks, cloth masks improve fit by eliminating gaps and holding the procedure mask closer to the face, consistently covering the nose and mouth.

DRDO setting up hosp in Ahmedabad for Covid patients



RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has conveyed to the Gujarat Government that DRDO is establishing a 900-bedded hospital in Ahmedabad to cater to the "alarming surge" in Covid-19 cases there.

The Union Home Ministry has also directed the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) or the Central paramilitary forces to spare 25 doctors and 75 paramedics and ensure that they report by April 21 to man the hospital in Gujarat.

"The hospital is being established at the Gujarat University Convention Centre, Ahmedabad to cater to the alarming surge of the Covid cases there," reads an order issued by Additional Director General (Medical) of CAPFs under the Union Home Ministry on Friday.

It has further been decided and conveyed that CAPFs are required to provide 25 medical officers and 75 paramedical/nursing staff, reads the order.

"It is, therefore, requested that the following number of doctors and paramedics/nursing staff be detailed for the purpose please," it said.

The detailed staff should report to the nodal officer (Colonel B Chaubey, DRDO Hospital, Ahmedabad by April

21 positively, it said.

Through the order, the ADG (Medical), CAPFs, Dr Mukesh Saxena has also named Devarshi Raval as the nodal officer for making logistical arrangements at Gujarat University.

The letter has been circulated to Inspector General (Medical) of the Border Security Force (BSF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB).

The BSF will send 10 doctors and 30 paramedics, the CRPF will spare 10 doctors and 25 nursing staff and SSB to chip in with five doctors and 20 paramedical personnel for the DRDO hospital in Ahmedabad.

Through the communication to the heads of CRPF, BSF and SSB, the Ministry has asked them to send their team on priority and the doctors and paramedics have to report to the nodal officer of the said hospital latest by April 21.

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) hospital set to be operationalised by late next week, officials said. On Friday, the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh directed the DRDO to reopen the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Covid care hospital here which was set up in July last year. He has also asked the defence body to set up a new facility in Lucknow.

Kumbh Mela: Plea in SC seeks direction to clear mass gathering from Haridwar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking directions to the Centre and others to clear the "mass gathering" from Haridwar amid a surge in Covid-19 cases across the country and prescribe a safety protocol with respect to people returning from Kumbh Mela.

The plea, which referred to the recent spike in COVID-19 cases, has also sought directions to the Centre and the Uttarakhand government to immediately withdraw the advertisements inviting people to Haridwar for Kumbh Mela.

It said that the Election Commission should be asked to issue direction to the authorities in the states where elections are being held to strictly enforce COVID-19 guidelines during the poll process and take appropriate action against the violators.

The plea, filed by Noida-resident Sanjay Kumar Pathak, said that COVID-19 cases are increasing rapidly across the country and the health infrastructure is "crumbling" in many states.

It claimed that hospitals and crematoriums are running out of space and shortage of essential drugs has been reported from many cities.

The petition said that India is currently witnessing its highest surge in COVID-19

cases since onset of the pandemic, but visuals of lakh of devotees crowding in Haridwar for Kumbh Mela and in election rallies in states have surfaced.

"On the one hand, poor common man on the street is often punished and treated violently by the police and executive authorities for individual violations of COVID-19 rules and regulations in the name of strict enforcement, and on the other hand, the authorities are not only permitting but facilitating and promoting congregation of people in the events like Kumbh-2021 and election rallies," the plea has alleged.

It sought the apex court's direction to the Centre, Uttarakhand government and the National Disaster Management Authority to not encourage or promote any gathering or event "inconsistent with the spirit and object of the COVID guidelines" and orders issued by these authorities.

"It is axiomatic that the respondents have turned a blind eye towards the violation of COVID-19 guidelines at the Kumbh Mela and during election campaigns and rallies which have the potential to become super spreader events but common people on the street is being fined and challans are being issued," the plea has claimed.

Private vehicle would not come within expression of public place: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A private vehicle does not come within the expression of a "public place" as per the explanation given under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, the Supreme Court has said.

A bench comprising justices U U Lalit and K M Joseph made the observation while deciding an appeal challenging an order passed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court affirming their conviction and sentence under the NDPS Act.

Two bags of poppy straw were recovered from the accused while they were sitting in a jeep at a public

place. The trial court, after considering the evidence on record, acquitted accused Major Singh but convicted accused Boota Singh, Gurdeep Singh and Gurmohinder Singh, under the NDPS Act and sentenced them to rigorous imprisonment for 10 years.

They were also asked to pay a fine of Rs 1 lakh, failing which they were directed to undergo further rigorous imprisonment for two years.

The accused argued before the top court that the vehicle in question was a private one belonging to accused Gurdeep Singh and was not a public conveyance, though it was parked on a public road.

AMID COVID 2.0

Fiscal package may be on cards to maintain economic recovery

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

A fiscal stimulus package may be on the cards again as the Government looks at ways to prevent the present surge in Covid-19 cases and the ensuing restrictions imposed by the States from derailing the economic recovery.

After last year's lockdowns, which resulted in the country's GDP contracting by (-) 23.9 per cent, it was hoped that the economy will grow hand-somely in FY22 to register a double digit growth.

For this to happen, the RBI has projected a Q1 FY22 GDP growth of 26.2 per cent. But the recent surge in the pandemic has again raised serious ques-

tions about the health of the economy.

There are some discus-sions within the government about the need, shape and tim-ing of a fresh fiscal stimulus package.

The idea is to see that the poor and small businesses do not suffer and their livelihood support is not disturbed, said an official source, on condition of anonymity.

The source said that any such package, if finalised, would come up later this month or next month.

The Union Finance Ministry has so far not indi-cated about any new stimulus to contain the disruptions caused by the fresh Covid-19

wave in the country.

Last year, the government and the RBI came up with a series of announcements to provide relief to the common man and businesses impacted by the Covid-induced lock-down.

Under its 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' package and the Garib Kalyan Yojana, the govern-ment had announced packages worth over Rs 20 lakh crore.

While the economic situa-tion is still much better than last year and the government has indicated against a com-plete lockdown this year, support measures could just look at the most vulnerable sec-tions of the society and the industry.

Sources said that like last year, the package may include measures by the government as well as compliance relief offered by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Already, various ministries are providing inputs to the Centre.

The worry for the govern-ment this time round is also about inflation that has seen an increase in the last few months.

This actually means that people are already struggling with higher food prices while their income is dogged with uncertainty.

The RBI will also have to do a balancing act over growth aspirations and containing inflation.

DPIIT notifies PLI scheme for ACs, LED lights

MERE ASSEMBLY OF FINISHED GOODS NOT TO BE INCENTIVISED

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The department for pro-motion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT) has notified the PLI scheme for ACs and LED lights and said that selection of companies to avail the incentives would

done to support manufactur-ing of components which are not made in India presently.

It said that mere assembly of finished goods would not be incentivised and companies investing in basic/core com-ponents would get a higher priority.

Earlier this month, the government approved a pro-duction linked incentive (PLI) scheme for white goods - Air Conditioners (ACs) and LED Lights - with a budgetary out-lay of Rs 6,238 crore. It will be implemented over 2021-22 to

2028-29. According to the notification of the DPIIT, the Empowered Group of Secretaries chaired by Cabinet Secretary will moni-tor the PLI scheme, undertake periodic review of the outgo under the scheme, ensure uni-formity of all PLIs and take appropriate action to ensure that the expenditure is within the prescribed outlay.

The group will be empow-ered to make any changes in the modalities of the scheme within the overall financial outlay of Rs 6,238 croreIt said

that the incentive per benefi-ciary will be applicable on incremental sales (net of taxes) of manufactured goods (as distinct from traded goods) over the base year (2019-20) subject to ceilings.

"Mere assembly of fin-ished goods shall not be incen-tivised. Selection of companies for the scheme shall be done so as to incentivise manu-facturing of components or sub-assemblies which are not man-ufactured in India presently with sufficient capacity," it said.

Indian pharma exports grow at 18% to 24.44 bn USD in FY 21

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Pharma exports from India witnessed over 18 per cent growth to USD 24.44 billion during the last financial year against USD 20.58 billion in FY20, Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexcil) said on Saturday.

"We have observed a big leap in our exports in the month of March 2021 which is USD 2.3 billion (figures for March are provisional) and is highest among the exports of all the months of this financial year, the growth rate for this month is 48.5 per cent against the exports in March 2020 (USD 1.54 billion)," Udaya Bhaskar, Director General of Pharmexcil said in a release.

Growth rate seems rela-tively big as the exports of March 2020 was crunched due to lockdown across the world and supply chain disruption, he was quoted as saying.

When the global pharma market is negatively grown by 1-2% in 2020, there is a big surge in demand for Indian made generics owing to its quality and affordability, the official said adding Drug for-mulations and Biologicals is the second largest Principal com-modity being exported by India.The Pharma exports body is expecting big growth in Indian vaccine exports in the coming years and the govern-ment policy on PLI (produc-tion Linked Incentive) scheme will also help the domestic

pharma to grow by reducing import dependance and devel-op export potential in the days to come as most of the coun-tries are looking at India for APIs (active pharmaceutical ingredient) he said.

North America is the largest exporting region for Indian pharmaceuticals with more than 34 per cent share.

Country wise exports to the US, Canada and Mexico have recorded a growth of 12.6, 30 and 21.4 per cent respectively. South Africa being the second largest exporting country, recorded a big jump of 28 per cent growth while Europe was the third largest exporting region which has recorded approximately 11 per cent growth over previous year.

Crude to be around \$60 a barrel in 2021

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Global crude oil prices are expected to be in the range of \$60 a barrel over the long term period as OPEC+ decision to cap supply until demand recovers and the pan-demic continuing to keep a check on consumption.

According to a research report by ICICI Securities, Brent has recovered and is over \$ 60/bbl since February, 21 vs April, 20 low of \$ 21/bbl driven by demand recovery from lows and OPEC+ capping supply to ensure supply deficit since July last year.

"OPEC+ capping supply until demand recovers is esti-

mated to ensure supply deficit of 1.3 million barrels of oil per day in calendar year 2021 and keep Brent above \$60/bbl," the brokerage said.

The expectation for the crude was that it may surge in 2021 on the back of economies recovering as vaccinations tamed the spread of Covid-19. But the lockdowns again due to fresh surge in Covid cases has delayed demand recovery in Europe.

Also, the probability of US sanctions on Iran's oil exports being lifted appears to have increased substantially.

EU and other signatories to the nuclear deal are talking to Iran and US separately to bring

them on the same page and revive the deal.

Indications are that US sanctions on Iran exports may be lifted as early as before Iran's presidential elections due on June 18.

"While OPEC+ capping supply should keep Brent above \$ 60/bbl, delay in demand recovery and US lifting sanc-tions on Iran exports would cap further rise. We estimate long-term Brent at \$60/bbl," ICICI Securities said.

With regard to gross refin-ing magind (GRMs) the out-look is modest as capacity addition is expected to exceed to refined products demand growth.

Second Covid wave to disrupt fabric demand: Ind-Ra

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

The second wave of Covid-19 resurgence can poten-tially disrupt fabric demand, said India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra).

"Woven fabrics produc-tion continued to improve mom, though marginally, in January 2021, despite remain-ing 21 per cent YoY lower," Ind-Ra said.

"While recoveries for blended and knitted fabrics were quicker, that of woven is expected to be delayed with micro-lockdowns and work-from-home culture."

Besides, export demand for woven fabrics is expected to plunge over Q1FY22 with key destination countries grappling with a second wave of pan-demic.

"Fabric exports remained muted in January 2021 on a mom basis, and 17 per cent YoY lower.

Demand for imported fab-rics surged over December 2020-January 2021, led by restocking by retailers."

"Imports in value terms doubled between November 2020-January 2021 with higher shipments from China, Bangladesh and Vietnam."

AGEL arm bags 150 MWac solar project

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Green Energy arm AREH Fifteen L has bagged a 150 MWac solar energy project capacity from Torrent Power.

Adani Renewable Energy Holding Fifteen Ltd (AREH Fifteen L), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL), participated in a Tender issued by Torrent Power Ltd for procurement of power through competitive bidding process, from grid connected solar photovoltaic power projects to be setup in Gujarat.

AREH Fifteen L has been awarded a project capacity of 150 MWac Solar Power Project, a BSE filing said.

The fixed tariff for this project capacity is Rs 2.22/ kWh for a period of 25 years.

Operating margins of sugar companies expected to moderate in FY22: ICRA

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

The operating margins of sugar companies are likely to moderate in FY22 due to higher production cost and reduced export subsidy, ratings agency ICRA said in a state-ment.

Besides, benefits from improved distillery performance was also cited by the agency as a factor that might moderate operating margins.

"In the medium term, the government support measures for higher diversion of sugar for ethanol production would reduce the sugar surplus and support in improving the demand supply dynamics of the industry on a sustainable basis," ICRA said.

As per the agency, domestic sugar production is expected to increase by 10 per cent to 30.2 million MT in SY2021 and outstrip consumption by

around 4.2 million MT.

ICRA expects sugar exports at around 5.5 million MT supported by the export policy and the closing stocks are likely to remain higher than normative sugar stock levels of 6-6.5 million MT at around 9.5 million MT for SY2021 season.

However, the stocks are expected to be lower than the previous season at around 11.0 million MT.

"Given the sugar surplus scenario in the domestic market, any significant increase in the sugar prices is ruled out in the near term. However, the higher diversion of sugar towards ethanol and the remun-erative pricing of ethanol is expected to result in an improved distillery performance in FY2022," said Sabyasachi Majumdar, Senior Vice President & Group Head, ICRA.

Correction an opportunity to add cyclical: MOFSL

FIANS ■ MUMBAI

Market correction due to Covid resurgence is an opportunity to add cyclical stocks said Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

In a report, MOFSL said resurgence in second wave of Covid-19 has led to elevated market volatility and correction. Later, both Nifty and Bank Nifty are down 5 and 15 per cent from their recent highs, respectively.

"To contain the pandemic, several states have announced localised restrictions with Maharashtra yesterday unveiling set of broad-based measures for two weeks mini-lock-down,"

"We expect the set of restrictive measures to impact near-term economic recovery till cases stabilise. However, key

government authorities and policymakers have ruled out national lockdown."

Consequently, MOFSL recommend that correction should be viewed by the investors as a buying opportunity and advocated adding a balanced mix of growth, cyclical and defensive stocks in their portfolios."We continue to be 'OW' on the BFSI, IT, Metals, Cement and Capital Goods, Neutral on Consumer, Auto and Pharma while staying 'UW' on Energy, Utility and Infrastructure."

On the bright side, it said that vaccinations are gradually beginning to accelerate.

"As vaccination pick up further with approvals for more vaccines now in place, we expect the focus to shift back to growth, cyclical recovery and fundamentals.0

FICCI writes to 25 CMs on Covid management, urges to avoid lockdown

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body FICCI has written to Chief Ministers of 25 States urging them to avoid imposing partial or total lockdown in the wake of fresh surge in Covid cases.

The industry body also argued that the economy has barely begun to turnaround from the impact of the earlier lockdowns and such decisions now will push the push the economy into downward spiral.

In the letter written to state CMs by FICCI President Uday Shankar, the chamber has acknowledged the need to break the Covid chain but has suggested the strategy to focus more on ramping up covid testing, awareness drive and enforcement of Covid appro-

priate behaviour rather than lockdown.

"The population may be sensitised about the Covid appropriate behaviour like wearing masks, physical distancing and personal hygiene.

Support may be taken by involving volunteers from the schools, colleges and the NGOs. Strict compliance to Covid protocol may be ensured with suitable penalties for violations," the letter states.

FICCI has represented to the Union Government to open up the vaccination for all the people above 18 years of age to give a massive push to the vaccination drive as there is no shortage of vaccines and the inoculation capacity can be increased with the participation of the private sector.

Petrol, diesel price unchanged for 2nd consecutive day

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Fuel prices in the country remained unchanged on Saturday as oil marketing companies decided to go on a pause mode and analyse the global developments on oil prices before effecting a revision.

Accordingly, pump price of petrol and diesel remained at ₹90.40 a litre and ₹80.73 a litre respectively in Delhi.

The price of the two auto fuels had fallen by 16 paise and 14 paise per litre respectively on Thursday after a 15 day break when OMCs kept its prices static.

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

Striking taxi drivers' demands unreasonable: Goa tourism body

Panaji: The tourism and travel industry in Goa have criticised taxi drivers in the State, who have been on strike for more than 10 days, demanding scrapping of an online app-based cab aggregator service.

"It is an unreasonable demand. The state government has to remain firm," Nilesh Shah, President of the Travel and Tourism Association of Goa, told reporters on Saturday, even as the state administration denied striking taxi operators the permission to gather at the city square for their daily protest.

"The state transport system has to be reasonable, transparent and on-time. Their demand to scrap the app-based taxi service is unfair at a time when the world is moving the digital way," he said.

The Goa-based unit of the Confederation of Indian Industry and other trade associations have also urged the state government to not relent to the single point demand of the various striking taxi driver associations, whose members operate nearly 30,000 cabs across the state.

Taxi operators in Goa have gone on strike, demanding an immediate end to Goa Miles, a cab aggregator service, backed by the state tourism development corporation, claiming it impacted the livelihood of nearly 30,000 private tourist taxi operators in the state.

A large section of tourist taxi drivers in Goa have often been accused of overcharging, intimidating and operating in an unregulated environment.

Jammu-Srinagar highway to remain closed on Sunday

Srinagar: The Jammu-Srinagar National Highway will remain closed for vehicular traffic on Sunday in view of the inclement weather and landslides triggered by incessant rain, said the state traffic police.

The traffic police said on Sunday no vehicular movement would be allowed from either side on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway in view of the inclement weather, landslides and falling stones at several places and continuous rain on NH-44.

The highway is the lifeline of the Kashmir valley and the main road link connecting Kashmir with the rest of the country. Kashmir-bound trucks laden with essential supplies and other vehicles pass through this highway.

Brisk polling, stray violence, no death in phase 5 Bengal polls

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With no death being reported, the fifth phase of Bengal Assembly elections experienced brisk polling in spite reports of sporadic violence coming in from various places. The State recorded a cool 78.36 percent voter turnout across 45 seats that went to polls on Saturday.

Reports of violence came from up market Salt Lake (Bidhannagar) constituency in northern fringes of Kolkata where the supports of TMC and BJP clashed following mutual allegations of rigging. At Gayeshpur in Nadia district the houses of saffron supporters

including a BJP booth president were ransacked by alleged TMC men after he reportedly foiled attempts of booth capturing.

While polling was 81.73 percent at Jalpaiguri, it was 81.72 percent at Burdwan East till reports last came in at 5 pm. In North 24 Parganas 74.83 per cent voters cast their votes while in Darjeeling the figure was 74.31 percent. Kampong witnessed the lowest turnout with 69.56 percent. ECI officials said adding the percentage of voting could go up by five percent as many people were still standing in queues.

Elections was held in 45 seats in North 24 Parganas, Bardhaman East and Nadia in south Bengal, and Jalpaiguri,

Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts in the north.

Incidents of violence and firing were also reported from Shantipur in Nadia district. At De Ganga in North 24 Parganas where villagers claimed that the quick response team of the central forces had fired at them without injuring any one. The local CPF officers however denied any such incident having taken place.

In Siliguri, a scuffle broke out between TMC and CPI (M) supporters outside a polling booth. In Bijpur in North 24 Parganas, TMC and BJP supporters clashed after the opposition party alleged that voters were being prevented from going to the booths.

At Kamarhati in northern fringes of Kolkata the moving vehicle of BJP candidate Raju Banerjee was attacked with stones and bombs, sources said. "I was rushing to a booth receiving information that it had been captured by the TMC men enroated at the Belghoria Flyover motorbike-borne miscreants attacked my vehicle, stoned it and threw bombs at us," Banerjee claimed. In all these incidents the ECI has asked the respective authorities to submit reports, sources said.

A total of 1.13 crore people — including 57 lakh men, 56 lakh women and 224 of the third gender --- were to exercise their voting rights in this phase.

Over dozen leaders test Covid +ve amid K'taka bypolls

Bengaluru: Two days after the public campaign for bypolls to three seats in Karnataka came to an end, nearly dozen political leaders including Janata Dal (S) strongman H D Kumaraswamy and his son Nikhil Kumaraswamy have tested Covid positive on Saturday and most of these leaders have got inoculated first dose of Covid vaccine.

In his tweet, former Karnataka Chief Minister Kumaraswamy said he has tested positive for Covid-19. "I request everyone who came in close contact with me over the last few days to isolate themselves and get tested," the 61-year-old Janata Dal (Secular) leader tweeted.

Kumaraswamy had been campaigning for the party candidate in Basavakalyan, where

polling for the bypoll held on Saturday.

The JD(S) strongman had got himself inoculated with the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine on March 23. Within hours of Kumaraswamy's tweet, his son and JD(S) youth wing state president Nikhil Kumaraswamy too stated, "I request everyone who came in close contact with me over the last few days to isolate themselves and get tested." Nikhil who is also a film actor and for the last couple of weeks he was busy in shooting with his upcoming movie in Ladakh.

Reports stated that Kumaraswamy's wife and Ramanagara MLA, Anita Kumaraswamy had been advised to remain home quarantined with two of her closest relatives testing Covid positive.

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala on Saturday recorded its highest ever single-day tally of Covid-19 cases at 13,835, after 81,211 samples were sent for testing in the past 24 hours.

The state's test positivity rate surged to a high of 17.04 per cent on Saturday.

Earlier in the day, Kerala Health Minister K.K. Shailaja had given enough hints that the numbers will surge as augmented testing is being con-

ducted for the past two days.

"We are expecting the number of positive cases to go up as around 2.30 lakh tests are expected to take place. Since our health system is quite fine-tuned to handle the positive cases, there is no need to worry as the hospitals are fully equipped," Shailaja said.

"We now need another 50 lakh doses of vaccine as we are now left with around 5.50 lakh doses only. We are expecting

fresh supplies at the earliest," added Shailaja.

Meanwhile, a total 3,654 people recovered from the disease in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of recoveries in the state to 11,35,921. Kerala presently has 80,019 active cases.

As many as 27 persons succumbed to the virus in the past 24 hours, mounting the state's Covid death toll to 4,904.

Across the state, 2,18,542

persons are under observation, including 10,539 persons in different hospitals.

With 18 new hotspots being added to the list, Kerala presently has 452 hotspots across the state. The authorities have asked all those who are conducting weddings or other functions to register in the online portal, and maintain the cap of 75 people for indoor events and 150 for outdoor functions.

IANS

The arrested persons have been identified as Adil Ahmad Dar and Tahir Ahmad Bhat, both residents of Narbal, and Gulam Mohd Gojre from Kawoosa Khalisa "Preliminary investigation has revealed that the arrested terrorist associates were providing shelter, logistics and other material support, including transportation of arms and ammunition, to LeT terrorists in Magam, Narbal and Beerwah areas of Budgam," the police said. The police added that all the three arrested persons were in touch with terror commanders in Pakistan through various social media platforms. They were also in constant touch with the self-styled LeT terror commanders, Mohd Yousuf Dar alias Kantro, and Abrar Nadeem Bhat.

"Incriminating materials, including ammunition and posters of LeT, were recovered from the possession of the arrested trio," the police said.

Myanmar pardons prisoners

Unclear if
coup foes
among them

AP ■ YANGON

Myanmar's junta on Saturday announced it pardoned and released more than 23,000 prisoners to mark the traditional Thingyan New Year holiday, but it wasn't immediately clear if they included pro-democracy activists who were detained in the wake of the military's seizure of power in February.

The releases were announced on state broadcaster MRTV, which said that junta chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing had pardoned 23,047 prisoners, including 137 foreigners who will be deported from Myanmar. He also reduced sentences for others.

The move comes as daily protests against the February 1 ouster of the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi continue, as does the use of deadly force against them.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors casualties and arrests, government forces have killed at least 728 protesters and bystanders since the takeover. The group says 3,141 people, including Suu Kyi, are in detention.



A man is embraced by two women outside Insein prison in Yangon, Myanmar on Saturday

AP

Unconfirmed but credible accounts with photos on social media claimed that three people were killed Saturday by security forces in a violent crackdown in the central city of Mogok, in Myanmar's gem mining region.

Detainees released Saturday from Yangon's Insein Prison included at least three political prisoners who were jailed in 2019, said witnesses and local press reports.

The three are members of the Peacock Generation per-

formance troupe where were arrested during that year's New Year celebrations for skits that poked fun at military representatives in Parliament and military involvement in business.

Their traditional style of acting is called Thangyat, a mash-up of poetry, comedy and music with a sharp undertone of satire. Several members of the troupe were convicted under a law banning circulation of information that could endanger or demoralise members of the military. The actors may have

drawn the special wrath of the military because they performed in army uniforms.

Several members were also found guilty of online defamation for livestreaming their performances. It could not be ascertained if all imprisoned members of the troupe were released.

Another freed prisoner was Ross Dunkley, an Australian newspaper entrepreneur sentenced in 2019 to 13 years in a Myanmar prison for drug possession. His release was con-

firmed by his ex-wife Cynda Johnston, reported The Sydney Morning Herald newspaper.

Dunkley co-founded the The Myanmar Times, an English-language daily, but was forced to give up his share in it. He became well-known for co-founding or acquiring English-language publications in formerly socialist states that were seeking foreign investment as they liberalised their economies, but was sometimes criticised for doing business with authoritarian regimes.

Early prisoner releases are customary during major holidays, and this is the second batch the ruling junta has announced since taking power.

Following the release of more than 23,000 convicts to mark Union Day on February 12, there were reports on social media that some were recruited by the authorities to carry out violence at night in residential areas to spread panic, especially by setting fires. Some areas responded by setting up their own neighborhood watch groups.

In March, more than 600 people who were imprisoned for demonstrating against the February coup were released from Insein Prison, a rare conciliatory gesture by the military that appeared aimed at placating the protest movement.

Those freed were mostly young people caught in sweeps of street demonstrations, while those considered protest leaders were kept locked up.

Troops level may increase in Af before withdrawal: Pentagon

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Before the complete withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan by September 11, there might be an increase in number of soldiers to ensure safe and orderly drawdown, the Pentagon has said.

"It is not out of the realm the possibility that for a short period of time, there will have to be some additional enabling capabilities added to Afghanistan, to help effect a safe, orderly, and deliberately planned drawdown of everybody by the president's deadline, early September," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters at a news conference on Friday.

However, Kirby did not elaborate on the nature of the increase in US troops. "I can't speak today with exactly what that would look like, how many, when they would be going in. But as we transitioned out of Iraq, of course, it's logical to assume that you may need some logistics help, maybe some engineering help," he said.

"You may have to add some force protection capabilities, temporarily, just to make sure that the drawdown goes in a safe, orderly, and effective way. Again, we'll know more as we get closer, but that would not be out of the realm of possibility," Kirby said.

Responding to a question, Kirby said that the Department



of Defense is still working out what the future bilateral security relationship is going to be with Afghanistan.

"We're going to transition to a bilateral relationship, a military relationship that's more akin to the kinds of relationships we have with other countries," he said.

"It will not include a US military footprint on the ground in Afghanistan with the exception of what's going to be required to support the diplomatic mission there. All that's still being worked out. So, I can't speak with specificity today about what contract support the Afghan security forces are going to need going forward," he said.

The United States, he said, will maintain counterterrorism capabilities to continue to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a launching pad for terrorist attacks on the US.

"We have a vast range of

capabilities available to us and we're not going to speak to the details of exactly how we're going to maintain those capabilities and utilise those capabilities," he said.

During a televised address to the nation earlier in the week, President Joe Biden said that keeping thousands of troops grounded and concentrated in just one country at a cost of billions each year made "little sense" to him.

He said all US troops would be withdrawn from the strife-torn country by September 11 to end America's longest war that has cost trillions of dollars and the lives of over 2,400 American soldiers.

The US and the Taliban signed a landmark deal in Doha on February 29, 2020 to bring lasting peace in war-torn Afghanistan and allow US troops to return home from America's longest war.

Worldwide Covid death toll tops a staggering 3m

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

The global death toll from the coronavirus topped a staggering 3 million people Saturday amid repeated setbacks in the worldwide vaccination campaign and a deepening crisis in places such as Brazil, India and France.

The number of lives lost, as compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is about equal to the population of Kyiv, Ukraine; Caracas, Venezuela; or metropolitan Lisbon, Portugal. It is bigger than Chicago (2.7 million) and equivalent to Philadelphia and Dallas combined.

And the true number is believed to be significantly higher because of possible government concealment or the many cases overlooked in the early stages of the outbreak that began 16 months ago in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019. Around the world, the trajectory of the virus and the race to bring it under control vary widely from country to

country. Even as the U.S. and Britain see their vaccination drives hit their stride and they begin to contemplate life after the pandemic, other places both rich and poor — France and India among them — are lagging behind in putting shots in arms and have imposed new lockdowns and other restrictions as cases soar.

Worldwide, deaths are running at over 12,000 per day on average and new cases at more than 7,00,000 a day.

The US toll alone is over 5,60,000, accounting for more than 1 in 6 of the world's Covid-19 deaths, by far the highest reported by any country. The United States is followed by Brazil, Mexico, India and Britain. This month, the US recommended a pause in the use of Johnson & Johnson's Covid-19 vaccine while authorities investigate extremely rare but dangerous blood clots, and some European countries are putting the vaccine on hold, too.

5 workers killed in police firing in power plant in B'desh: Reports

Dhaka: At least five people working at a under construction coal power plant being built by a Chinese firm in Chittagong were killed and 20 others injured in a clash with the police following a protest by the workers over wage and allowances, Bangladesh media reports said on Saturday.

The incident happened when the protesting workers of the plant clashed with the police, prompting them to open fire in which five workers were killed, the *Dhaka Tribune* reported.

"The violence broke out around 10:30 am at the coal-fired power plant. Five have died while at least 20 others were injured in the clash, including police and local residents," a senior police officer was quoted as saying in the report.

"They attacked police who are on duty, forcing the policemen to retaliate. Four were killed during the incident while three policemen were injured," Chattogram Range Deputy Inspector General Anwar Hossain was quoted as saying by the Daily Star newspaper. **PTI**

Russia expels Ukrainian consul over classified information

Moscow: Russia detained a Ukrainian diplomat for allegedly receiving classified information from a database of the country's main security agency.

The Federal Security Service, or FSB, said Saturday that Alexander Sosonyuk, Ukraine's consul in St Petersburg, was taken into custody on Friday during a meeting with a Russian in which he received "information of a classified nature contained in the databases of law enforcement agencies and the FSB".

The FSB statement, reported by Russian news agencies, didn't give further details.

Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko said Sosonyuk has been released from custody and is on Ukrainian diplomatic property. It wasn't immediately clear if Russia would move to expel him.

Nikolenko said Ukraine was preparing a response, but didn't elaborate. The detention comes amid escalating tensions between Russia and Ukraine amid a Russian military buildup along the border with the eastern Ukraine region. **AP**

US Prez Biden, Japanese PM Suga discuss Chinese influence over Indo-Pacific

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden and Japan Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, in their first in-person bilateral meeting at the White House, discussed the increasing Chinese influence over the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific and ways to strengthen the QUAD, comprising of India and Australia as the other two nations in the grouping.

Other issues like climate change, fight against coronavirus pandemic and North Korea did appear in their talks on Friday, which was the first for Biden with a foreign leader as the president of the United States.

"Our alliance has served its role as the foundation of peace and stability for the Indo-Pacific region and the world. In light of the current regional situation and the severe security environment, the importance of our alliance has reached new heights," Suga told reporters at a White House news conference with Biden.

In addition to the bilateral relationship, Suga said they

discussed the free and open Indo-Pacific.

"We agreed that while Japan and the US will take the lead to promote the vision through concrete efforts. We will also cooperate with other countries and regions, including the ASEAN, Australia, and India," he said.

"We also had serious talks on China's influence over the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific and the world at large. We agreed to oppose any attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion in the East and South China Seas and intimidation of others in the region," Suga said.

Beijing claims almost all of the 1.3 million square mile South China Sea as its sovereign territory. China has been building military bases on artificial islands in the region also claimed by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Beijing has impeded commercial activity like fishing or mineral exploration by countries like Vietnam and the Philippines.

After outcry, White House says Biden will lift refugee cap in May

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Facing swift blowback from allies and aid groups, the White House said President Joe Biden plans to lift his predecessor's historically low cap on refugees by next month, after initially moving only to expand the eligibility criteria for resettlements.

In an emergency determination signed by Biden earlier Friday, he stated the admission of up to 15,000 refugees set by former President Donald Trump this year "remains justified by humanitarian concerns and is otherwise in the national interest." But if the cap is reached before the end of the current budget year and the emergency refugee situation persists, then a presidential determination may be issued to raise the ceiling.

That set off a deluge of criticism from top allies on Capitol Hill such as the second-ranking Senate Democrat, Dick Durbin of Illinois, who called that initial limit "unacceptable." White House press secretary Jen Psaki said later that Biden is expected to increase the refugee cap by May 15, though she didn't say by how much.

Biden has been consulting with his advisers to determine what number of refugees could realistically be admitted to the United States between now and October 1, the end of the fiscal year, Psaki said.

"Given the decimated refugee admissions program we inherited," she said it's now "unlikely" Biden will be able to boost that number to 62,500, as he had proposed in his plan to Congress two months ago.

Riot declared after police kill man in Oregon protests

Portland: Police in Portland, Oregon, said on Saturday they arrested four people after declaring a riot Friday night when protesters smashed windows, burglarised businesses and set multiple fires during demonstrations that started after police fatally shot a man while responding to reports of a person with a gun.

Police said they dispersed the crowd so firefighting crews could douse fires before they spread in extreme fire hazard conditions.

The vandalism downtown came after the police shooting earlier Friday and was also was part of vigils and demonstrations already planned for the night in the name of people killed in police shootings nationwide. They include 13-year-old Adam Toledo of Chicago and Daunte Wright, a Black man in a Minneapolis suburb. Deputy Police Chief Chris Davis told reporters a white man in his 30s had been shot and killed in Portland by

police. The man was pronounced dead at the scene in Lents Park, a leafy, residential neighbourhood of the city.

Two officers fired a 40mm device that shoots non-lethal projectiles, and one officer — an eight-year veteran — fired a gun, police said

in a statement. The officer is on paid administrative leave, and his or her name will be released, authorities said.

Davis did not know if the man who died had pointed a weapon at the officers and did not say how many shots were fired. A witness who spoke to reporters at the scene said the man, who had removed his shirt and was blocking an intersection, appeared to be in a mental health crisis, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

The police investigation into the shooting was hampered by a crowd of "fairly aggressive people" who showed up at the park within two hours of the shooting. **AP**

Italy's Salvini to stand trial for 2019 migrant standoff

Rome: A judge in Sicily on Saturday ordered former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini to stand trial for having refused to let a Spanish migrant rescue ship dock in an Italian port in 2019, keeping the people at sea for days.

Judge Lorenzo Iannelli set September 15 as the trial date during a hearing in the Palermo bunker courtroom, the LaPresse news agency reported. Salvini, who attended the hearing, confirmed the outcome and insisted he was only doing his job and his duty by refusing entry to the Open Arms rescue ship and the 147 people it had rescued in the Mediterranean Sea. **AP**

After China, US envoy Kerry in S Korea for climate talks

Seoul: US climate envoy John Kerry met with South Korea's foreign minister in Seoul on Saturday for talks ahead of a virtual climate summit of world leaders called by President Joe Biden for next week.

Kerry arrived in South Korea after a four-day visit to China where he held closed-door meetings with senior Chinese officials in Shanghai.

While Kerry's discussions with South Korea's Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong were focused on Biden's climate meeting and another video summit on environmental issues that South Korea will host in May, Chung also conveyed Seoul's "serious concerns" over Japanese government plans to start releasing treated radioactive water from the wrecked

Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea in two years.

Chung also requested US help for South Korea's efforts to secure more coronavirus vaccines as it wrestles with a slow vaccine rollout and a steady rise in infections, South Korea's Foreign Ministry said. The ministry didn't release any specific comments made by Kerry during the meeting.

Chung and Kerry agreed that the countries should cooperate to create "mutual synergy" between the virtual summits hosed by each country in the coming weeks, which would help set up the UN Climate Change Conference scheduled to be held in Scotland in November, the ministry said in a statement. **AP**

Era ends as Raul Castro steps down as Communist Party chief

AP ■ HAVANA

Raul Castro said he is stepping down as Cuban Communist Party leader, leaving the island without a Castro guiding affairs for the first time in more than six decades and handing control of the party to a younger generation.

The 89-year-old Castro made the announcement in a speech Friday at the opening of the eighth congress of the ruling party, the only one allowed on the island.

"I concluded my task as first secretary... With the satisfaction of having fulfilled (my duty) and confidence in the future of the fatherland," he said in a typically terse, to-the-point finale that contrasted with the impassioned

verbal pyrotechnics of his brother Fidel, who died in 2016.

Castro didn't say who he would endorse as his successor as first secretary of the Communist Party. But he previously indicated he favors yielding control to 60-year-old Miguel Diaz-Canel, who succeeded him as president in 2018 and is the standard bearer of a younger generation of loyalists who have been pushing an economic opening without touching Cuba's one-party system.

"All processes have a continuity and I think Diaz-Canel should be there now," said 58-year-old driver Miguel Rodriguez. Castro's retirement ends an era of formal leadership that began with his brother Fidel and country's 1959 revolution.

"One has to step aside for the young people," said 64-year-old retiree Juana Busutill, for whom Castro "is going to continue being the leader."

The transition comes at a difficult time for Cuba, with many on the island anxious about what lies ahead.

The coronavirus pandemic, painful financial reforms and restrictions imposed by the Trump administration have battered the economy, which shrank 11% last year as a result of a collapse in tourism and remittances. Long food lines and shortages have brought back echoes of the "special period" that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.



given us, his kindness, humour and humanity."

As per details of the ceremonial funeral released by Buckingham Palace earlier in the week, the Duke's coffin travelled in a bespoke Land Rover designed by him, with

his children and grandchildren walking alongside.

Those in the procession included Prince Charles — the Prince of Wales, Princess Anne — the Princess Royal, Prince Andrew — the Duke of York, and Prince Edward — the Earl

of Wessex and Forfar.

Grandchildren Princes William and Harry, said to be somewhat estranged, walked behind the vehicle separated by their cousin Peter Phillips, the son of Princess Anne. Vice Admiral Sir Tim Laurence, the husband of Princess Anne, and the Earl of Snowdon, the son of the Queen sister, were also among those who followed the funeral procession.

They all wore their face masks the moment they arrived at the entrance of the chapel.

Others on the limited guest list included Prince Charles' wife Camilla, Duchess of

Cornwall, Prince William's wife Kate Middleton, all of Prince Philip's grandchildren and their spouses, and the children of the Queen's sister Princess Margaret.

From the Duke's German heritage, the guests included Bernhard, the Hereditary Prince of Baden; Donatus, Prince and Landgrave of Hesse; and Prince Philipp of Hohenlohe-Langenburg. The Countess Mountbatten of Burma, previously known as Lady Romsey and Lady Brabourne, who was one of Prince Philip's closest friends, was also be in attendance.

Prince Philip laid to rest in royal funeral

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II bled a small group of senior royals at the ceremonial funeral of her husband and consort Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, at Windsor Castle on Saturday.

The funeral incorporated hymns and readings chosen by the late royal himself and focussed on the "unwavering loyalty" of the longest-serving consort in British history to his wife, the monarch, and service

to Britain and the Commonwealth.

The ceremony, which began at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle with a national minute's silence at 1500 local time on Saturday, was a religious one though without any sermons, as planned by the Duke — who passed away aged 99 last week on Friday.

"The Order of Service for the funeral was agreed with the Duke of Edinburgh during his lifetime, and reflects the Duke's military affiliations, and per-

sonal elements of His Royal Highness' life," Buckingham Palace said in a statement.

At the end of the ceremony, the Duke's coffin was carried to his resting place in the royal vault beneath St George's Chapel.

The Queen, dressed in black and wearing a face mask, travelled in the State Bentley in a procession, behind senior royal family members on foot, before entering by a side door to the chapel. Inside, she was seated by herself under the

social distancing guidelines.

In his reading, the Dean of Windsor said: "With grateful hearts, we remember the many ways in which his long life has been a blessing to us.

"We have been inspired by his unwavering loyalty to our Queen, by his service to the Nation and the Commonwealth, by his courage, fortitude and faith.

"Our lives have been enriched through the challenges that he has set us, the encouragement that he has

HOMETHEATRE

Gripping tale of terror from young eyes

UTOYA: JULY 22
Norwegian with English subtitles
&PriveHD
*ing: Andrea Berntzen, Aleksander Holmen, Solveig Koløen Birkeland
Rated: 6/10

There will always be a debate on whether it is appropriate to put on mounts of terror attacks and the impact it has on the victims. Some argue it is glorifying the terrorist in some way. Others want documentation. Over and above this debate, *Utoya* is a Norwegian mount which leaves no stone unturned to look at the terror killing on an otherwise peaceful island of Utoya in Norway executed by a home grown extreme Right group. It was Norway's 26/11 with many left dead quite without premise. "It is the safest island on Earth, mom" one of the m a i n protagonists says in the opening sequence of this film. The environs she is walking through are green, serene and enchanting which, by the way, is a complete contrast to what the film otherwise centres on with dogged starkness throwing up the real impact of a terror attack and its aftermath on any population in any part of the world.

Here, the movie pans out through the eyes of youngsters and the terrorist is given a grand go-by, being allowed to visit the screen only in pithy scenes with almost an abstract presence to give the audience some shape of the orchestrator. An English version of this film is all set to premiere on Netflix and that promises to take over in starkness, blood and gore from *Utoya*. For now, however, *Utoya* is a powerful story told candidly



even though the director could be faulted for what many may perceive as a story exploiting grim reality to make some noise on the small screen. Nevertheless, a gripping tale which should get a go by because of subtitles.



A BLACK CAPTAIN AMERICA?

FALCON AND THE WINTER SOLDIER
Episode 5
Disney+Hotstar
*ing: Sebastian Stan, Anthony Mackie, Wyatt Russell, Erin Kellyman, Danny Ramirez, Emily VanCamp
Rated: 6/10

Those who have been following the miniseries would know how episode 4 ended — the Shield — all bloodied. The fallout is felt by the Falcon and Winter Soldier. The Shield, for now is back with Sam just how Steve Rogers had wanted. So are we looking at yet another Captain America? A Black Captain America? Like Isaiah Bradley played by Carl Lumbly says — no self-respecting Black will take up the job. With John Walker stripped of all his duties and the title of Captain America, there is a new person who

makes an entry — Contessa Valentina Allegra de Fontaine. Who is she and what is the agenda? Well, maybe we will get to see more of Walker in episode 6. Meanwhile, Flag Smashers have upped their ante and are preparing for the final count down. Will they succeed? Will the Falcon and Winter Soldier be able to prevent Karli from going full guns ahead? Given that death hangs over Falcon's head, things will come full circle next time. The only thing missing here is the awe-inspiring action. In almost all the episodes, till now, they have been far between. The series has Falcon, Winter Soldier and the now redundant Captain America and yet the action is way below on the makers list. That boggles the mind and wonders if it has all been saved for episode 6 for the wow factor. Definitely something that Avengers fans will be looking forward to. — Shalini Saksena

Plan Your Day

Cold Brew Day is on April 20. SUNDAY PIONEER brings you recipes that will surely give you chills without costing too heavy on your pocket

COLDBREW POPSICLES WITH FRESH MINT

- Ingredients:**
- half and half
 - 1 1/2 cups coffee beans
 - 2-4 tablespoons brown sugar
 - Mint leaves
- Directions:**
- Grind the coffee beans. Place the grounds in a large pitcher or carafe. Add three cups of cold water and stir to combine. Cover and let steep for 12-24 hours.
 - Strain the coffee and add 2-4 tablespoons brown sugar. Stir to combine.
 - Place a few torn mint leaves into each popsicle mold and top with a few tablespoons of half and half. Freeze for 15-20 minutes, until slightly firm.
 - Insert popsicle sticks into each mold and freeze for another 20 minutes until set.
 - Remove the pops from the freezer and top with sweetened



coffee. Freeze until firm, 30-40 minutes. Enjoy!
Half and half: It's that simple. Half whole milk, half heavy cream. The texture is thicker and more luscious than milk, but less decadent and rich than cream.

CARAMEL SURPRISE COLD BREW



- Ingredients:**
- 1-2 cups Coldbrew
 - Handful of ice
 - 1-2 tablespoons coconut milk
 - 1-2 teaspoons caramel syrup
 - Pinch of sweetener of choice (if desired)
- Directions:**
- You can prepare coldbrew at home using French press or in a mason jar using muslin cloth, important is perfect coffee blend for your coldbrew. Keep prepared cold brew coffee in a pitcher or carafe in the refrigerator.
 - Pour one cup (eight-ounces) of coffee into a mug, cup or glass jar filled with ice. Stir in coconut milk and caramel syrup. Add sweetener, if desired. Serve immediately. Courtesy: Girish Chandra, Beverage Training Manager, Lavazza India

TELLY TALE

IT'S TIME FOR MAHASANGAM



COLORS' *Mahasangam* episodes have always raised the bar of entertainment with its complete package of drama and musical performances. One such blast of entertainment is the upcoming *Mahasangam* episode where the cast of *Choti Saradaani* and *Udaariyaan* will share a screen during Baisakhi celebrations. Tejo (played by Priyanka Chaudhary) and Jasmine (played by Isha Malviya) will invite Jass even after knowing that there is stress going on in Virk family due to Fateh's decision of going to Canada. The celebration will be sparked with singer B Praak's presence as he will sing some of his hit song *Teri Mitti* from *Kesari* and also his recently launched soulful track, *Baarish Ki Jaaye*.

In the special episode, Fateh (played by Ankit Gupta) will have his share of dramatic moments as he will get to know that the woman he saved and admitted to the hospital is awake and turns out to be Meher! (played by Nirmal Kaur Ahluwalia). In a dramatic turn of events, Fateh will also come face to face with Sarabjit (played by Avinash Rekhi). Will he be able to bring together Meher and Sarab? Singer B Praak, who was a part of the dramatic *Mahasangam* episode said: "I am excited to shoot here in Punjab with the cast of two most relevant show. *Choti Saradaani* is my family's favorite and *Udaariyaan*'s concept strongly resonates with each one of us. The episode is going to be full of drama, entertainment and of course our beautiful new music track, *Baarish Ki Jaaye*. I had a lot of fun shooting with the cast of the show- They are fun, energetic, and extremely talented."

HERO TASTES DEFEAT

Sony SAB's *Hero* — *Gayab Mode On* will take a shocking turn with Dansh (Manish Wadhwa) defeating Hero (Abhishek Nigam) and stands triumphant. The upcoming episodes will send shockwaves to the viewers, with Hero assumed to be dead. At the beginning of the War of Worlds, our beloved Hero is vanquished by Dansh. The intense battle between the two is set to take the viewers on a roller

coaster ride and keep them on the edge of their seats.

With Rocky (Keshav Sadhna) uniting with Dansh to defeat Hero, the forces of the aliens get more robust, and it becomes difficult for Hero to fight them single-handedly. Dansh threatening to destroy the planet and cause harm to human beings leads to the battle of the War of Worlds. Dansh launches his attack with the help of Rocky and with each passing moment, it gets tricky for Hero to fight Dansh and protect his ring simultaneously. The battle gets fiercer, leading to the heartbreaking moment of Dansh beating Hero and conquering the magical ring. Hero's identity as Veer is exposed to Dansh and Zara simultaneously. Dansh is celebrating after winning over Hero and gaining the magical ring. But little does he know



what's in store and what will this end of Hero lead to?

Is Veer Nanda aka Hero dead? What will happen next?

Manish Wadhwa, essaying the role of Dansh, said: "Dansh is very strong and an intense character. He never gives up and attacks back with force. The experience of shooting for this fight sequence has been amazing and it's fun to work with Abhishek. He is very hardworking and we both share great timing. Dansh is happy and very delighted with getting hold of the ring, unaware of what will happen next. So, stay tuned to witness exciting twists and turns on the show and join us on this thrilling journey!"

Abhishek Nigam, essaying the role of Hero, said: "This is the most intense fight sequence we have shot on the show so far and I was so much into the character that I could feel the same energy. Hero was putting in all the efforts to save the world and protect his ring, but he chooses his loss so that he can save the world. It was a learning experience while shooting for this sequence with Manish Sir. This sequence has come out really well and it will take the viewers on a thrilling never seen before ride. So, stay tuned and don't miss the fun!"

KUMKUM BHAGYA TURNS SEVEN

Zee TV's popular fiction show, *Kumkum Bhagya* has been an audience favourite ever since it was launched in 2014. Its intriguing plot and the authentic portrayal of relatable characters like Abhi (Shabbir Ahluwalia), Pragya (Sriti Jha), Rhea (Pooja Banerjee), Ranbir (Krishna

Kaul) and Prachi (Mugdha Chapekar) have kept the audience entertained throughout these past seven years and has helped the show gain countless fans across the globe. Produced by Television's czarina Ekta Kapoor, *Kumkum Bhagya* has witnessed roaring success on the viewership charts every year and has won more than 50 awards till date. But it looks like there is no stopping the show even as the show completed seven years on April 15.

The family drama that explores and brings a range of emotions as well as the deepest intricacies of human relationships has kept the viewers hooked all this while through several interesting twists and turns in its storyline! In fact, the show has also managed to successfully reinstate the belief that opposites do attract by showcasing how despite having contrasting personalities, its lead protagonists are inseparable.

As Kumkum Bhagya completes seven glorious years, Shabir Ahluwalia who plays the role of Abhi got nostalgic and said: "It is not just a show, but a feeling for me. I've been associated with it for seven years now, but it doesn't feel like it's been so long. I must say that all these years have been a breeze and the entire unit including the technicians and actors are like a family for me. Generally, you hear people saying this when the show is coming to an end, but our case is different. When you're around the same people for seven years, you know them even better, as you have seen them at their best and their worst. I have to add that the writers and the creative team are fantastic, and they've held all of us together. I've been associated with the producers, Balaji Telefilms for nearly two decades and they are like a family to me. As we complete seven years, I would like to say Thank You Ekta for believing in me, Shobha aunty for being there always and Jeetu uncle, you're a rockstar and always



guide us for the best. I also want to thank Zee TV for giving us such a great platform to showcase *Kumkum Bhagya*. Last but the most important, *Kumkum Bhagya* is what it is today because of all our fans, so thank you so much to all."

‘I don’t regret my choices’

KUNAL JAISINGH, who plays Veer in SET’s *Kyun Utthe Dil Chhod Aaye*, tells MUSBA HASHMI the attraction of playing the role, how it has become his priority and his story of giving endless auditions

■ **What is your role in Kyun Utthe Dil Chhod Aaye?**

I play Veer, a self-destructive and brooding person who is addicted to alcohol. I am paired opposite Gracy, who plays Amrit in the show. I will be donning a different look. I am extremely excited to be a part of this show and to work with such a lovely production house.

■ **What made you take up the role?**

The show offers beautiful love stories, many action scenes and gives a bit of knowledge to all the viewers about how people's suffering during the partition. Earlier the show managed to depict the pain and sorrow of 1947 perfectly. Now with a leap of four years, the makers are showing the story of the 1951 era and have planned many new things for the viewers. The concept of the show is unique and the overall plot is not only interesting, but intense and heart-wrenching for me. Other than that, I wanted to be a part of the show which stands out from all the other shows I have done in the past.

■ **Did you have any apprehensions?**

No, not at all. I knew I was going to be part of this story post leap. I was actually excited for it. With a lot of twists and turns ahead in the show, this will be a good start for me.

■ **From Mann Kee Awaaz Pratigya to Kyun Utthe Dil... how has the journey been for you?**

It has been a great one. I have been able to grow and learn so much in every role I have played. Every character I essayed holds a special place in my heart because with each character my audience and my fans started loving me more. Not only that, I learnt something from every character I played. Those were not only roles, but life lessons. My only goal during all these years has been to make sure that the audience understands the actions and emotions of the characters I play.

■ **Omkara Singh Oberoi was a much loved character...**

I was always passionate about my career, but getting into this space has been difficult, given the fact that the City of Dreams has a lot to offer but the hard way



Each show has his trials and a story to tell. *Ishqbaaz* was focused on the story of three brothers, and India's first spin-off was *Dil Bole Oberoi*. When it comes to Omkara he was an artist who was the one balancing factor between the brothers and the family. Omkara has been a special character for me. It earned me a lot of love and support from my fans. I am grateful for all that. The character will always be valuable to me. I feel blessed and lucky and I never thought it would be so popular. The team, of course, was great. We are still like a family. We all have encouraged each other to perform at our best and that was visible in the show.

■ **How did acting happen?**

I was always passionate about my career, but getting into this space has been difficult, given the fact that the City of Dreams has a lot to offer but the hard way. I have been a part of endless auditions ever since I have come here. I have even stood in an audition line for more than 10 hours. This industry has offered me a platform to project my skills and I am truly humbled by the fact that today I am getting to do that. My experience in the industry has been a roller coaster ride with a lot of ups and downs, but I have learnt that at the end of it, it's all worth it.

■ **Do you have any regrets?**

Till date, I don't regret anything I have done in life. If I talk about my journey in the industry, it has been beautiful. None of the characters that I have played overlaps each other. We should not regret anything. After all, we do choose the opportunities that we think is right at that time. How things will unfold is not in anyone's hands. Regrets just make you sad and I don't want to feel sad for the choices that I have made. I have surely mellowed with time. I might not do the roles now which I did earlier, but when back then, I was proud of what I was doing and will always be.

■ **What is there in the pipeline?**

My pipeline is full with the current show that I am doing. It is my only priority. I am focused and would like to be loyal to it. I believe to make one's work stand out one should focus on a single thing at a time. That is the reason I prefer not to juggle projects.

VIRUS GETS YOUNGER

Alarm bells have reached a fever pitch with more and more COVID-19 cases being reported in the younger segment, with fatalities. MUSBA HASHMI talks to doctors and experts to see what can be done

The unexplained COVID related deaths in children less than one has rung alarm bells all around the globe. To make things even worse, a heart wrenching video of a woman from Brazil, who lost her toddler to COVID because of the late diagnosis is enough to give you a peek into how alarming the situation really is. Hospitals full, ICU wards on waiting list and oxygen cylinders running off the shelves, the traumatic situation has left people in distress. Finding a bed in hospital has become a stroke of luck. There's nothing else we could imagine with the nation witnessing not less than 2,00,000 cases a day in the second wave of COVID.

And in the middle of all this chaos, the devastating fact is more and more children are testing positive, as compared to last year, and with increased complications. This has been a cause of worry for parents, who took a sigh of relief thinking that their young ones are immune to the virus. But, experts say this was never the case. Though the positivity rate was extremely low, that was mainly because of children being asymptomatic.

"This has been a wrong perception. Children were never immune. They were asymptomatic. However, their caseload was relatively low, it is hard to speculate why at the moment," Dr Sisir Paul, Director and Head of Department of Pediatrics, Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi, tells you.

With the studies still being at a nascent stage, doctors attribute the mutated strain as one of the main reasons of the high positivity rate in children. Not to mention complacency also has a role to play.

"There's no denying that people have become complacent. However, we speculate that the mutated strain is the reason behind the increased positivity rate. We can't say whether children were immune, but yes cases were relatively low. Last year, we were working with 50 per cent capacity, but now it is full," Dr Praveen Khilnani, Director — Pediatric Critical Care, Senior Consultant Pediatric Critical Care & Pulmonology, Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi, says.

The silver lining, however, is that the mortality rate in the young people is less than 10 per cent. And children, specifically, are experiencing not-so-severe symptoms. "Children are often experiencing fever, cough and cold, sore throat, body ache and, in some cases, faster breathing. The recovery rate, fortunately, is between eight and 10 days," Khilnani tells you.

However, there is a varied picture now with this episode of the disease. The common symptoms have changed and children are now reporting gastrointestinal issues. "We have seen cases where some children are reporting diarrhoea and vomiting, with no fever or cold. The clinical picture has changed. Even children as young as one are symptomatic now. To know the exact reason, it will require a lot more detail, but on the face of it, yes mutations have taken place and can be the reason behind the increase in cases," Paul explains.

He adds that the hospital hasn't reported any casualties in children yet, but the situation around the globe is worse. "We have been fortunate enough to have seen moderate cases. Some required ICU, but ventilators were nowhere in the scenario. This gives a ray of hope. However, having said that the situation is grim. Events like elections, malls and theatres opening up and Kumbh Mela hold a possibility to become the reservoirs of the virus. Given such a hard situation, we can't afford to put down our guards," Paul says.

While many doctors doesn't suggest masking up children below the age of five, what can't be compromised at any cost is following all the other precautions. "Avoid outside contact. Don't let your relatives visit you, more so if you have toddlers at home. Don't call several house helps. Meet and greet sessions can wait, COVID won't. Be on optimum guard. If you see any symptoms, self-isolate, even if its normal flu. Since, there has been a change in weather, children may fall sick. However, don't ignore the symptoms, think of it as COVID," Paul opines.

Dr Sumit Gupta, Pediatrician, Columbia Asia Hospital, Ghaziabad, agrees with Paul and says that the surge in cases might be because of the mutant virus.

"We have received around 50 per cent rise in cases of COVID in children since the end of March and more than half of them show symptoms. More than 60 per cent of all OPD cases in children are suspected COVID. There is an acute rise in number especially in Ghaziabad. The fact that more children are getting infected in this wave of the disease may have to do with the mutations in the virus, which has brought in many changes in the disease and its manifestations this time. Since many children are showing symptoms, we have to closely monitor them if they develop multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C) and toxic syndrome, which may happen in severe cases," Gupta tells you.

Experts tell you that MIS-C is a post-COVID complication that can result in swelling of joints, rashes, fever, diarrhoea and bloodshot eyes in children.

"About 50 per cent children that have been admitted to our hospital has, at least, one adult in the family who have tested positive. It is very rare that a child alone has tested positive. So, it is not the children, but their family members who got infected first. But having said that, kids have been, unknowingly, spreaders of the virus. Because until last year they were mostly asymptomatic," Khilnani tells you.



GOLDEN RULES

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ Keep children indoors | importance, even if you are vaccinated |
| ■ If an elder tests positive, make sure he isolates himself | ■ Avoid taking children out to play, even if you do make sure your child doesn't mix with other children |
| ■ Avoid inviting your relatives to your place | ■ Eat healthy and fresh food |
| ■ Mask, sanitiser and social distancing still holds as much | |

Several data collected from a Chinese study of Covid-19 in children has confirmed that more than half of the children participated in the survey showed mild symptoms of fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches and sneezing; while around a third showed signs of pneumonia, with frequent fever, a productive cough and wheeze but without the shortness of breath and difficulty breathing as seen in more severe cases.

Dr Manish Mannan, HOD — Paediatrics & Neonatology, Paras Hospitals, Gurugram, tells you that contrary to the prior belief with the rising cases it is clear that the amount of infection in children is the same as in adults. "It's just that when they do get the infection they get much milder symptoms. Children are predominantly affected in their upper airways so they get cold-like symp-

toms. The perception that children are less affected as compared to adults is also because of the fact that the virus needs a protein on the surface of a cell (a receptor) to get into the inside of a cell and start causing problems. A report from BBC stated that the Coronavirus seems to use the Angiotensin converting enzyme II (ACE-2) receptor for infecting others. It may be that the children have less ACE-2 receptors in their lower airways (lungs) than in their upper airways, which is why it is their upper airways that are predominantly affected, causing less severe issues in them. With that being said, the amount of infection in children has risen considerably as compared to the first wave but is still not same as that in adults presently," Mannan tells you.

Another scary fact is the reports that suggest

IT IS A WRONG PERCEPTION. CHILDREN WERE NEVER IMMUNE. THEY WERE, IN FACT, ASYMPTOMATIC. HOWEVER, THE CASELOAD LAST YEAR WAS RELATIVELY LOW. IT IS HARD TO SPECULATE WHY AT THE MOMENT

— DR SISIR PAUL, DIRECTOR & HEAD OF DEPARTMENT — PEDIATRICS, MADHUKAR RAINBOW CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL, MALVIYA NAGAR, NEW DELHI

children under the age of one might be at a higher risk of severe illnesses with COVID.









"Toddlers may be at a higher risk of suffering from severe illnesses because of the immature immune systems. There are chances that they might develop breathing issues. However, as it is being said, it is too early for us to make a statement," Gupta says.

In the absence of a proven vaccine for children, experts emphasise on the fact that there's nothing much one can do except for following the guidelines laid out by the Government.

While, it is not recommended for children below five to wear masks, the World Health Organisation suggest children who are in general good health can wear a non-medical or fabric mask, if at all. This provides source control, meaning it keeps the virus from being transmitted to others if they are infected and are not aware that they are infected. The adult who is providing the mask should ensure the fabric mask is the correct size and sufficiently covers the nose, mouth and chin of the child.

Children with underlying health conditions such as cystic fibrosis, cancer or immunosuppression, should, in consultation with their medical providers, wear a medical mask. A medical mask controls spreading of the virus and protection to the wearer, and is recommended for anyone who is at higher risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19.

"The only advice to the families is to stay back home and bring back the guard. Even for the older patients who have been vaccinated, we urge them to keep on following the precautions because vaccine alone won't help. You have to be on optimum guard anyway," Khilnani says.

POINTS TABLE							
			P	W	L	NRR	PTS
1		MI	3	2	1	+0.367	4
2		RCB	2	2	0	+0.175	4
3		CSK	2	1	1	+0.616	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		PBKS	2	1	1	-0.909	2
8		SRH	3	0	3	-0.483	0

Ravi Dahiya retains Asian title

Bajrang settles for silver after withdrawing from final due to injury

PTI ■ ALMATY

Indian wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya retained his Asian Championship title with a solid performance but Bajrang Punia settled for a silver medal after withdrawing from the much-awaited final against Takuto Otoguro due to an elbow injury, here on Saturday.

Bajrang told PTI that he did not want to aggravate the condition of his right elbow. He said he started feeling the pain during the quarterfinal against Korean Yongseok Jeong.

“When I was pulling the Korean, the pain in my right elbow resurfaced. It’s the same elbow that I had injured during the World Championship. The coaches advised that I must not take risk so close to the Olympics, so I withdrew,” Bajrang said.

Bajrang did not look his usual self but did not face much competition en route the final. He had no difficulty in getting past Jeong, who hardly attacked in his opening 65kg bout.

His first scoring point was a take-down on counter and earned one more for the passivity of his rival.

Next for him was Mongolia’s Bilguun



Sarmandakh, whom he pinned to ensure his passage into the summit clash.

Bajrang had lost the 2018 World Championship title clash and last year’s Asian Championship final to the Otoguro and could have tested himself against the Japanese but it turned out to be an anti-climactic end to the 65kg competition.

Ravi Dahiya, though, gave India the first freestyle gold medal of this edition with a commanding show.

His supreme stamina and relentless attacking prowess was too good for his opponents in the 57kg. He returned to the mat after a year and in style. He had last competed at this event in New Delhi where he had won gold.

He was slow off the blocks but became his usual dominant self after the first period against Uzbekistan’s Nodirjon Safarov in his opening bout.

Once he got into his rhythm, his moves were too hot to handle for his rival, as he

won 9-2.

Ravi had a lot left in his tank even towards the end while Safarov had lost his steam, making it easy for the Indian to score points.

Next, he faced Palestine’s Ali M M Aburumaila and won on technical superiority.

His title clash against Iran’s Alireza Nosratolah Sarlak was expected to be a tight one but Ravi only got better and better as the fast-paced final progressed.

There were attacks from

both the wrestlers but Ravi was clearly the superior one on the mat with his quick moves as he won 9-4.

Karan Karan bagged the 70kg bronze medal after winning 3-1 against Korea’s Seungbong Lee.

He had reached the quarters with a hard-fought 3-1 win over Iran’s Amirhossein Ali Hosseini but lost the next bout 0-6 to Syrbaz Talgat from Kazakhstan. Later he got into medal round through the repechage route.

Also reaching the medal rounds were Narsingh Pancham Yadav (74kg) and Satywart Kadiyan (97kg), who will fight for bronze after losing their respective semifinals.

Kadiyan moved to the 97kg quarterfinals with an easy 8-0 win over Kyrgyzstan’s Arslanbek Turdubekov.

He scored two points in the first period with push out while the rest were through take-down moves in the second as his rival hardly attacked.

In the quarterfinal against Uzbekistan’s Mukhammadrasul Rakhimov, he played smart to win 4-1.

He then faced Iran’s Ali Khalil Shabanibengar and lost the semifinal by technical superiority in mere 25 seconds.

Lucknow to host T20 WC matches

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After being denied IPL matches, the Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana International Stadium has been awarded the forthcoming T20 World Cup matches, as the Board of Control for Cricket in India has included Lucknow as one of the hosting cities for the big event.

The World Cup is scheduled to be held in India in the months of October-November and Lucknow is expected to get at least five matches. However, things will be clear after the final announcement of the full schedule. Ekana has the third-largest seating capacity in the country and managing director Uday Sinha expressed happiness over the selection of the stadium for the



World Cup matches.

“We are very proud and happy at the same time to be getting this opportunity, and we will leave no stone unturned to make it a gala event,” he said.

Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh Cricket Association secretary Yudhveer Singh termed it as a big opportunity to be one of the nine venues for T20 WC. “We are expecting to host 2-5 matches,” he said.

Lille draws with Montpellier; PSG 4 points behind

AP ■ PARIS

Lille needed a late equalizer from Luiz Araujo to draw 1-1 at home to Montpellier and guarantee it will keep top spot in a close French title race, regardless of whether defending champion Paris Saint-Germain wins this weekend.

With time running out against a well-drilled and counterattacking Montpellier side, a loose ball fell to the Brazilian on the left of the penalty area and Araujo curled a superb shot past goalkeeper Jonas Omlin in the 84th minute.

Eighth-place Montpellier’s main threat -- Teji Savanier providing for strikers Gaetan

Laborde and Andy Delort caught Lille cold after 20 minutes.

The unselfish Laborde chased a pass down the right and whipped in a fine cross which the alert Delort met with a diving header.

He joined Laborde on 12 goals this season, a good total considering that Delort has twice tested positive for coronavirus during this season.

Lille is four points ahead of Champions League semifinalist PSG, which hosts an improving Saint-Etienne side on Sunday without the suspended Neymar.

There are five rounds remaining after this weekend’s matches.

BILLIE JEAN KING CUP

Ankita’s defeat sends India back to regional competition

PTI ■ JURMALA

Ankita Raina’s gallant fight ended in agony yet again as her defeat against world number 47 Anastasija Sevastova in the must-win Play-offs match on Saturday sent the Indian team back to the Asia/Oceania Group of the Billie Jean King Cup.

After her phenomenal fight against 2017 French Open champions Jelena Ostapenko on Friday, the India number one again showed stomach for fight against superior players but Sevastova sealed the match to give her side an unassailable 3-0 lead.

Ranked 174, Ankita lost the first reverse singles match 0-6 6-7(5) to Sevastova, who had got the better of legendary Serena Williams in her team’s previous tie against the USA. India had earned promotion to the Play-offs for the first time in the history of the tournament.

After being bageled in the opening set, Ankita had two set points at 5-2 in the second set but failed to convert. After those chances were blown away, Sevastova reeled off four games in a row to puncture



India’s hopes.

Ankita saved a match point to drag it to the tie-breaker but Sevastova’s immense experience helped her seal the tie.

A forehand from Ankita, sailing over the baseline on the breakpoint, gave the Latvian the first break of the match in the very first game. Sevastova made it 2-0 though Ankita stretched the game with her fierce returns.

In the third game, Ankita netted a backhand on the game

point to be in danger again but found a crushing backhand winner down the line to be on advantage point.

However, the crafty Sevastova had Ankita running on both the flanks and eventually made it deuce.

A second double fault from Ankita at deuce gave Sevastova a chance to get the second break for a 3-0 lead and she got it when Ankita made a backhand error with a feeble single-hand return that did not cross

the net.

The Indian could not get on even board with Sevastova calling the shots. However, there was drama in the second set with Ankita yet again surprising the home camp by rising her game by a few notches. A backhand error from the Latvian gave Ankita two break-points in the second game and another one gave the Indian a 2-0 lead in the second set.

Ankita made it 3-0 by serving the next game at love. However the cushion was lost when Ankita dropped her serve in the fifth game, thanks to unforced errors.

A series of unforced errors from the home player meant that the Indian got another break in the sixth game when Sevastova buried her backhand on the net to give Ankita a 4-2 lead, which became a handsome 5-2 with a confident hold.

Ankita had a chance to close the set in her favour in the next game and force a decider but Sevastova served well to save both.

From there on, it was Sevastova who controlled the game, though Ankita saved a couple of match points.

Mirabai creates world record, bags bronze in Asian C’ship

TASHKENT: Former world champion Mirabai Chanu made a splendid return to the weightlifting arena, setting a new world record in clean and jerk while also bettering her own national record en route winning a bronze medal at the Asian Championship here on Saturday.

Chanu also confirmed her Tokyo Olympic spot as she has now competed in the six mandatory qualifying events.

The 26-year-old Indian lifted 86kg in snatch and a



world record of 119kg in clean and jerk for a total of 205kg.

While the earlier clean and jerk world record was

118kg, Chanu’s personal best total in 49kg was 203kg (88kg+115kg) at the National Championship in February last year.

The gold medal went to Hou Zhihui of China who created a new world record in snatch and total weight with an effort of 213kg (96g+117kg) while her compatriot Jiang Huihua clinched the silver, lifting 207kg (89kg+118kg) in the gold level Olympic qualifier.

Chanu was off to a shaky

start as she failed to lift 85kg in her first two snatch attempts. The diminutive Manipuri then lifted 86kg in her final attempt. However, she finished fourth best, behind Zhihui (96kg), Huihua (89kg) and Aisah Windy Cantika (87kg) of Indonesia.

Chanu began her clean and jerk with a 113kg and then lifted 117kg successfully for her personal best. The Indian then bettered her own performance, hoisting 119kg, more than twice here body weight.

Hamilton takes pole for Emilia-Romagna GP

IMOLA: World champion Lewis Hamilton edged out the Red Bull duo to claim pole position for the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix on Saturday.

It was Hamilton’s 99th career pole and although there is a Red Bull directly behind the Mercedes driver, it will be Sergio Perez rather than Max Verstappen.

Hamilton edged Perez by .039 seconds and was .087 faster than Verstappen, who is expected to be his main challenger this season. “I didn’t expect to be ahead of two Red Bulls, they’ve been so quick this weekend,” Hamilton said. “The car is feeling much better, I want to thank the team for their hard work.”

“I love the challenge, having two Red Bulls will definitely make strategy harder.”

Hamilton’s teammate Valtteri Bottas had a scrappy final lap and will start from eighth on the grid after finishing 487 slower. Lando Norris will start just ahead of Bottas. The McLaren driver was heading for the front row after a superb final lap but had his time deleted because of exceeding track limits.

Charles Leclerc qualified in an encouraging fourth for Ferrari but his teammate Carlos Sainz failed to make it into the final part of qualifying, known as Q3, and will start 11th on the grid.

Pierre Gasly and Daniel Ricciardo will start fifth and sixth, respectively, while Esteban Ocon and Lance Stroll round out the top 10.

Earlier in the day, Verstappen posted

the fastest time in the final practice as the Red Bull driver was nearly half a second faster than the rest of the pack. He was .456 ahead of Norris and .557 clear of Hamilton. Mercedes led the two practice sessions on Friday with Bottas fastest in both, just ahead of Hamilton as Red Bull endured a tough start to the weekend.

Verstappen’s second practice lasted just 10 minutes after a driveshaft problem.

The Emilia-Romagna GP is the second race of the Formula One season. Hamilton won the opener in Bahrain last month, just ahead of Verstappen after a thrilling duel.

Saturday’s practice was briefly red-flagged after Nicholas Latifi lost control at the Villeneuve chicane and slid through the gravel and into the barriers.

BCCI plans to start Ranji season in December

No Irani, Duleep Trophy this year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BCCI plans to kick-start its 2021-22 domestic season in September this year with the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament and has also allocated a three-month window to the Ranji Trophy from December after the marquee event had to be cancelled last season due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the Duleep Trophy, Deodhar Trophy and Irani Cup are not a part of the tentative calendar prepared by the cricket operations team. Apart from this, five women’s competitions have also been dropped from the roster.

The 2020-21 season was a severely truncated one with only the National T20 (Mushtaq Ali) and ODI (Vijay Hazare Trophy) championships being held in the wake of pandemic. For women, only the National One-Day meet was organised.

Amid a second wave of COVID-19 cases across India, the BCCI is still hopeful of conducting the domestic season across age-groups in men and women’s categories after a curtailed last season.

With India playing the T20 World Cup in October and the mega IPL auctions in the offing next year, it is understood that all stakeholders want to start off with two white ball tournaments -- Mushtaq Ali T20 between ‘mid-September to October’ followed by the Vijay Hazare Trophy in

Amid a second wave of COVID-19 cases across India, the BCCI is still hopeful of conducting the domestic season across age-groups in men and women’s categories after a curtailed last season

November.

Ranji Trophy, India’s premier tournament which was cancelled for the first time in 87 years in 2020, has been planned between December and March in the upcoming season.

The BCCI has also slotted the U-23 tournaments for men and women along with the U-19 events which weren’t held during the last season.

The performances in the U-19 One Day Challenger tournament along with Cooch Behar Trophy (days format) and Vinoo Mankad trophy (one day) will help in selection of India colts team for ICC U-19 World Cup next year.

Women’s T20 as well as ODI Challenger Trophy will not be played along with these events’ under-23 versions. The under-19 women’s T20 Challenger Trophy will also not be played.

Kane injured after scoring in Spurs’ 2-2 draw at Everton

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Harry Kane scored twice, including a second-half equalizer, before limping off with an ankle injury in Tottenham’s 2-2 draw at Everton in the Premier League as both teams stayed on the fringe of the race for Champions League qualification.

The England captain’s latest injury comes ahead of Tottenham playing Manchester City in the English League Cup final on April 25 -- the only shot at a trophy this season for Jose Mourinho’s team.

Kane rolled his right ankle under the weight of a tumbling Richardson at a corner in second-half stoppage time at Goodison Park. Kane hobbled off after treatment, walking around the perimeter of the field unaided toward the locker room.

“I think it’s too early to say something,” Mourinho said immediately after the match on Friday.

“For him to leave the pitch (at) 2-2 with a couple of minutes to go is obviously because he felt something. But let me be optimistic and believe he has time to recover.”

Mourinho added: “We all felt the same fears of something that stops him playing Wednesday (against



Southampton in the league) and especially Sunday, but we will see.” The striker has suffered with a number of ankle issues in recent years.

Earlier, Kane moved onto a league-high 21 goals for the season, two more than Liverpool’s Mohamed Salah, with his clinically taken equalizer in the 68th minute after a defensive mix-up.

Kane had given Tottenham the lead in the 27th, only for a double from Gylfi Sigurdsson the first coming from the penalty spot following a foul by Sergio Reguilon on James Rodriguez to put Everton ahead.

Sigurdsson’s goals came in the 31st and 62nd minutes.

Tottenham stayed in seventh place, and is now five points behind the fourth-place West Ham having played one game more. Everton is a point further back in eighth.

It appeared that February’s nine-goal FA Cup thriller between the teams Everton won it 5-4 after extra time had used up all the fun for this fixture as it was a drab opening 25 minutes. Richardson’s shot, which Hugo Lloris saved comfortably, was the only moment that passed as entertainment.

But the game burst into life with two goals in four minutes.

Spurs took the lead with their first foray into Everton’s box as Kane was

clinical. Everton defender Michael Keane could only glance on a cross from the left by Tanguy Ndombele into the path of Kane, who controlled and fired left-footed into the bottom corner.

Mourinho’s team let another advantage slip thanks to a quick response from the hosts.

Reguilon was adjudged to have shoved Rodriguez as the Colombian shaped to shoot, with the referee immediately pointing to the spot even though replays suggested Rodriguez kicked the ground and contact was minimal.

Sigurdsson made no mistake from the spot, sending Lloris the wrong way.

Everton gained momentum from its equalizer and should have gone in front before halftime. A brilliant move ended with Richardson playing in Rodriguez, but his snap-shot was saved by Lloris, who also kept out Richardson’s header before the break.

It did not take much for Spurs to improve after halftime and they fashioned good chances in the opening 15 minutes.

First, Son Heung-min ghosted into the area and shot straight at

Jordan Pickford when Kane was begging for a pull-back and, after more great work by Kane to open up play, Ndombele’s effort was deflected over the crossbar.

From the resulting corner, Toby Alderweireld came close to regaining Spurs’ lead, but his header hit the near post.

But it was Everton which moved in front, cutting Spurs open by working the ball out to Seamus Coleman, who pulled it back to Sigurdsson to direct a well-taken first-time finish into the far corner with his left foot. However, the home side was the master of its own downfall by allowing Tottenham to hit back just six minutes later.

Keane and Mason Holgate collided with each other when trying to clear a cross and the ball fell to the one man they did not want it to. Kane made them pay, lashing home in style from 10 meters out.

Kane almost completed his hat trick minutes later but a header clipped the outside of the post.

It was Everton’s players who were left with their heads in their hands at the end as they squandered a great chance to win it when Richardson blazed over a virtually open goal.

We need to build a bunch of pacers for T20 WC and other series: Waqar

KARACHI: Pakistan’s bowling coach Waqar Younis on Saturday said the team is looking to build a strong pool of pacers ahead of its upcoming assignments, including the T20 World Cup.

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to be held in India in October-November.

“All the boys got rest after PSL postponement so fatigue is not a problem with them but we will sit down and discuss

with them as we monitor every bowler.

“Of course we will try out other bowlers as we need to build a bunch of pacers for upcoming series and tournaments including the World T20,” Waqar said.

The fast bowling great said that winning the One-Day and T20 series in South Africa was a big achievement for the team.

He said the team management would look at giving

left-arm pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi a break from the coming matches in Zimbabwe.

The team has faced criticism for playing Shaheen Shah without a break across formats in recent months.

Asked about the disappearance of young pacer Naseem Shah from Pakistan squad after being touted as a big find two years ago, Waqar said he was having some injury and fitness issues.

“He is a very promising young fast bowler and we are confident that after playing some more domestic cricket he will come back stronger and better. He is one for the future,”

Waqar also defended the performance of his bowlers in the twin series in South Africa, saying they had shown a lot of energy.

“They are getting better and better.”

The former Pakistan cap-

tain noted that in modern day white-ball cricket bowlers returning 8 to 10 runs per over was expected because of the flat tracks and the demanding conditions.

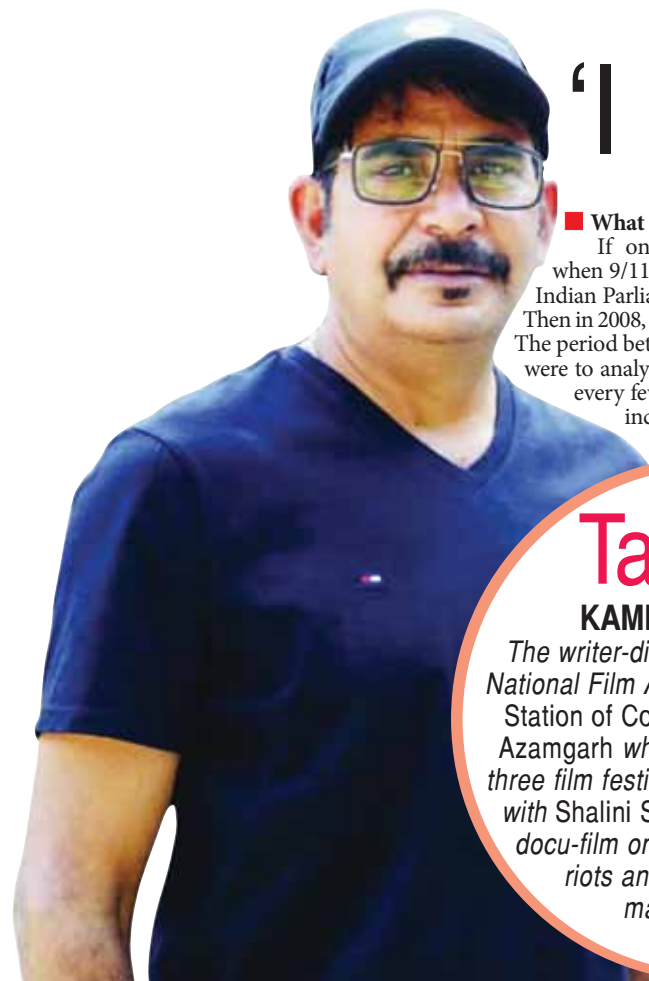
“The T20 format is so fast-moving and the type of tracks you get sometimes bowlers suffer. I think it’s a mix and match as long as you are winning matches no need to worry.”

Waqar said that if South

Africa were without some of their key players for the last ODI and T20 series, this was not Pakistan’s problem.

He also made it clear that he was the bowling coach and had no role in the selection of the team.

“That is not my domain, that is the head coach and captain’s domain and I don’t try to interfere. I give my feedback and they decide what is best for the team.”



■ **What is Azamgarh about?**
If one remembers, in 2001, when 9/11 happened, the same year Indian Parliament came under attack. Then in 2008, Mumbai was under attack. The period between 2001 to 2008, if one were to analyse it, one would find that every few months there was a big incident. In 2006, there were several

blasts in Mumbai's suburban railway network. Then Azamgarh connection came to light. I read news about a *maulvi* who used to bring children from Bihar under the pretext of teaching them, brainwash them and send them to Pakistan. He was caught by Delhi Police. Then there was another news about a Muslim boy from UP who ranked among the top three in Class XII exam. I have taken these three real incidents and woven a story around it and made the movie.
■ **What is Delhi Riots: A Tale of Burn & Blame about?**
It is totally about what happened during the Delhi riots last year. The news that came, especially in select international and Indian media and even if one checks Wikipedia, it said that it was the Hindus who killed the Muslims. When such riots take place, one must check facts. Then there was other news that came to light. There was a blame game. But the hurt was being ignored. I felt that there was a need to find the truth. I visited the place and spoke to people. What I found is what this film is about. I have let the survivors and experts speak and tell the story.

Talktime

KAMLESH K MISRA

The writer-director who won the 66th National Film Award for *Madhubani: The Station of Colors*, is set to debut with *Azamgarh* which has been selected in three film festivals in the US. He speaks with Shalini Saksena about his film, a docu-film on 2020 North-East Delhi riots and how tough it is to make such films

WHEN RIOTS TAKE PLACE, ONE MUST CHECK FACTS. THERE WAS OTHER NEWS THAT CAME TO LIGHT DURING DELHI RIOTS. THERE WAS A NEED TO FIND THE TRUTH. I VISITED THE PLACE AND SPOKE TO PEOPLE. WHAT I FOUND IS WHAT THIS FILM IS ABOUT. I HAVE LET THE SURVIVORS AND EXPERTS SPEAK AND TELL THE STORY

■ **How tough was this project?**
These projects are really tough to handle. I started my career as a journalist. We, sometimes, feel that there is a need to maintain a balance, even if it is not required. Take an example. If I slap someone and he slaps me back, both can't be wrong or right. One has to see who slapped first. In this film, we have, without trying to blame anyone, put across the point who slapped first. The aim was to find the root cause of the riots.
■ **What is the reason for making short films?**
Making a full-length feature film is an expensive proposition. I am not from the film background nor do I have backing of a big and established production house. I have had to struggle to become a filmmaker. We have to take baby steps. This is when people sit up and look at your work. I had made a short film with Tom Alter — *Kitaab*. It was shown at many film festivals and much appreciated. Then I made *Madhubani...* (in 2018), for which I got the National Award. In between I made *Azamgarh* but it's release got postponed due to lockdown and looking for a fresh date to release it. The focus is to make feature films but if a topic comes my way that needs to be talked about and if

I have the resources, I will make a docu-film on that as well.
■ **How did social work find its way into your filmmaking career?**
I am a bit sensitive to what is happening around me. I feel that if one can take some time out from one's professional and personal life, one must do whatever one can for the less privileged. I have joined an organisation and try to help those in need. We did some work for the people when we were under lockdown.
■ **How did it feel when you won the National Award?**
When I made *Kitaab*, I didn't make it with the intentions of getting an award but after it was completed, I felt that I would definitely get an award. But I didn't. When I made *Madhubani...* and got an award for it. I feel the same for *Azamgarh*. But let's see how things pan out.
■ **What are your upcoming projects?**
I am making a documentary. It is about showcasing Delhi under the lockdown. It is a challenging subject — to recreate the same scenario now. I am putting a lot of hard work here. I draw my inspiration from the journalist that is still inside me and try and tell stories that one doesn't usually get to read.

MUSBA HASHMI catches up with ANAM HASHIM, the only Indian professional street bike freestyle athlete to win an international stunt competition in 2017, about how she fell in love with bikes and the challenges of riding solo

RIDING INTO THE SUNRISE

Women bike riders are not a surprise anymore. Time and again, women have proved that gender is no bar and there's nothing called a man's job. However, what may flabbergast you is a stunt woman. Of course, there are likes of Reshma Pathan and Geeta Tandon, but they all rule the B-town. Meet Anam Hashim, an Indian professional street bike freestyle athlete, though she isn't a celebrity but what she does is worth mentioning. Hashim is the only Indian stunt athlete to win an international stunt competition in 2017.

If this is not enough, she is also known as the first



woman who rode to Khardung La on a TVS Scooty alone and also led a group of 10 women to Khardung La in 2016 during the Himalayan Highs.
However, it was not as if she woke up and decided to play with bikes. For her, it has been a natural process just like breathing.
"Since childhood, I have been a person who loved to move everything around. I never played with girls. Even my choice of toys included trains, aeroplanes and bikes. I remember maneuvering the handle of my father's scooter. So, in a way, I was fond of

vehicles as long as I can remember. It has been a natural process for me," Hashim tells you.
Stunt riding and offloading is what that excites Hashim above everything. Not that, she doesn't like motorcycling, but the former offers more challenges and that is what she is on a lookout for.
"There is a constant urge that I need to learn new techniques and things. I have done wheelies so much that it is normal. That's why I started doing Cross country rally racing because it is challenging. It requires a lot of speed. It is thrilling, exciting and

The challenge, in our country, is the lack of infrastructure. It is hard to find a washroom when you are riding. The other thing is if you are riding solo, you will be troubled by men

dangerous also, but this is what I love doing," she says.
Human minds, she says are more negative than positive. And as a result, judgments on the basis of gender and religion never parted ways from her.
"It is never ending. I have stopped focusing on that because there is nothing much I can do about it. As long as something makes me happy, I will continue to do it," Hashim asserts.
Performing stunts is like a cup of tea for Hashim. There are no challenges that she faces as such. However, the problem lies with the men and

the infrastructure. "I have been performing stunts for more than nine years. It's like a daily routine for me. I have learnt to tackle my fears. The challenge, in our country, is the lack of infrastructure. It is hard to find a washroom while you are on solo rides. When you are riding on Himalayas, there is nothing you will find. The other thing is if you are riding solo, you will be troubled by men.

"Even if I am riding a scooty in my city, there are boys who try to zip around just to get your attention. It's rare that somebody actually appreciates you because they don't know who is inside the helmet, but the moment they figure out they will be around to trouble you," she tells you.
However, back when she started, there were times when she just left her bike in panic. "Initially, I used to panic a lot. But then, with time I learnt to deal with it. There is no solution to eliminating fears but to keep practicing," Hashim says.
There is always a trial and error approach that one can follow in everything one does, however what Hashim does, doesn't allow her to do so.

"There's never been a time when a stunt had gone wrong. I never do anything that can harm others. Also, I have been doing it for so long now that I even know how to crash.
It is the basic one should know — how to land and crash. This is how you can manage to perform the stunts. I know a lot of men who have hit people so hard that they died on the spot. Why? Because they didn't know how to land properly," she tells you.
Travelling to Khardung La on her own, she says, was one of the best and challenging times of her life. "The whole event was a company's idea who approached me and I immediately said yes to the adventure.
I was learning stunt riding then. Back then, I was pushing myself to explore things. It was my first big thing apart from stunt riding that I did back in 2015. And because of that event, I have become an explorer now who is ready to take on challenges," Hashim, who is also featuring in &TV's music video *Awesome In Disguise*, explains.



'I do out-of-the-box and refreshing songs'

Indi pop singer ANAMIKA, who started her musical journey from New York with a band, speaks with SHALINI SAKSENA about her journey and her latest single, Ferraree

■ **How did your musical journey begin?**
Besides learning Indian classical I have learnt western classical as well since I was studying in New York. Then home beckoned and I came back to India and saw the trend here. My first song was *Catwalk*, it was a fun song too. Then I realised that I had to get into music and started doing other songs like *Intezaar* and *Kala Sha Kala*. Indian classical helped me because of my strength on stage; western classical helped me in the power of the voice. So you can give me any song — international or Punjabi or Hindi — I can sing all since I can modulate my voice accordingly.
■ **What is Ferraree about?**
It is about the car — Ferrari — as the name of the song suggests. This car has always been on my bucket list; it is my favourite. The brand, for me, is larger than life and so has been my vision. I have always wanted something out-of-the-box, something that takes away from the usual and breaks the monotony. There have always been songs about boys chasing girls. This time I wanted to do a song about a girl chasing a boy, something different, something refreshing. Then I wrote my lyrics accordingly and hence they are fun. The words are not complicated, they are very next door and relate to the song. The moment people will hear it, they would want to sing with it.
■ **Does this mean that the song is for a particular segment?**
Not at all. All my songs are for every generation. This is one thing that I always keep in mind, that I will not do a song just for teenagers or youngsters. No. Songs that I do are for people of all ages. Once you hear this song and see the video, you will relate to it.
■ **How long did you work on this song?**
I started working on it much before the lockdown last year, in January. We were scheduled to release the song in October 2020. But due to COVID-19 protocol we had to defer it. We did the video in November and ready it in December. But choose to wait and release the song on Mahashivratri and it is my mother's birthday. I just wanted to thank her.
■ **You had a band in NY. What made you come to India?**
Yes, I worked with a band called Yankies. I came back to India due to my responsibility towards my mother and father. They were very lonely. So, I wanted to be back home. Also, it was never in my mind to do an album or anything like that. I am a live band singer. I formed a band called Temptations and used to sing at the Le Meridien. From there, I got spotted and here I am.
■ **You are the only Indi pop singer who sings in Punjabi and English. How did you end up doing this?**
I also sing in Hindi and Spanish as well. It just happened and that is how versatile I want to be. I don't want to stick to one genre or style of music. This is my passion. But these songs so big like *Intezaar...* *Kala Sha Kala* is a wedding anthem. We were probably thinking 10 years ahead when we did these songs. This song, that I have just done, will carry on for another couple of years. My idea is to sustain.

■ **Have you had to change your style a bit due to changing musical tastes of the people today?**
I am one person who goes with the trend. I adapt to what is happening in the present. I move with the time. I tell everybody that my idol is JLo (Jennifer Lopez). I follow her to the T. She is always going with the time. I want to do the same and keep going till I can. I have good support.
■ **What next?**
My next song *Sha La La La* I ready. Then there is another song, *Chak De Dhol*. I have done an international song for world peace. Due to lockdown it got postponed.

LET THE DUST SETTLE

Dust allergies are common in the country triggering reactions among people. But now, a liquid-based anti-pollution product aims to cure all dust and air pollution problems. SHALINI SAKSENA tells you more

Last year, Delhi's average annual concentration of PM2.5 was 84.1 microgram per cubic meter, more than double the level of Beijing which averaged 37.5 g/m3 during the year, according to a report by a Swiss group that measures air quality levels based on the concentration of the lung-damaging fine particles. This leads to dust allergies. But this could soon be a thing of the past.

A liquid-based anti-pollution product aims to reduce the PM levels up to 65 per cent in seven days. All one has to do is add 70 ml of the liquid — Curol+ — to 10 litres of water and mop the floor with this mix or spray the same onto the carpet. The coating creates a safety net, the floor becomes a giant air filter and the pollutants, dust mites and virus carrying dust are attracted to the floor. The mopping cycle removes the dust from the floor and creates a new coating. On day seven, there is a 65 per cent reduction in air pollution in the

treated surface.

Dhruv Bhatnagar, CEO, DB Life Science LLP tells you that the main cause of worry in a country like ours is not so much as the carbon levels but the PM levels. "You mix 70 ml of this product in water and mop the floor with it. The dust particles get attracted to the floor, they settle down and the next day, you mop the floor again and the settled PM gets removed and the cycle continues," Bhatnagar says.

He tells you that just like one would eat a medicine for a lifelong illness, this liquid needs to be applied daily. "It is safe, 100 per cent organic, food safe, 100 per cent water soluble, biodegradable and PH neutral. Unfortunately, if one were to stop using it, the pollution levels will start rising again," Bhatnagar says.

For the liquid to be effective, one can't use any other product on the floor. This, he tells you, will bring down the efficacy of the liquid to zero. But all



those who have been mopping their floors with sanitisers to keep COVID-19 away from their homes, need not worry. All they have to do is mop the floor twice — in the morning, using Curol+; in the evening using sanitiser with an eight to nine-hour window between mops.

Whether mopping the floor with sanitiser works or not is difficult to ascertain, there is need for more research, Bhatnagar says. "There was a research done, over a period of time, by Harvard University, US, that wherever, the PM levels were higher — indoors and outdoors — in those

areas transmission and fatality rates were higher. Our guarantee on paper, to anybody using our product, is that the liquid can reduce PM levels by 50-60 per cent within seven days," Bhatnagar says. He is quick to point out that if people are using his product, ideally, they don't need to use any other disinfectant.

"The advantage of this liquid is that this product has been made in such a way that it does the work of a normal disinfectant available in the market. One doesn't really need to use anything else on the floor. Our aim here is to tell people that our product reduced PM levels. The fact that it cleans the floor as well, is an added benefit, not the end goal," Bhatnagar says.

For outdoors, since the PM is there all the time and multiplying every day, it can't be removed but there is a solution. "This is where our expertise comes in. We don't remove the pollution. We reduce the effects of it. We spray the area

the pioneer agenda

FROM THE INSIDE

Lokas 2: What Exists Above

To move from the *Bhulok* to *Bhuvalok* (Astral Plan), from *Tamas* to more *Rajas*, we need to work on controlling our senses

2



4

Of learning and wisdom

Every seeker must undergo a mandatory grooming process before being allowed exposure to the particular subject of learning

I personally think that if you deny something or if you hide something you're inadvertently admitting it's wrong
— Amber Heard



TELLING THE TALE OF HERITAGE

Stories are an excellent mode of keeping the history of heritage alive, writes SUTAPA BASU, as she shares her impressions on the importance of making heritage a part of contemporary storytelling

Stories have disseminated consciousness of our past cultures since times immemorial. Whether through cave paintings or oral narrations, the earliest mode of passing traditions, history, customs, and rituals through generations has been only through storytelling. Before written language was discovered, even certain work skills were passed from father to son through stories. The reason is simple, anything woven into a story is unforgettable. Storytelling is a powerful tool that has massive lasting impact. When we listen to stories or read them, they boost our feelings of trust, compassion, empathy and positively influence our social behaviour. Storytelling has a unique ability to build connections. When we hear a well-told story, your brain reacts as if we are experiencing it ourselves. We respond to stories because they cultivate a sense of togetherness. Thus, stories that tell us about our past or what we have inherited from our ancestors make us feel, we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

WHAT IS HERITAGE?

Heritage is the complete scope of inherited traditions, monuments, objects, and culture. Most significantly, it is the range of contemporary activities, meanings, and behaviour that we draw from them. Heritage includes, but is much more than just preserving, excavating, displaying, or restoring a collection of old things. Heritage is tangible as well as intangible. Monuments, artifacts, books, archived records of events are tangible while traditions, lifestyles and mannerisms are some of the intangible elements that we inherit. We can explore heritage through excavations, conservation, restoration and display of concrete objects. However, history of songs, recipes, cuisine, nuances of language, dances, dress and other conventions of legacy need to be perceived and appreciated. An excellent mode of keeping the history of heritage alive, generation after generation, is through stories. For what is history but story telling? Let's see how some of the palpable as well as abstract elements of heritage have benefited through telling stories.

ARCHITECTURE

Old forts and castles, mansions and monuments are natural source for stories, myths, and tales. When I visited Chittorgarh fort, one of the myths I heard was about how the religious fervour of Meera Bai, the Princess of Mewar, had kept intact her chamber in the huge palace though the rest of the royal residence had been flattened. Obviously, I went back and read up everything available about the history of the palace and fort. I discovered more such myths. In *The Pillars of the Earth*, author Ken Follet

describes in great detail how a 12th century cathedral is built. He makes a tale of its unusual architecture, politics and weaves civil war, famine and religious strife around it. Bimal Mitra's Bengali novel *Saheb, Bibi, Golam* made into the famous film, *Sahib, Bibi Aur Ghulam* is set in a *zamindari* mansion that resonates with the culture of the period. His entire story is about the feudal and patriarchal traditions which emanate from the mansion. Another story like that is *Shatranj Ke Khilari* about the *nawabi* culture that has been filmed in the old palaces of Lucknow.

CUISINE

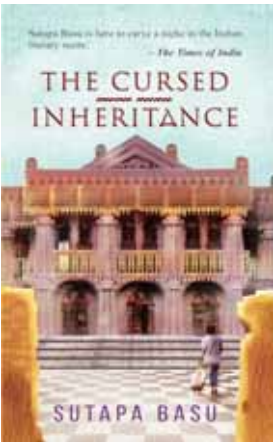
An amazing story that revolves around food, its concoction, history and influence is *Like Water For Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel. Tita, the tragic protagonist of the story, is only able to express herself when she cooks. The chapters even carry recipes. They fascinated me and I even cooked some of them. The stories about food gave me a wonderful view of regional cuisine. Another book that has enamoured me is *The Flavour of Spice* by Marryam H Reshi that gloriously celebrates spices. Reading her book, I embarked upon a delightful foray into the heritage of Indian cooking as she traces history of spices as far back as possible.

WAY OF LIFE

Reading *Gone With The Wind* by Margaret Mitchell gives the reader an excellent insight into lifestyles, dresses, social customs and attitudes prevalent in southern parts of USA during the American Civil War in the 1800s. The book has become a reference point for scholars of that period. Vikram Seth's novel *A Suitable Boy* brings us the perfume of courtesans and old-world charm of the pre-independence period. It gives us a peep into lifestyles, notions and sentiments of a bygone culture.

DRESS

Dramas written by playwrights such as Shakespeare, Kalidas or Anton Chekov, when staged, are a feast for costume designers. They display the fashions worn during a specific period in a certain parts of the world where the dramas are set. However, stories are created not only by writers but are also told by raconteurs. When the *Ramcharitra Manas* or *Meghdoot* is recited there are vivid descriptions of garments, headresses and weapons which make them come alive through mental visuals for the listeners. History and heritage of dresses come alive only through these descriptions. We can then compare them and find out what of that heritage still remains in our fashions today.



WE RESPOND TO STORIES BECAUSE THEY CULTIVATE A SENSE OF TOGETHERNESS. THUS, STORIES THAT TELL US ABOUT OUR PAST OR WHAT WE HAVE INHERITED FROM OUR ANCESTORS MAKE US FEEL, WE ARE PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN OURSELVES

MEANS OF TRANSPORT

Read *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and we find out about chaises, stagecoaches, barouches, phaetons, and curricles. What about *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne to know about submarines or fictional wonder vehicles such as the muggle car from the *Harry Potter* series? *Pather Panchali* by written by Bibhutibhushan Bandhopadhyaya and put on celluloid by Satyajit Ray shows its protagonist's obsession with the train that passes his village. Since his only travel experience had been on a bullock cart, the speeding train enthralled him.

TRADITIONS

Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is a wonderful cameo on the traditional Christmas spirit. Similarly, *Sense and Sensibility* by Austen profiles the Victorian custom of older men marrying young girls. Emily Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights* is all about how social class creates conflicts among its characters. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *Namesake* and *The Lowlands* are excellent profiles of traditions and rituals in different parts of India. Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* gives insights into class disparities of an India of a decade ago. Chitra Divakaruni's *Palace of Illusions* takes the reader back to the rituals of the *Mahabharata* period of Indian history while *Before We Visit the Goddess* is about multi-generational bonds, that rise from the countryside of Bengal, India and sweep into the streets of Houston, Texas.

NUANCES OF LANGUAGE

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is a wonderful study of the use of dialect by different social classes in nineteenth century America. In fact, introducing dialect into literary writing goes back to Chaucer. Non-standard spellings and slang are used often in literature to delineate characters and give them identity. Evolving language is one of true measures of heritage. Do you remember Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*? If only learning the correct dialect could make a flower girl into a lady of consequence, how important can language be in the reconstruction of society? Ruskin Bond often uses regional nuances and dialect to create atmosphere and build his characters. Many of his stories are set in the terai of the Himalayas and his villagers often use words in their own dialect in dialogues. With such eminent authors to light up my path, I have included many features of heritage in my books to build ambience, build characters and bring authenticity to my storytelling. In all

my historical fiction books, I create the historical period through visual pen pictures of the dress, cuisine and traditions of the period and place. In *The Curse of Nader Shah*, I have exposed Nader Shah's obsession with the colour red on his garments and his creation of the four-cornered hat, the *kulah-e-naderi*. In *The Legend of Genghis Khan*, I have described the wide range of knives that the Mongols always carried on their belts and their varied purpose. *Padmavati* has numerous regional words sprinkled across the story for the sake of authenticity.

My latest book, *The Cursed Inheritance* focuses on the city of Kolkata and its cultural nuances. The *zamindari* mansions that dot the city inspired the setting of this cozy mystery inside a dilapidated yet grand mansion of Kolkata, called Sarkar Bari. I describe egg concoctions being cooked that are special to Kolkata as well as a coal stove built inside an iron pail, a common cooking implement in Bengal.

Kolkata is one of few cities which still has the hand-pulled rickshaws. Mentioned numerous times in my new book, is Kolkata's iconic vehicle though the protagonist also empathises with the emaciated pullers and their livelihoods. I have chronicled the tradition of celebrating the festival of Durga Puja in the mansions of old *zamindari* families in this novel. Belief in *tantric* practices and demons as guardians of treasures is one the regional features of rural Bengal which has been exploited to the hilt.

Stories, narratives, and storytelling are central aspects of all cultures and thus, a part of heritage. For the storytelling to become an effective propagator of cultural history, it must engage the listener or reader, and provide a narrative that is both cognitively and emotionally compelling. People are natural storytellers. They tell narratives about their experiences and the meanings that these experiences have in their lives. All cultures and societies also possess their own stories or narratives about their past and their present, and sometimes about their view of the future. The memories and retelling of the past provide a sense of security in an uncertain world. Stories, both written and verbal, are veritable source for this history.

Stories are a thread of timelessness that runs through a rapidly changing environment. Hence, stories revolving around heritage bring a special sense of belonging and of continuity. It reduces global conflict and brings empathy for co-existence. All said and done, storytelling is one of the dominant means of preserving heritage and passing down of values and traditions that make the global social fabric stronger.

The writer is an author and poet. Her book, *The Cursed Inheritance*, has been recently published

Importance of behavioural economics during Covid

The coronavirus pandemic has not only grabbed the headlines but has also thrown the global health emergency care in disarray. The ubiquitous virus has not spared anyone, not even the most prosperous economies of the world.

Studies have shown that people living with comorbidity (i.e., concomitant morbidity) are under high risk of falling critically ill or succumbing to coronavirus. They are dying from the in-hospital complications and a high incidence of mortality. The comorbidity is mostly of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, cerebrovascular accident, malignancy, asthma, cardiovascular disease, chronic kidney and obstructive pulmonary diseases, etc.

Moreover, persons with diabetes have been in the lime-light since the inception of the pandemic as the epidemiological data have revealed their high risk of several clinical adversaries (The Lancet, 2020). As per the statistics, 71 per cent of deaths are owing to NCDs globally, 41 million people every year, of which 15 million are under the age of 70 years. Moreover 8.5 million cases are from low and middle income countries.

The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology published its findings based on 61 million individuals in England on their absolute and relative risk of mortality due to Covid-19 and the type of diabetes. It finds that the odd ratio of in-hospital deaths is 3.51, and 2.03 for persons with type-1 and type-2 diabetes, respectively. Information from 1561 Covid-19 patients from two hospitals in Wuhan showed that those with diabetes (9.8%) were more likely to need admission to the intensive care unit or to die, and similar cases are also noted from other parts of the world.

However, despite having a high percentage of diabetes, the



A patient waits inside an ambulance to be admitted to a dedicated Covid-19 hospital in Ahmedabad on April 15, 2021

AP

reported cases of mortality in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are comparatively low so far. The climatic and geographical factors have some bearing on this low fatality rate in this region. (Apicella et. al., The Lancet, July 17, 2020).

Using the Longitudinal Aging Study in India (LASI, 2017-19) database of the Harvard, IIPS and the University of Southern California on disease and health condition of the popu-

lation aged 45 years and above, we estimated that 18.28 per cent have comorbidity. About 60 per cent of the patients with diabetes have high blood pressure, while 17.32 per cent of patients with high cholesterol levels are suffering from chronic heart diseases. This co-occurrence of more than one disorder in the same individual is a matter of utmost concern during the raging pandemic. Our results also demonstrated that 75 per cent of the indi-

viduals suffering from comorbidity are hardly ever or never engaged in vigorous physical activities. Out of total patients suffering from comorbidity, about one-quarter indulge in substance use. Cases among females are more than males and it increases with the rise in income from the second to fifth income quintile.

The Government's initiative to prioritise the people with comorbidity in this age group on the vaccination list is the

need of the hour and has been followed from March 1 to curb the second wave of covid.

However, the public spending on NCDs is less than 0.5 per cent of GDP in India. The findings of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) of 2015-16 state that obesity has given a steep rise to hypertension among people with BMI more than 30. While 11 per cent of the eligible women (i.e, age 15-49) have hypertension, including 7 per cent having stage-1

hypertension, and stage-2 and stage-3 hypertension at 1 per cent each. On blood pressure parameter, it finds 61 per cent women as compared to 43 per cent men, but only 1 per cent of them take anti-hypertensive medicines.

The National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Disease and Stroke (NPCDCS) has been executed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to

raise awareness regarding risk factors and establishment of NCD clinics, cardio care centre and screening at primary health-care level. The National Action Plan has also been conceived along the global monitoring framework to reduce the premature deaths from NCDs to 25 per cent by 2025. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has militated against Government's efforts of integrating NPCDCS with National Health Mission and AYUSH to promote a healthy lifestyle and strengthening infrastructure to detect NCDs at an early stage.

The focus of the healthcare system in India at present lies on four important directions -- intervention in maternal and child health, preventive and affordable healthcare, medical infrastructure, and communicable and non-communicable diseases. Under the aegis of Ayushman Bharat Scheme, the Health and Wellness Centres, Primary Healthcare Centres, Community Health Centres are providing free diagnostic services for the NCDs.

Simply designing and implementing policies are not sufficient to weaken the bond between Covid-19 and comorbidity. There is a need to eliminate practical and psychological barriers to healthy behaviour, which is possible by the adoption of a behavioural economics approach. Integration of these idiosyncratic approaches into policymaking will illustrate its ability to improve both the effectiveness and efficiency of policies through well-designed interventions in curtailing the comorbidity, especially during the second of Covid-19.

(Pratap C Mohanty teaches Economics at IIT Roorkee. He specialises in Health Economics. Pragya Taneja is a PhD Fellow, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Roorkee)

Integration of idiosyncratic approaches into policymaking will illustrate its ability to improve both the effectiveness and the efficiency of policies through well-designed interventions in curtailing comorbidity, especially during the second of Covid-19



PRATAP C MOHANTY



PRAGYA TANEJA

PERSPECTIVE

Takers' total reliance key to vaccination success

From the early-vaccinated who share their experience with others to the vaccine administrators, local bodies that facilitate the vaccination centres, healthcare community, policymakers and the media, everyone has a role to highlight the need to support and encourage the vaccination drive



SUBHROJOYOTI BHOWMICK

It is crucial that the world's largest vaccination campaign in India must succeed with more shots being administered because this is the green shoot of hope we have to rebuild our lives and our economy and to build India stronger.

Covid-19 has had an unprecedented impact in the way we live and work. The lockdown and quarantine protocols also fueled social anxiety as more cases were identified, and reports of deaths due to Covid-19 related complications trickled in.

Every death is a tragic loss; every death impacts people and families in ways that go unreported. With over 1.69 lakh lives already lost to the pandemic, there is urgent need to embrace the nationwide vaccination drive.

The nation's resilience and prompt action has seen it record among the world's lowest number of cases and deaths per million of the population, but we must continue to build on this through the most effective and safe tool that science has developed — prompt vaccination.

After all, vaccines have helped contain several contagious diseases. The fact that we are smallpox free is just one example of how successful vaccination campaigns have enabled the nation to address pressing health-care crises.

While the first dose of smallpox vaccine reportedly arrived in the country in 1802, the country's first national campaign in 1962 enabled us in achieving the desired effect through the tireless efforts of volunteers and a greater awareness among the public on the need to be vaccinated.

We have seen similar success in preventing tuberculosis through the BCG vaccination programme. Further, from being hyperendemic for polio in the early 1990s, India's success in eliminating wild polioviruses is another inspiring example of the success of the children vaccination programme and awareness campaigns. These successful

vaccination campaigns have helped save millions of precious lives.

What is common across all successful vaccination campaigns is the fact there has been strong grassroots acceptance. With no clear sight on when the Covid-19 pandemic will end, and if the world will ever go back to the place as we knew it, it is crucial to take the jab.

Let us take a moment to look back on the same period last year: There was no hope in sight as the pandemic wreaked havoc across the world. Less than a year later, we have hope and confidence in a number of approved vaccines, highlighting the inspiring work of our scientists. With multiple variants of the virus being reported, being vaccinated is important to support humanity's collective effort to contain the pandemic.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi has warned, the country, with its large population of 1.3 billion, stands to face trouble if vaccinations are not taken to prevent new infections. The strategy of the nation to first inoculate front-line workers followed by the elderly and now opening up vaccinations for all over 45 is the right direction as we need to ensure lower mortality, given that the elderly and those with medical conditions are more vulnerable to the complications arising from Covid-19.

With vaccination centres set up in key locations across all States, people have more access to vaccination. More than 10 crore doses of the vaccine have already been administered, including over nearly 1.35 crore people taking both the doses, as of April 14.

My family members and I have taken the jab, and the confidence it brings is enormous. The process was seamless; we visited the vaccination centre near our home. There were trained volunteers who explained to us the process of the vaccination, what to expect, and we were back home in no time.

It is both a privilege and an hon-



A medic prepares to administer a dose of Covid-19 vaccine during the vaccination festival Tilka Utsav, at EDMC Vishwakarma Park Dispensary in New Delhi

PTI

our to get the opportunity to protect oneself, and at the same time, support the safety of the family and community. Being vaccinated, I believe, is the first step to protecting yourself and your family, and thereby the wider community and the nation. While it is important to continue to follow all protocols, vaccine ensures that you are less vulnerable to the disease, which gives you a sense of immense relief.

The Government of India has taken the right steps, by authorising the emergency use of Russia's Sputnik

V Covid-19 vaccine, and also fast-tracking approval for other shots already passed by other major countries. With the rising cases in India, vaccination is the most effective tool in our battle against Covid-19. And as the Government rightly stated, "It is very critical to expand the basket of vaccines for domestic use and hasten the pace and coverage of vaccination".

What is the key to the success of this vaccination mission is that every member of the public plays a key role in contributing to it. From the early-

vaccinated who share their experience with others to the vaccine administrators, local bodies that facilitate the vaccination centres, the healthcare community, the policymakers and the media, everyone has a role in highlighting the need to encourage the vaccination drive.

We have a solution to the unprecedented challenge we faced, and it would be unwise, and in fact a disservice to the nation, to squander this opportunity due to apprehension, uncertainty, or misinformation. India's vaccination drive is

moving in the right direction and we must step up the tempo to enable safety for all our fellow citizens, so that as a country we can focus on our growth and socio-economic and developmental priorities.

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YOUR MIND WILL ANSWER
MOST QUESTIONS IF YOU
LEARN TO RELAX AND WAIT
FOR THE ANSWER
— WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS



YOUR
WEEK
AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

Health looks promising this week. Some of you may regain your health and feel a new spark of creativity. This is a great time to try a new health care approach, especially preventative care. Exercise, eating well, and rest are common approaches that you can reconsider. On the work front, a change of place, relocation; posting or transfer is on the cards. You are filled with new hopes and aspirations as it is a post for which you have been aspiring for a long time. The new avenues of progress will be opened, and you get a chance to prove your worth and potentials. On the personal front, you are demanding and very strict in your relationships, and this attitude will not go in married couples' favour.

Lucky number 10
Lucky colour Off-White
Lucky day Monday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

This week you are confused and pondering a change in your life's direction. Health is fluctuating and affecting the quality of life. You need guidelines, a session of counselling to gain the results of your past behaviour. It is never too late to improve. On the work front, there will be challenges. With your determination and will power you are likely to take hold of the situations and emerge a winner. Electrical, technical gadgets may create problems and take most of your time. On the personal front, this week is likely to bring love to the centre stage of your life. This is either a new relationship or a powerful re-bonding of an old one. You share your joy with those around you who need it.

Lucky number 16
Lucky colour White
Lucky day Sunday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

You need to let go of the wounds of the past to move forward. This is a time that you must look within yourself to analyse the areas of fears, trying to hold onto things. Non-attachment with anyone or anything will give you the independence to decide things. Learn about the energy centres in the body and meditate on how you are functioning. Be open to changes as it is the only constant in life. This week, professionally, the need of the hour is to give your time and attention to your work. You need to be sure that your work balance is where it needs to be. Do justice to your work. Avoid confrontations and conflicts with the people in the work area as that will only tarnish your image. You find success in love and rejoice this week.

Lucky number 9
Lucky colour Red
Lucky day Tuesday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

This week some challenges are foreseen on the health front. Problems may come up together and make you restless. Indigestion, gastric, BP and depression might leave you with no time to think. Your emotions and sensitivity are badly affected. You should spend more time relaxing. On the career front, your work graph will take a new turn this week, as your potentials will be duly recognised. Finances will improve. You will feel the positive vibrations at the workplace. This is a week of attainment, accumulation and finding inner satisfaction. On the personal front, be cautious in your relationships. You may be marked as arrogant or incompatible. Married couples may not be in harmony and want their own space.

Lucky number 1
Lucky colour Indigo
Lucky day Friday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

This week you will be balancing five elements in life and have harmony between body, mind, and soul. Those with an ongoing health issue may benefit greatly from alternative therapy like nutritional counselling, massage, dietary restriction etc. Professionally, you need career counselling at this stage to sharpen your skills. Attending short courses, workshops, or lectures etc will help you in your goals. Work will go well if you can organise yourself and work as per the rules. Relationship wise you are lucky as the people around you hear you with respect and value your ideas. Professional and personal both the fronts, you live life king size. In love, you make impression on your partner with your positive and honest approach.

Lucky number 20
Lucky colour Golden
Lucky day Sunday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

This is a great week for your creativity and optimism, and you believe that everything will turn out in your favour. You are generous and willing to share. You have learnt to accept your flaws and to accommodate others. It gives you the strength to be what you want to be. Health will be fine, and you enjoy it. On the work front, the feel-good factor will bring a smile to your face. This week you find the support of colleagues and seniors, and there is a chance that your name may be recommended for promotion. Make the best use of this time. On the love front, you may have your eye on someone who you feel is not treating you the way they should. It may be that that you need to stop fantasizing about this person entirely.

Lucky number 8
Lucky colour Camel Brown
Lucky day Friday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

You will overcome challenges and feel on top of the world. Appreciation, applause for a job well done on the domestic front will bring encouragement. You have the blessings of elders. As also, inner satisfaction, with positive energy after easing a difficult situation. On the career front, a good message is on the cards. Some of you will be promoted and assign an important task that will give a boost to your career. You might attend a virtual seminar or training session to enhance your skill. The stars are with you and you enjoy the results of your hard work. Relationship wise, you may not be very lucky this week. If you like someone goes ahead and express yourself. You may be expected to avoid the loose talk as this may spoil your relationship.

Lucky number 12
Lucky colour Yellow
Lucky day Wednesday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

Your efforts for being in good health will pay you well this week. You feel energetic, creative, and versatile. There is a purpose in life, and you want to recreate your life. You will get busy in various activities like Yoga, *Pranayam* and some healing up exercises to keep yourself fit and rejuvenated. Spiritualism will help restore your confidence and live a meaningful life. On the career front, you may find things going much better. A powerful person is likely to support you. This is a good time to ask for a raise or to seek employment that pays more if you are so inclined. Overall, your career front is looking up. In the context of love, it's important to remember that no relationship can stand up to constant analysis. Try to give your beloved some breathing space.

Lucky number 11
Lucky colour Pastel Blue
Lucky day Thursday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

The week starts with never-ending activities like meeting, attending to guests etc. This will give you no time for yourself. You are working hard. There are chances you may hurt yourself or get bruised. Stay focused while you drive and use all safety measures to avoid any unpleasant situation. On the work front, you feel at ease as things are going in your favour. Great things come in a small package and this is what is going to happen with you. There will be new opportunities at the job, and those who are unemployed will get that job in their desired field. On the personal front, your partner may put things in some challenging situations and give you excuses for not accepting your relationships. Be patient.

Lucky number 7
Lucky colour Brown
Lucky day Thursday



CANCER June 21-July 22

This week positive energy flows in your veins. You must use this energy in some creative pursuits. This can be a very creative time for you, and a good time for you to dream, play and be inventive as a child. On the professional front, things are likely to go your way. This seems to be an excellent time career-wise. A raise or promotion is certain for those who work in the private sector. Stay focused and the approach of a senior official will help make your work easy. On the relationship front, you need to talk to your partner face to face to sort out the mess which has been created knowingly and unknowingly between you two. Take out some time and plan a romantic endeavour to boost up your love life.

Lucky number 17
Lucky colour Silver
Lucky day Saturday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

This week you will feel a great deal of stamina. You will be filled with confidence and be in the best of your health. Do not hesitate to consider alternative ways to treat or deal with health challenges. Professionally, the way your career graph is going, you need a break and professional counselling. Seek some advice from your senior for better results. To maintain control over your domain and to achieve mastering in your trade someone's guideline will give a boost to your career. Join a virtual professional course/seminar or workshop to increase your skills. On the love front, there will be tension. A rejection or break up might be faced. The singletons will remain single. This is the time to make thoughtful bonding whether in love or marriage.

Lucky number 13
Lucky colour Rose Gold
Lucky day Tuesday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

This week you are advised to avert anger and aggression. Listen to your body and treat it accordingly. Seek the advice of an elder in the family, maybe your mother or aunt. Her homemade remedies will bring you relief from your current health problems. Workwise, you will follow your gut instinct and try your level best to achieve what you want in life. Those who are waiting for the final verdict in court in legal hassle will be pleased to get the case in their favour. Those in media, opposition, and justice etc fields will do well this week. On the personal front, love is not happening, neither you have time to think about the matters of the heart. The existing relationships too may suffer due to the lack of understanding and busy schedule.

Lucky number 3
Lucky colour Peach
Lucky day Saturday

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ASTROTURF
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

Of learning and wisdom

Complex dynamics of man and the universe calls for necessary awareness. That alone would help articulate ways and means to steer life in conformity with the design parameters underlying our existence and secure its smooth run. We need to be aware of our individual as well as collective worth and limitations. For, we are all born ignorant and unaware, primarily driven just by our instincts. We are however, also born with an inherent urge to learn, expand one's reach and evolve.

The process of learning begins ever since the child begins to respond to suggestions. However, seeing the enormity and complexity of our life mechanism, as also limitations of mind and intellect, it is simply inconceivable to get to know the whole at one go. It does not come about easily either. That evidently calls for a well-articulated step-by-step learning process, as would India's age-old concept as scripted in the following verse from *Atreya Samahita* mean.

"JanmanajayateSudrah/
Samaskarataadvijauuchayate/
Vedapathibhavetaviprah/
Brahmajanatiibrahmanah".

Literally it means that by birth we are

born ignorant. Having learnt how to engage with the living world would mean being born the second time. Submitting to formal education, one becomes knowledgeable. And having realised the realities of life in holistic terms, one becomes wise.

Mind it: By birth one begins with a clean slate, apparently not carrying any impression of worldly object or experience in mind that could serve as a guiding principle. Although armed with all the faculties of mind to comprehend a thing or to act on their own, they do not have any image in mind that may provide them the right lead. They do not have enough of spoken words stock either to describe an object or express their feelings. Obviously, therefore, they would need a lesson in how to engage with the world around.

The children are, however, abound with energy, and curious to know everything that would come in sight. With all that, their minds keep jumping from one object to the other in succession. So, they suffer from attention deficiency. Accordingly, they are to be first given a lesson in the basics, in a manner befitting their age, as would be needed to conduct



themselves with ease. Evidently, they are first taught the civic and moral conduct norms. That qualifies them to relate well with the environment and conduct themselves in an orderly manner. Having been brought up to this level will literally mean being born afresh the second time.

Ground is thus laid down to step into the next course of learning, as the mind will still not be at rest. It will continue with its inherent urge to further expand its reach and strike. One is then provided with opportunity for exposure to various disciplines vital to our qualitative existence. Here, a reference to the word "Veda" as reflected in the above verse does not necessarily mean Veda parse. Vedas here implies all the acquired treasures of knowledge covering different aspects of life, be they philosophy, medicine, astronomy, warfare, justice.

However, it was necessary for every seeker to undergo a mandatory grooming process before being allowed exposure to the particular subject of learning. Purposely so that character is built, strength of mind is increased, vision and intellect get expanded. The whole process was directed towards the seeker getting well-grounded so that s/he could

approach the subject with an open mind without any egotistical preconditioning whatsoever. The purpose, obviously, is to invoke the spirit of an honest seeker as is usually evident in a curious child. In the process, the seeker develops enough of mental and moral control. That enables him/her to put in all acts together to pursue the learning process in the right spirit following an open enquiry system. The seeker, thus groomed, qualifies to easily grasp true import of the lessons imparted, both explicit as well as hidden between the lines.

It is pertinent to note here that in the ancient India's tradition, most of the knowledge treasures were purposely scripted in formulated language. It was supposedly done so in order that one could have in store, enough of memory implants in the least possible space and words possible. It needs to be appreciated here that but for honing one's intellect thoroughly well, it would not be possible to see through the truths veiled under the express words.

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