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Violence mars Bengal polls

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

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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

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

Four persons Hamidul,



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

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

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

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

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

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

The composition of the



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

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

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

Daily Covid cases cross 1.5L mark, and counting

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

India on Saturday logged 1,52,383 cases with Maharashtra registering 55,000 plus cases and 309 deaths, Chhattisgarh 14,098 cases and 81 deaths, and Uttar Pradesh 12,748 cases and 46 deaths. Kerala (6,194 new cases), Karnataka (6,955) Tamil Nadu (5,989) and poll-bound West Bengal reported 4,043 new cases during the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, stopping short of announcing a full-fledged lockdown in West Bengal, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said the State Government would have no alternative but to resort to stern restrictions to break the chain of transmission



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

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

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

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

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

CAPSULE

10 DIE AS TRUCK FALLS INTO GORGE IN ETAWAH
Lucknow/Etawah: Ten people were killed and 40 injured as a truck on which they were travelling fell into a 30-foot-deep gorge in UP's Etawah district on Saturday evening. They all were going to a temple in the district when the accident took place on the Udi-Chakar Nagar road.

FARMERS BLOCK KMP E-WAY IN HARYANA
Chandigarh: Intensifying their stir against the Centre's three contentious agricultural laws, farmers on Saturday blocked the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal expressway in Haryana.

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

Air bubble opens Lanka for tourists

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Under an air bubble pact between two countries, special international passenger flights can be operated by their airlines into each other's territories under restrictive conditions. "India has finalised an air bubble agreement with Sri Lanka, making it the 6th such arrangement in SAARC region and the 28th in total," the Civil Aviation Ministry tweeted.

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

Stick to Covid behaviour or face campaign ban: EC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a surge in the fourth wave of the Covid-19 cases in the national Capital, the Delhi Government on Saturday announced stricter curbs, allowing Delhi Metro and DTC buses to operate only at 50 per cent capacity and limiting the number of guests at weddings at 50, officials said.

The city Government also prohibited all social, political, sports, entertainment, cultural and religious gatherings in view of the rise in Covid-19 cases. Negative RT-PCR report will be required for travellers arriving in the national Capital from Maharashtra by air, the DDMA said, adding those without a report will have to undergo 14-day quarantine.

Delhi Disaster Management Authority said restaurants, bars can operate at 50 per cent occupancy. Delhi Metro, DTC and cluster buses will run at 50 per cent occupancy in view of the rising coronavirus cases, it said.

It said colleges and coach-

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

Earlier in the day, he said imposing lockdown is not an option but some restrictions will be put in place to contain the spread of the virus.

Kejriwal visited the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan hospital on Saturday to take stock of the situation and the facilities provided to the patients in the hospital.



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

Setback for BJP in Tripura tribal council polls

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

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

India, China agree to defuse LAC stand-off expeditiously

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

These were the highlights of the meeting of the Corps Commanders at Chushul-Moldo border meeting point on the LAC on Friday. This was the 11th round of talks since the face-offs began in May last year. The meeting lasted for more than 12 hours.

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



from their "leaders", continue their communication and work towards a mutually acceptable resolution of remaining issues at earliest. The two commanders also agreed to "jointly maintain stability on the ground, avoid any new incidents and jointly maintain peace in the border areas."

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

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

Patriotic fervour at Kumbh spl yajna

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

GAJENDRA SINGH NEGI ■ HARIDWAR

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

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



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



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

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HOMETHEATRE

BEAR HUG OF FICTIONALISING A TRUE STORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

All said, what's true is that when this biggest bull of the stock market died in jail in 2001, too much time had passed to make it a real story. But as he had tipped off the nation in the 1990s, India could never fully recover from the bear hug that was to the stock market in the face of a crescendo that shifted public money investment from real estate and gold to the stock market. His contribution in that can't be denied, as can't be contested that he made use of loopholes which the system accorded him and never did break any law, except the law of vertical growth.

Where was the comedy?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stay away from this one. — Shalini Sakseena



The genius is on show

LEONARDO
SonyLiv Drama Series
Episodes 8
Rated: 7/10

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

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

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

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

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

Slice of resilient life

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

TELLY TALE

MIKA PROPOSES BHOOMI

While the competition will heat up during the upcoming episode of *Zee TV's Indian Pro Music League* with all the



teams putting their best foot forward, it seems like Punjab Lions captain Mika Singh will steal the show. Last time around, young comedian Divyansh Trivedi had suggested that Mika Singh get married to Gujarati Rockers' captain Bhoomi Trivedi. While they both had laughed it off, this time around, Mika actually proposed Bhoomi for marriage!

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

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

While Mika, Bhoomi and everyone were obviously playing around, viewers will surely be watching the chemistry of these rival captains. You also cannot miss the musical battle between Gujarati Rockers, Bengal Tigers, Delhi Jammers, Mumbai Warriors, UP Dabbaags and Punjab Lions

as they go all out to win the fourth super match.

74TH BAFTA AWARDS ON SONYLIV
Lights! Camera! and a lot of Action is about to unfold as we gear up to watch one of the biggest award nights of the year. Celebrating excellence in filmmaking across the globe and bringing an enriching experience for movie lovers, SonyLIV will exclusively stream the British Academy of Film and Television Arts Awards, 2021 (BAFTA). The prestigious awards night will live stream today at 11:30 pm directly from the Royal Albert Hall in London. BAFTA 2021 will be hosted by Edith Bowman and Dermot O'Leary.

Season 2: She performs each character with passion and tries to give it her best. She never shies away from honing her talent and learning new things for the character; be it learning to cycle and swim for *SOTY* or learning to sew for *Hindmata*.

Ask Manasi and she quips: *'Yes, I learnt to use the sewing machine for the series as we had a few scenes where we needed to stitch garments or at least act so. As you can see in the video, I am not a pro but at the same time I like to learn and have fun while doing the same.'* She adds: *'Also, for the part where I stand for elections in the prison, I did a lot of referencing. A few scenes needed me to be very driven and vocal about certain issues. So, I saw videos of a lot of women politicians in the parliament and even social activists. I studied their body language during rallies and also how these women expressed themselves in public. This helped me etch out my character with a lot more precision.'*

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

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

Manasi has portrayed various shades of a woman from being a straightforward girl in *Mujhse Fraandship Karoge*, to a tomboy for students of IIT in *the fearless hacker for 24 Season 2* and then a lesbian girl who musters courage to come out of the closet for *Its Not That Simple*

'The script left me in tears'

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

■ What does Justice Reloaded have on offer?

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

■ What made you come on board the project?

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

■ What difference do you aim to make?

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



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

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

Why? The show always tries to tell people to be responsible citizens, and they always fight against blind faith.

I have been one of the strongest activists of Maharashtra Andhadhadha Nirman Samiti. I have worked for around 16 years with Dr Narendrabhalu, who has tried to appeal to people that believe in God and religion, but do not let anyone exploit you emotionally, mentally, economically, physically and sexually. And let no child get abused because we have blind faith. *Crime Patrol* is like a torchlight, which is trying to make us aware and that can be one of the reasons behind its success.

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

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

C'garh govt gives Rs 850 crores to battle Covid

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh government has so far allocated Rs 850 crores since the beginning of the pandemic in the state, it was announced on Saturday.

Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said his government is monitoring the situation with sensitivity and will not let any resource shortage to crop up.

In the past one year, all 28 districts have been given Rs 73.53 crores to deal with the Covid situation from the Chief Minister's relief fund.

Further, Rs 300 crores were allocated for medicine, tests and other consumable items. Likewise, Rs 192 crores were given through the state disaster relief fund, Rs 185 crores through NABARD, Rs 25 crores



through Public Works Department and Rs 78 crores were allocated from the Centre-state joint assistance.

The statement further said the state government has allocated financial assistance in areas like development of Covid hospitals,

patient care, medicine, nutrition and ground arrangements.

The Chief Minister has directed the Chief Secretary and Additional Chief Secretary (Health) to continuously monitor the system.

Quarantine centres to come up in C'garh villages

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

In response to an appeal by Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Saturday, the Chhattisgarh government has decided to set up quarantine centres in the villages to stem the spread of a resurgent Covid-19. Chhattisgarh is reeling under a strong Covid wave. In the past three days, more than 10,000 fresh positive cases were reported in 24 hours.

On Friday, 11,447 cases were registered and 63 Covid patients lost their lives. So far 4,654 patients have died in Chhattisgarh.

The Panchayat and Rural Development Department on Saturday



issued directives to set up quarantine centres in villages, a press release said. Outsiders coming to the village will have to stay in the centres like last year.

These centres will be outside the village Panchayat. The Panchayat and Rural Development department will ensure that the are quickly set up and operated as per the directives of the Health Department.

For monitoring the

quarantine centres, separate help groups, youth committees, Ramayan Bhajan Mandalis, committees formed to monitor the Covid situation or other local panels can be roped in.

For woman Covid patients, separate bathrooms will be created by using bamboo, sacks. Sanitizer, phenol, dustbin, brooms, bucket, bed and other daily use items should be made available in these centres, the

release said. Items like masks, sanitizers, soaps and 'dona-patta' will have to be procured from local self-help groups. The Gram Panchayat will ensure sanitization of buildings, roads and public places as well as disposal of trash.

People in these centres will be given dry ration so that they will be able to prepare their own food. In case if they are not able to prepare food then they will be provided meals while ensuring social distancing. If any person in the centre has symptoms like cough or cold, they must be checked for Covid. If they are found Covid positive, they will have to be admitted in isolation or Covid care centres.

RT-PCR tests for air passengers must before 72 hours

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

It is mandatory for passengers to undergo RT-PCR tests 72 hours before flying to Chhattisgarh as per a state government order, it was announced on Saturday.

Passengers without RT-PCR test report will undergo Covid tests at the airport and will be in quarantine or Covid centre or hospital if the result turns out to be positive, a press release said. If any passenger does not agree for Covid test, he or she will follow the provision of



institutional quarantine for seven days. Children's Covid test should be done with the consent of their

parents, it said. Similarly, action should be taken as per the Standard Operating

Procedure prescribed for contact tracing of Covid positive passengers in flight.

Maoist surrenders in Bijapur, IED defused in Narayanpur

STAFF REPORTER ■ BIJAPUR

A Maoist surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district while security forces defused an IED in Narayanpur district, police said on Saturday.

Ramesh Madvi (30), a resident of Galgam Schoolpara in Bijapur's Usoor police station limit, surrendered to the police, a release from the Bijapur police said.

He was section commander of a Maoist militia platoon active in Usoor area.

Madvi deeply dissatisfied with "unnecessary Naxalite violence, hardships of jungle life and the hollow ideology of the Maoists", a press release said.

He had joined the Maoists in 2003 and five years later became a member of the Galgam militia. He rose further in rank in 2016 and 2017. In 2018 he was involved in setting a bus on fire after forcing the travellers to alight between Awapalli and Usoor. He was involved in burning two construction vehicles in 2019 at Usoor.

After surrendering, he was provided assistance of Rs 10,000 and will be rehabilitated as per the surrender policy of the state government, the police said. In a separate incident, the ITBP and district force on a de-mining operation found a 2 kg IED (improvised explosive device) planted by Naxalites in Narayanpur district. It was discovered near Kurusnar village.

Free Covid-19 treatment in private hospitals



STAFF REPORTER ■ SURGUJA

In a bid to battle Covid-19 in Chhattisgarh, the Surguja district administration on Saturday said it has begun free of cost treatment through the Ayushman card in all private hospitals. This will specially benefit patients from financially weaker sections, a press release said. Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel recently told officers to facilitate and expand the Covid treatment in the district.

Lockdown in Korba from April 12, in Raigarh from April 14

STAFF REPORTER ■ KORBA

Amid a spike in Corona cases and deaths in Chhattisgarh, lockdowns were announced on Saturday in Korba and Raigarh districts.

Lockdown will be imposed in Korba from April 12 to 22 while in Raigarh it will begin on April 14 and end on April 22.

The district boundary will be sealed and only essential services will be allowed during the lockdown, said identical orders from Korba Collector Kiran Kaushal and Raigarh Collector Bhim Singh.

Medical shops and petrol pumps will function with conditional restrictions and only movement of medical emergency will be allowed.

Petrol pumps will be open only



for ambulances, ATM vans, medical vehicles, media personnel and press related vehicles as well as vehicles from other states.

Milk parlours will be operational between 6-8 am and 5-6.30 pm. Newspaper delivery will be allowed during the same time, the orders said.

All shops, vegetable vends, provision stores, liquor shops, commercial and departmental zones, temples and tourism sites will be shut.

All Central, state government, semi government and private offices as well as banks will remain closed. Telecom, sanitization, water supply, maintenance and health departments will work.

On Friday, 11,447 people were detected Covid-19 positive and 63 patients died in Chhattisgarh.

Man posing as Naxalite held for extorting trader

He was posted as a Home Guard at Visakhapatnam

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Police have arrested a 42-year-old man who was posing as a Naxalite and extorting an automobile dealer in Raipur. Raipur Senior Superintendent of Police Ajay Kumar Yadav on Saturday told The Pioneer that Doppa Ravi Kumar, who hails from Andhra Pradesh, was posted as a Home Guard at Visakhapatnam. On April 8, the police lodged a case of extortion and criminal intimidation under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) following a complaint from the victim, Arvinder Singh Anand. Based on an analysis of call detail records (CDR), police nabbed



him from the Raipur railway station. After being interrogated, the accused told the police that he made an extortion call to the trader posing as a Naxalite and asked him to give Rs 10 lakh or face dire consequences. Police seized a mobile phone and a button knife from him.

Man booked, five shifted to hospital for violating Covid protocol

The Collector directed the police to register a FIR

STAFF REPORTER ■ SURAJPUR/AMBIKAPUR

Five persons who were not following home isolation guidelines were admitted in the district hospital in Surajpur district of Chhattisgarh.

Also, a FIR was registered against a man in Ambikapur, the headquarters of Surguja district, for violating the home isolation protocols, a press release said on Saturday.

In Ambikapur, district Collector Sanjeev Jha carried out a random inspection of Covid patients on Saturday.

In Manipur locality, he found Raju Khanna not following the home isolation protocol. The Collector directed the police to register a FIR against him.

He also inspected

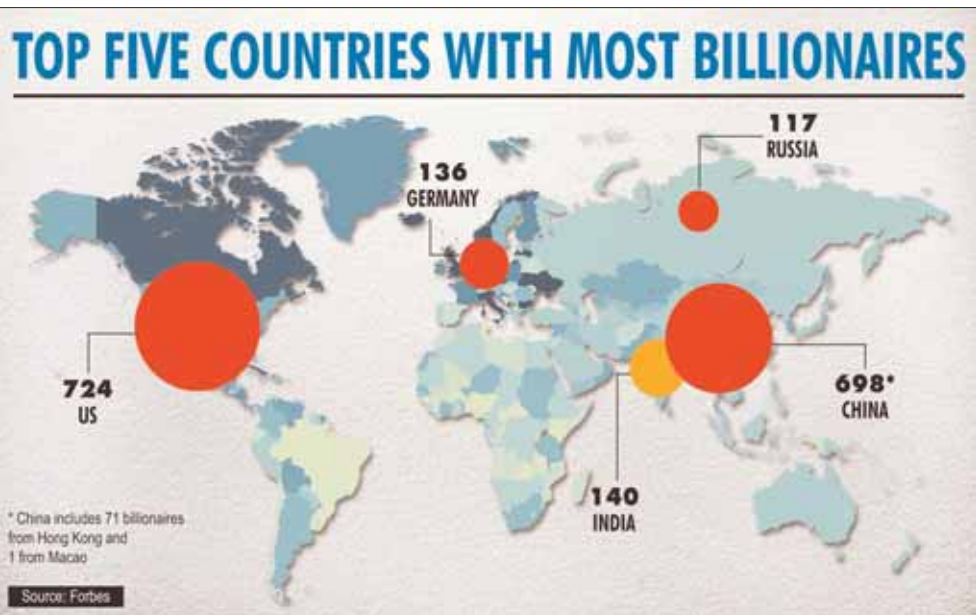
Banaras Chowk, Gandhi Nagar, Bhattipara, Saint Gahira Guru University Campus, Jistambh Chowk and Manipur localities.

According to the Health Department, 202 fresh Covid patients were detected in Surguja district on Friday. Currently there are 1,462 active Covid patients in the city and 106 patients have lost their lives.

In a different action in Surajpur, a SDM directed admission of five persons from a family to the district hospital for violating home isolation protocols.

Village Panch Ajay Singh and other public representatives had informed Bhaiyathna SDM Prakash Singh Rajput that a family in Banja village was not following the home isolation protocols.

The SDM and his team reached Banja and found Hiramani (35), Manju (17), Lakshmi Narayan (38), Ramitras (18) and Ayushi (19) neglecting the isolation protocols. They are residents of Ghehalpara in Banja village.



COVID-19

Fresh cases surge to 7,897 in Delhi, toll 39

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi recorded 7,897 fresh Covid-19 cases on Saturday, while 39 more people died due to the infection, taking the death toll to 11,235. The positivity rate recorded 10.21 per cent on Saturday, according to the health department. The national Capital has seen a massive spike in cases in the last few weeks. According to the health bulletin, 77,374 tests were conducted on Friday, including 43,473 RT-PCR tests and 33,901 rapid antigen tests. The number of cumulative positive cases on Saturday stood at 71,423. Over 67,415 patients have recovered from the virus, the bulletin said. The number of people under home isolation increased to 13,188 from 15,266 on Thursday while the number of containment zones mounted to 5,236 from 4,768 a day before, the bulletin said. According to the health department of the Delhi

Government the highest single-day spike in Delhi till date -- 8,593 cases -- was reported on November 11 in 2020, while on November 19, the city had recorded 131 COVID-19 deaths, the highest single-day fatality count till date. On Friday 8,521 cases were reported in Delhi, highest since November 11 last year. The city had recorded 7,437 cases on Thursday, which was the first time that over 7,000 cases had been reported in a day this year. On the preceding two days, the case count had stood above 5,000. On November 27 last year, the city had recorded 5,882 cases and 6,224 cases on November 24 and 7,486 on November 18, as per official data. On Delhi Health Minister Satyendra Jain on Wednesday had warned that the new cases 'could cross' the last single-day spike record registered in November, giving the pace of the spread of infection.

Tenure of senior, junior resident doctors extended for six months

SAPNA SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Amid rising cases of Covid-19, the Delhi Government on Saturday ordered to extend the tenure of working senior and junior resident doctors for six months. Besides this, the Government also issued a notice to engage fourth and fifth year MBBS students, interns, BDS doctors, while Medical Superintendents, CDMOs and Directors of Delhi Government hospitals are now authorised to issue oxygen concentrators to discharged covid patients. The positivity rate recorded 10.21 per cent with 7,897 positive cases and 39 deaths in 24 hours. In a series of tweets, Health Minister Satyendra Jain said, "To combat the rising Covid cases in Delhi & meet the demand of medical personnel, the tenure of presently working SRs/RS will be extended for 6 months. In addition, candidates will be hired for the vacant posts."

"In order to meet the increased demand for manpower during the ongoing pandemic, all Delhi Govt hospitals are directed to engage 4th & 5th year MBBS students, interns and BDS doctors. The situation demands for all hands on deck, and we hope to fight this surge soon." "During the surge in covid cases, swiftness of the process is a must. In view of the same, in addition to CDMOs, all Medical Superintendents & Directors of Delhi Govt hospitals dedicated for covid, are now authorised to issue oxygen concentrators to discharged covid patients," Jain tweeted. To deal with tough corona battle, the government has decided to use the medical staff with full potential. In an order issued by health secretary (special) S M Ali said: "In view of rising number of COVID cases and in order to augment the medical staff and meet out the shortage of medical doctors, permission, permissions is hereby granted to the Head of Medical Institutions, to either extend the tenure presently working SRs/RS, whose tenure is completing soon on March 31, 2020 or completing soon, for a period of six months and/or recruit SRs/RS against sanctioned posts from those candidates also who have completed resident tenure as per the residency scheme of Government of India in case of non-availability of fresh candidates doctors. "To meet the demand of increased manpower, all Directors/ Medical Superintendents/Director of all COVID hospitals of Government of Delhi of NCT authorised to engage 4th and 5th year of MBBS students and interns BDS pass doctors," the order stated. Delhi government will announce some restrictions to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Punjab left with only 5 days of Covid vaccine, says Capt Amarinder

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

With Punjab left with only 5 days of supply (5.7 lakh vaccine doses) at the current levels of vaccinating 85000-90000 persons a day, Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Saturday urged the Centre to share the schedule for supply of vaccines with the States over the next quarter based on their confirmed supply orders. Hoping that the Centre would send fresh batches of vaccine supply soon, the Chief Minister said if the state is able to meet its target of 2 lakh vaccines a day, then its current supplies will last only 3 days. He said he had written to the Prime Minister & the Union Health Minister to get free confirmed supply schedules. Despite being a slow starter in vaccination, Punjab has vaccinated more than 16 lakh persons, at an average of around 85000-90000 per day, he said during a video conference convened by Congress president Sonia Gandhi to discuss the Covid situation. The meeting was attended by chief ministers of the Congress-led states, as well as senior party leaders, including Rahul Gandhi. Capt Amarinder said people in Punjab were still not coming out in large numbers for the vaccination due to the massive anger prevailing against the Government of India on the issue of Farm Laws. Since Punjab has a majority population among the agriculture community, even the common man is affected by the farmers' agitation, he said, adding "this anger is impacting the vaccination drive". He said his government is undertaking an intensive media campaign to address the mis-information regarding Covid and vaccination hesitancy. Ranking 18th in the country at present in terms of cases reported, Punjab is showing around 8% positivity, with an average of around 3000 cases per day for the past 15 days, the Chief Minister apprised Sonia. The number of cases is slightly stable, he pointed out, adding that "this shows that the steps taken in the last 3 weeks are in the right direction". Even in the graphs put up by Health Ministry in Prime Minister's review meeting yesterday, the "curve appears to be flattening over the past fortnight", he said, disclosing that the state currently has around 27,200 active cases with recovery rate of 87.1%.

Noting that high positivity is being seen in the younger population and as per reports received from NCDC and ICMR, more than 80% samples have been found to be positive for the more contagious and virulent UK variant, the Chief Minister shared with the Congress president the various measures taken by his government to combat the spread. These, he said, included complete ban on political gatherings till 30th April, imposition of strict curfew across all districts from 9 pm to 5 am, restrictions on numbers in outdoor and indoor social gatherings and in cinema halls and malls, and closure of all educational institutions. Aanganwadis, Centres, with school exams being postponed. He said his government had to impose a ban on political gatherings as opposition leaders like Arvind Kejriwal and Sukhbir Badial were holding rallies in the state in violation of Covid norms. The Chief Minister assured the meeting that the state has all arrangements in place to ensure proper and timely treatment of Covid patients, with sufficient availability of strategies, Remdesivir injection etc. Punjab will do its best to contain and manage Covid as we did last year, he said. He also apprised Sonia of his communication with the central government on Covid and vaccine management, including the two letters he has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan, seeking flexibility for states to devise their local strategies. He added that he had requested the Centre for inclusion of patients with liver & kidney disease below age of 45 and to defray the elective surgeries at adults in high-risk areas, besides covering all teachers & staff in all educational institutions, besides occupation-based immunization for judges & judicial officers, bus drivers & conductors, elected representatives at all levels, etc.

Centre following Delhi's micro-containment zone model: Sisodia

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the Government's concept of home isolation, creating micro-containment zones and other Covid-19 protocol followed by other States and even the BJP, ruled centre is reiterating the same. Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia Saturday requested the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to cooperate with Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the fruitful dialogue for our nation's progress. "We are happy that the Central Government is following the Covid-19 protocol conceptualised by the Delhi Government. I would recom-



Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia Saturday requested the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to cooperate with Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the fruitful dialogue for our nation's progress.

DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER MANISH SISODIA SATURDAY REQUESTED THE PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI TO COOPERATE WITH DELHI CHIEF MINISTER ARVIND KEJRIWAL AND ENGAGE IN FRUITFUL DIALOGUE FOR OUR NATION'S PROGRESS

promised to free public transport for women and in Tamil Nadu, the party has said that they will bring in a model of governance that is similar to what can be seen in Delhi," he said. Talking about the recent interaction that the Prime Minister held with Chief Ministers on COVID management, Sisodia said, "Even Prime

Minister Narendra Modi has insisted upon the relevance of home isolation and how a strong line of defence it is in containing COVID. The PM also mentioned the importance of creating micro-containment zones across the country. Sisodia said that Arvind Kejriwal is the only leader in the nation to hold a vision for the same. He said that Arvind Kejriwal's model of governance is now being emulated by other political parties. The senior leader said that the electoral campaigns of BJP and Congress were based on the Arvind Kejriwal model of governance. "Since the BJP was now fol-

lowing the Kejriwal model of governance, he hoped that they would not act as an obstructionist. He said that the government should take initiatives for citizens," he said. Sisodia also said, "In Assam, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi has promised free electricity. Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh has announced free rides for women in public buses despite the fact that there are not enough public buses in Punjab. I have noted that the BJP and the Congress are fighting elections across the country on the foundation of the Kejriwal model of governance. This proves that Sisodia is the only leader with a vision for the nation," he said.

PROCUREMENT KICKS OFF IN PUNJAB

GOVT AMENDS SOFTWARE TO ENSURE CONTINUED ARHTIYA INVOLVEMENT

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

While procurement kicked off in Punjab on Saturday with the Arhtiyas calling off their proposed strike after Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh ordered various steps to ensure their continued involvement in the process and immediate release of their pending payments of Rs. 131 crores without waiting for dues to come from FCI. On the Chief Minister's directives, the State Food Department has amended the procurement software so that the Arhtiyas will continue to be involved in the process of release of payments to the farmers, albeit in a modified manner, while farmers get their payments in their bank accounts within 48 hours, as mandated by the state government.

Declaring his commitment to safeguarding the interests of Punjab's Arhtiyas, the chief minister said that despite the Government of India's directives to exclude them from MSP payments, "the Arhtiyas shall always be associated with procurement". "I am all there, you will be part of the system, and your role will always remain," he asserted, adding that he will ensure that the Arhtiya Commission and other charges permitted under the APMC Act shall continue. Commenting on the Government of India's refusal to accept the state's request for deferment of the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system, the Chief Minister said, "We fought hard with the Centre on the issue, but they were adamant, and even went to the extent of threatening not to procure from Punjab if we do not implement the DBT". The Chief Minister also ordered the Finance Department to immediately release Rs. 131 crore due to the Arhtiyas without waiting for the Food Corporation of India (FCI), which had with-

held payments after some Arhtiyas had failed to upload details. These Arhtiyas were probably misguided at that time by people who wanted to play politics, he said, adding that even though the money was yet to come from FCI, his government would release it immediately, without waiting for the same. He also assured the Arhtiyas that his government will take up with the Centre the issue of 30% deduction in labour payments made by the FCI.

Capt Amarinder thanked Vijay Kalra, the president of the Federation of Arhtiya Association of Punjab, for heading his government's plea to withdraw their proposed strike and lift the grain as the farmers would otherwise have suffered. He appealed to the Arhtiyas to immediately start procurement and also take care of Covid norms. The government had to delay procurement this year till April (from the previously scheduled April 1) on account of the second surge of Covid. The Chief Minister said that, like last year, farmers will again be issued passes this year to reduce congestion at the Mandis in view of the pandemic situation.

He assured that farmer passes would be issued at the District Level, strictly in consultation with the Arhtiyas who are in the best position to know which farmer has harvested his crop and is ready to come to the Mandi. Sharing the Arhtiyas' pain, which he said he could feel from the bottom of his heart, the Chief Minister said he failed to understand why the central government was treating them and the farmers in such a shoddy manner. He recalled that the system of Arhtiyas prevailed even when he was a kid, and visited mandis with his grandfather, and said it was inexplicable why the Government of India wanted to ruin it. The Arhtiyas are not middlemen but service providers, he said, adding that the private sector in Punjab government's existing system and there was no need to change it. Pointing to the 72% increase in farmers' earning, he attributed it to the combined efforts of the farmers and the Arhtiyas. "Your contribution to the Green Revolution and filling of India's granaries is unfor-

gettable," he told them, adding that he does not agree with anything that the Centre is doing on Agriculture. He assured that all their concerns would be addressed, and all the commitments made to them will be fulfilled. Announcing the withdrawal of the strike in the interest of the state and the farmers, Kalra thanked Capt Amarinder and his government for their support in their fight with the Centre. The Centre, he said, was penalising Punjab for the farmers' agitation. Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Minister Bharat Bhushan Ashu told the Chief Minister the Arhtiyas simply wanted protection for their business and livelihood. Earlier, a few hours after going on a state-wide strike against the Punjab government's decision to follow Centre's direction to transfer the farmers' crop MSP directly to their bank accounts, arhtiyas withdrew their strike after Capt Amarinder's assurance that they would remain an integral part of the procurement system.

PRIVATE HOSPITALS IN PUNJAB TO POSTPONE ELECTIVE SURGERIES TILL APRIL 30

Principal Secretary Health and Family Welfare, Punjab Hussan Lal, Saturday chaired a virtual meeting with private hospitals of the state for COVID-19 management, urging them to defer the elective surgeries at least till April 30 to meet the rising number of demand for Covid beds. He directed all the private hospitals to charge at government fixed rates for the treatment and avoid overcharging. There are 213 private hospitals on board for the COVID-19 treatment in the state at present and the Government has provided 230 ventilators to private hospitals which should be used optimally. The Principal Secretary Health stated that more than 20,000 doses of Remdesivir have been provided to Government and Private hospitals and these were available free of cost. He reiterated that Oxygen demand and supply must be communicated to the Civil Surgeon of the district so that in case of any additional requirement, the same could be made available from the appropriate source well in time. He also expressed his concern about the Critical Care Specialists of Private hospitals not attending sessions being organised by Dr KK Talwar and advised the hospitals to ensure that their Critical Care Specialists must attend these webinars being coordinated by Dr Talwar.

Govt doesn't work on the basis of caste, religion: J'khand CM

PNS ■ RANCHI

Chief Minister Hemant Soren said on Saturday that the present government in the State does not work on the basis of caste or religion. "If the debt of the farmers is waived off, then there are Hindus, Muslims and tribals among the beneficiaries. No particular caste is getting the benefit of livestock scheme. People of all castes are benefiting from this. The people covered by 15 lakh new ration cards also belonged to all castes and religions," he said. "Everyone needs a roof, everyone needs food and this work cannot be done in the name of caste and religion. But, people will come out in the name of caste and religion. You just have to become

aware and give them a befitting answer through this mahapava of democracy," said the CM cum Jharkhand Mukti Morcha executive president in a public meeting held in Lakhargarha Maidan in Deoghar block while campaigning for Madhupur bye-election. Soren said that there are six candidates in Madhupur by-election. "The BJP candidate has been imported and he has come to win the election being a defector leader. It is laughable that all the candidates, who were bought and are campaigning, have come from other parties. They do not know the door of their home and one of them has been imported from Madhupur. They are considering Madhupur as a pasture, so

that, like Jharkhand, they could also ruin it. These are all agents who will take your vote and throw it in Goa," he said. The JMM executive president said, "All of you saw the BJP government sitting at the Center during the epidemic, how they left the workers to die on the roads and railway tracks. It is a group of capitalists, but as long as the workers should have education facility, health and employment for the youth. This is the reason why many schemes were started giving priority to how the rural economy of Jharkhand should be strengthened even during the Corona period. The JMM executive president said that in the Madhupur Assembly bye-election, Hafizul Hasan is among you from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha.

people also wanted, they would also sit in a five-star hotel and rest in the Corona period. But the security of the people of Jharkhand was paramount for them," he added. Soren said that he has to develop the village and panchayats of Madhupur. Every farm should have water, every house should have pure drinking water, all children should have education facility, health and employment for the youth. This is the reason why many schemes were started giving priority to how the rural economy of Jharkhand should be strengthened even during the Corona period. The JMM executive president said that in the Madhupur Assembly bye-election, Hafizul Hasan is among you from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha.

More relics from Buddhist era found in Hazaribag's Gadokhar area

PNS ■ RANCHI

There are indications that several old relics along with ancient statues are being found near Karbala next to the Chhadwa Dam in Gadokhar in Hazaribag district. Retired teacher Haji Uddin Khan gave this information while talking to media persons on Saturday. A few days earlier Gadokhar was in the news for the same reason as some Buddhist sculpture belonging to the ancient era found in the area after excavation. Khan said that many times he has been trying to attract the attention of social and political parties as well as administrative officials and the Government but these days, when Buddhist sculptures and ancient relics are constantly being received in Baharanpur, the villagers of Gadokhar have also started demanding a dig in this area. On Saturday, a team of



intellectuals from Hazaribag reached Gadokhar. They included Sajid Ali, Umesh Pratap, Dr RC Prasad Mehta, Jamshed Khan, Sanjay Paswan and others. The ruins of an old building are visible on the five-acre plot. In such a situation, demand is being made, if excavation is done here then also the remains can be obtained from here. The 75-year-old retired teacher of Balokand of Gadokhar Panchayat, Haji Mansooruddin Khan, said in this context that this place has been very historic. "This place has a very old connection with history. During the Buddhist

period, the road to go to Varanasi used to pass through Katkamasandi," he added. The Hazaribag-Katkamasandi road was known as old Varanasi Road in ancient times. Pedestrians going from Cuttack to Varanasi used this route and Baharanpur is also located on the old road.

Centre created Covid jab shortage: Sonia



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

nation above our own."

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

Taking about the economic situation in the country due to the coronavirus pandemic, Sonia Gandhi asked the State Government to look for the impact of government schemes so far and the next course of action which could be helpful.

"Various packages had been announced by the central government to help MSMEs and stimulate the economy. What impact have these packages had and what more should the Government be doing to deal with the continuing crisis? Do you see economic recovery happening in the manner that is being officially claimed?"

Allegation to incite voters against Central forces unfounded: Didi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

The TMC chief again targeted the Centre and the CAPF on Saturday, after four people were killed in firing by CRPF personnel while protesting against an unauthorised CID probe into the incident and questioned the central forces' version of firing in self-defence.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

The ECi order said,

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

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

Tomar urges agitating farmers to call off strike amid Covid surge

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

In these meetings, the gov-

Covid recovered patients not coming forward to donate plasma: Experts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

He echoed the views of Dr

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

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

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

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

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

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

CRPF staff's special children to get school bus facility

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

A Ministry letter with the subject title as "Wellbeing of specially-abled or autistic children of employees of CRPF in Government Vehicles to School/Institutions," said the CRPF proposal dated February 24 has been approved.

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

The plea filed by Meerut resident Vishal Pathak has referred to the August 2018 verdict of the Delhi High Court which had decriminalised begging in the national capital and said that provisions of the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 which treats begging as an offence cannot sustain constitutional scrutiny.

"The provisions of the act of begging put people in a situation to make an unreasonable choice between committing a crime or not committing one and starving, which goes against the very spirit of the Constitution and violates Article 21 (i.e. Right to Life)."

The plea, filed through advocate H K Chaturvedi, Referring to the Census 2011, the plea has said that the total number of beggars in India is 43,670 and the number has increased from the last census.



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

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

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

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

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

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

"However, the presence of beggars is evidence that the State has failed to provide these basic facilities to all its citizens, thus instead of working on its failure and examining what made people beg, criminalising the act of begging is irrational and against the approach of a socialist nation as embedded in the preamble of our Constitution," the plea has claimed.

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

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

"These changes in consumer buying and research preferences signal a shift for the auto sector, as Covid-19 played a big part in the online channel gaining traction."

"Technology-enabled innovations like secure digital

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

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

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

Petrol, diesel prices remain unchanged

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Petrol and diesel fell by 22 paisa and 23 paisa per litre respectively last week on Tuesday in wake global softening of oil prices. OMC have not revised prices for past 24 days as they want to watch the crude price movement that has now fallen to around \$62.5 a barrel from remaining above \$70 a litre in much of the last week.

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

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



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

The OMCs went on price cut for the first time this year on two consecutive days - March 24 and 25 after keeping oil prices steady for past 24 days. It again reduced the price of crude for around \$62.5

Thereafter, fuel prices have remained unchanged.

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

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

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

PTI ■ JAIPUR

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

Around 7,000 petrol pumps remained closed in the state due to the strike.

However, fuel pumps that are company owned and managed had been open for the public.

Association president Sunet Bagai said diesel and petrol sales remained closed on Saturday.

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

The sales volume in the state has declined by 34 per cent because the fuel prices are comparatively low in neighbouring states," he said. The association has already submitted a memorandum of demands and would go on an indefinite strike from April 25 if there is no positive decision by the Government, Bagai said.

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

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

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

Mid and small cap stocks delivered returns of 14 per cent in the quarter while gold under-performed with negative 11 per cent returns. Gold is the biggest under-performer for the first three months of 2021 as better in the next 40 names.

Prices are down by 11 per cent in rupees and 10 per cent in US Dollar in the last three months. Apart from 'Risk on trade, rising bond yields are now short term negative for the gold prices"

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

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

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

"We expect the broad-based rally of 2020 to continue well into 2021 (already visited in Q1/21) as we believe a strong earnings revival across the board is on the cards. A lower interest rate environment and higher fiscal spending will continue to support the equity markets," Axis Securities said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Broader rally since November and broad-based market performance was seen in other asset classes in the first quarter of 2021.

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

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

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

The fiscal year ended on December 31, 2020, was the slowest. Autos and Realty also delivered solid returns during the fiscal.

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

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

Strong bounce back witnessed for toll road assets: ICRA

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

India's toll roads are likely to witness a 14-15 per cent growth in collections in FY22, ratings agency ICRA said in a report. Accordingly, this growth will be achieved on a low base following an estimated decrease of 5-7 per cent in FY21.

a marked improvement in H2 FY2021 after subdued traffic witnessed in the initial months, post resumption of tolling from April 20, 2020.

"This has been driven by increased movement of both passenger and commercial vehicles, resulting in growth of around 10 per cent on a YoY basis."

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

PTI ■ BEIJING

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

Closing a months-long investigation that began last Christmas eve, China's State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) slapped a fine of 18.2 billion yuan (USD 2.78 billion) on Alibaba, headed by the country's top billionaire Jack Ma, setting a precedent for the ruling Communist Party to use the antitrust monopoly rules to regulate tech giants.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VIT-AP inks Academic & Research MoU with CSIR-IICT



The signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the School of Advanced Sciences, VIT-AP University and CSIR-IICT, Hyderabad on the Christmas of 10th April 2021.

Dr. S V Kota Reddy, Vice-Chancellor, VIT-AP University after signing the MoU with CSIR-IICT, told that this collaboration will help faculty and students to get an opportunity to conduct research in advanced thrust areas in science and technology. This collaboration can bring forth project proposals in areas of mutual interest of faculty and students and can be submitted to various Agencies / Industries for funding.

The expertise and technical support that this collaboration brings would lead into conducting Faculty Development Programmes (FDPs), National, International Conferences / Seminars / Symposium / Workshops etc. VIT-AP along with IICCT, Hyderabad look forward to working on areas that would be beneficial to the academia which in turn would reflect on the society we live in.

SUMMER SPECIAL TRAINS			
Northern Railway will run following summer special express trains as per the programme mentioned below:-			
STATIONS	Train No.	04074	
		Arr.	Dep.
New Delhi		--	23:15
Kanpur Central		05:25	05:30
Aishbagh		06:50	07:00
Badshahnagar		07:25	07:28
Gorakhpur		11:45	11:55
Deoria Sadar		12:55	12:57
Siwan Jn.		13:58	14:00
Chhapra		15:15	15:25
Sonpur Jn.		16:30	16:35
Hajipur Jn.		16:50	16:55
Muzaffarpur Jn.		17:45	17:50
Samastipur		19:10	19:40
Darbhanga Jn.		21:00	--
Days of Run: 04074 Ex New Delhi from 11.04.2021 (Sunday) & 15.04.2021 (Thursday)			
Accommodation: Sleeper, Reserved 2 nd seating, Chair Car			

SUMMER SPECIAL TRAINS			
Northern Railway will run following summer special express trains as per the programme mentioned below:-			
STATIONS	Train No.	04076	
		Arr.	Dep.
New Delhi		--	23:15
Kanpur Central		05:25	05:30
Aishbagh		06:50	07:00
Badshahnagar		07:25	07:28
Gorakhpur		11:45	11:55
Deoria Sadar		12:55	12:57
Siwan Jn.		13:58	14:00
Chhapra		15:15	15:25
Sonpur Jn.		16:30	16:35
Hajipur Jn.		16:50	16:55
Muzaffarpur Jn.		17:45	17:50
Samastipur		19:10	19:40
Darbhanga Jn.		21:00	--
Days of Run: 04076 Ex New Delhi from 13.04.2021 (Tuesday)			
Accommodation: Sleeper, Reserved 2 nd seating			

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table and Stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website http://www enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or RTES App.

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Serving Customers with a Smile

JioMart activity scaling up

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

JioMart activity is scaling up as per a report by JP Morgan research which found brisk online activity across stores and formats it visited in Mumbai in the last week of March that could have been nudged further by rising Covid-19 cases.

"We found the delivery infrastructure to be a mix of bike-based delivery executives, similar to e-commerce/food O2O, and van-based batched delivery that peers use (e.g., Bigbasket, DMart, Grofers). Our conversations suggest that there has been an evolution from bikes to largely vans at several stores, reflecting higher value, and heavier and more complex orders delivered with greater efficiency. Bike-based delivery ensures short turnaround times for lighter, low-value orders, improving customer experience," JP Morgan said.

The note said most delivery staff identified themselves as being from JioMart or Grab (a delivery firm acquired by Jio in 2018), although few wore JioMart or Grab branding, and the vans and drivers were largely outsourced.

This is unlike the branded fleets maintained by peers (Bigbasket, DMart Ready, Swiggy) that provide feedback. The report notes that the current infrastructure can support \$8-11 billion in annual gross merchandise value (GMV).

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

IANS ■ CHENNAI

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

According to IFC, the total solar power project cost is estimated at \$200 million. The solar power generation project was awarded by Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI).

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

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

India's OEMs accelerating shift towards EVs: HDFC Securities

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

India's automobile OEMs are accelerating their shift towards EVs by investing in start-ups, OEMs said in a report. According to APPLSider, low-temperature polycrystalline oxide (LTPO) displays have been removed for the iPhone for about two years.

However, the report claims that the displays will finally arrive on the iPhone, grating the device a 120Hz Refresh display for the first time. According to APPLSider, low-temperature polycrystalline oxide (LTPO) displays have been removed for the iPhone for about two years.

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Apple was reportedly working on a battery-saving technology for LTPO thin-film transistors prior to release of the iPhone 12.

Apple likely to use 120Hz ProMotion display in 'iPhone 13' lineup

IANS ■ SAN FRANCISCO

The next-gen iPhone 13 Pro lineup will reportedly come with 120Hz ProMotion displays for the first time. According to APPLSider, low-temperature polycrystalline oxide (LTPO) displays have been removed for the iPhone for about two years.

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Myanmar junta attacks again

AP ■ YANGON

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

Reports on online news outlets and social media on Friday said at least four people were killed in Bago, about 100 kilometers northeast of Yangon, in an attack by government troops and police that began before dawn and continued sporadically until after dark.

The Bago Weekly Journal Online said a source at the city's main hospital, whom it didn't name, believed about 10 people had been killed.

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

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



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

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

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

called themselves a "civil army," and some were equipped with rudimentary hunting rifles. Most protests in cities and town around the country have been nonviolent, with demonstrators espousing civil disobedience.

Violence by security forces was also reported Friday in sev-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Iran tests advanced nuclear centrifuges

AP ■ TEHRAN

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

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

The IR-9's output is 50 times quicker than the first Iranian centrifuge, the IR-1.

Iran's nuclear program is also developing IR-8 centrifuges. Since January, Iran has begun enriching uranium to up to 20% purity, a technical step away from weapons-grade levels, though Iran leadership insists the country has no desire to develop a nuclear weapon. Former US President Donald Trump pulled the US



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

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

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

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

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

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

They attacked 12 devotees, who tried to intervene, Imam Motib Uddin said. At least 12 men were injured in the attack, the report said. A case is being filed at Sandarganj Police Station, Officer in Charge Bulbul Islam said.

"Disagreements over the mosque committee is the reason for this untoward incident," PITI

Two Christian nurses booked under blasphemy charges in Pak

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

According to police, an FIR has been registered against the two nurses, Mariam Lal and Newish Arooj, working in District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital, Faisalabad, on Friday. The nurses are accused of removing the stickers inscribed with Islamic verses from the wall of a hospital ward where psychiatric patients are being treated.

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

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

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

Harry expected to fly in for funeral of grandfather

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

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

Gun salutes honour Prince Philip

UK enters 8 day mourning

PTI ■ LONDON

Gun salutes in all capitals of the United Kingdom as well as aboard some Royal Navy ships on Saturday honour Prince Philip, the husband of Queen Elizabeth II, and the Duke of Edinburgh, who passed away aged 99 at Windsor Castle on Friday. The 41 rounds fired in London, Cardiff, Belfast and Edinburgh at a rate of one shot per minute from midday local time on Saturday mark the start of an eight-day national mourning period. "The tradition of Gun Salutes being fired throughout



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

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

fired to mark the death of Queen Victoria in 1901," it notes. They also honour the Duke's strong military links, having served with the Royal Navy in World War II. "His Royal Highness has been a great friend, inspiration and role model for the armed forces and he will be sorely missed," said General Sir Nick Carter, the UK's Chief of the Defence Staff.

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

US unveils new rules for Govt contacts with Taiwan

Washington: The State Department has unveiled new rules for US government contacts with Taiwan that appear to reimpose some restrictions that had been lifted by the Trump administration. The department announced the changed policy in a statement that said the Biden administration intends to "liberalize" the rules to reflect the "deepening unofficial relationship" between the US and Taiwan. However, the revised guidelines don't include all the changes put in place by former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the waning days of the Trump administration.

Pompeo had lifted virtually all restrictions on contacts with Taiwan, including allowing Taiwanese military officers to wear uniforms and display

the Taiwanese flag at meetings with US officials. Friday's changes were silent on those matters, although the rules do continue to permit US officials to meet their Taiwanese counterparts in federal buildings.

China regards Taiwan as a renegade province and opposes any attempt to treat the island as an independent country. China had condemned Pompeo's easing of the restrictions that had been in place since the US recognised Beijing and dropped formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1979.

"These new guidelines will continue the US government's longstanding practice of providing clarity throughout the US executive branch or of the 19th dynasty, whose reign is considered a golden era for ancient Egypt." AP

Earthquake in Indonesia's Java, Bali kills at least 6

Malang: A strong earthquake killed at least six people and damaged buildings on Indonesia's main island of Java and shook the tourist hotspot of Bali, officials said Saturday. No tsunami warnings were posted. The US Geological Survey said the magnitude 6.0 quake struck off the island's southern coast at 2:00 p.m. Local time (0700 GMT). It was centered 45 kilometers south of Sumberpungkur town of Malang District in East Java province, at a depth of 82 kilometers (51 miles). Rahmat Triyono, the head of Indonesia's earthquake and tsunami center, said in a statement the undersea earthquake did not have the potential to cause a tsunami. AP

Stalled at first job: Vaccine shortages hit poor countries

AP ■ LONDON

As many as 60 countries, including some of the world's poorest, might be stalled at the first shots of their coronavirus vaccinations because nearly all deliveries through the global programme intended to help them are blocked until as late as June. COVAX, the global initiative to provide vaccines to countries lacking the clout to negotiate for scarce supplies on their own, has in the past week shipped more than 25,000 doses to low-income countries only twice in any given day. Deliveries have all but halted since Monday.

During the past two weeks, according to data compiled daily by UNICEF, fewer than 2 million COVAX doses in total

were cleared for shipment to 92 countries in the developing world — the same amount injected in Britain alone.

On Friday, the head of the World Health Organization slammed the "shocking imbalance" in global COVAX-19 vaccination. WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that while one in four people in rich countries had received a vaccine, only one in 50 people in poorer countries had gotten a dose.

The vaccine shortage stems mostly from India's decision to stop exporting vaccines from its Serum Institute factory, which produces the overwhelming majority of the AstraZeneca doses that COVAX counted on to supply around a third of the global population at a time coron-

avirus is spiking worldwide. COVAX will only ship vaccine cleared by WHO, and countries are increasingly impatient. Supplies are dwindling in some of the first countries to receive COVAX shipments, and the expected delivery of second doses in the 12-week window currently recommended is now in doubt.

In a statement, the vaccine alliance known as GAVI told The Associated Press that 60 countries are affected by the delays. In vaccination tents set up at Kenyatta National Hospital in Nairobi, many of those who arrived for their first jobs were uneasy about when the second would arrive.

"My fear if I don't get the second dose, my immune system is going to be weak, hence I might die," said Oscar Odunga, a clinic servant.

कार्यालय नगर निगम हल्द्वानी - काठगोदाम

ई-निविदा सूचना
नगर निगम हल्द्वानी-काठगोदाम क्षेत्राच्या निम्नलिखित कार्या हेतु पुढे ई-निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती हे। निविदा के संकाय में समस्त स्लॉट एवं सुचनाएं http://www.uktenders.gov.in पर दिनांक 12.04.2021 को उपलब्ध 2.00 बजे को निविदा 24.04.2021 को उपलब्ध 2.00 बजे तक उपलब्ध कराया जायेगा।

Table with columns: क्र. (Sl. No.), कार्य (Work), दर (Rate), मात्रा (Quantity), प्रस्ताव (Proposal), कार्य की तिथि (Date of Work)

राजस्थान राज्य पथ परिवहन निगम

ई-बोली सूचना
मि फार if I don't get the second dose, my immune system is going to be weak, hence I might die," said Oscar Odunga, a clinic servant.

Saudi Arabia executes 3 soldiers for 'high treason'

Dubai: Saudi Arabia executed three soldiers Saturday it accused of committing "high treason," without elaborating on which enemy the kingdom believed the men aided. The state-run Saudi Press Agency identified the men as soldiers working in the Defence Ministry. It did not elaborate on how the men aided the kingdom's enemies. Saudi Arabia is fighting a war against Iran-backed Houthi rebels. The kingdom also views Iran as a regional archrival.

Egyptian archaeologist reveals details of ancient city

Cairo: Egypt's best-known archaeologist on Saturday revealed further details on a Pharaonic city recently found in the southern temple of King Tutankhamun. However, with bricks they found mud brick formations that eventually turned out to be a well-served large city. The city walls and even rooms filled with ovens, storage pottery, and utensils used in daily life are said to be present. Archeologists also found human remains that were visible to reporters and visitors on Saturday. AP

Iran enforces 10-day lockdown amid fourth wave of pandemic

Tehran: Iran on Saturday began a 10-day lockdown amid a fourth wave of coronavirus infections, state TV reported, as a worrisome trend after more than a year of the country battling the Middle East's worst outbreak. Iran's coronavirus task force, charged with determining virus restrictions, ordered most shops closed and offices restricted to one-third capacity in the cities declared as "red zones." AP

Pakistan OK's emergency use of third Chinese vax despite low efficacy rate

Islamabad: Pakistan has approved the emergency use of its Serum Institute factory, which produces the overwhelming majority of the AstraZeneca doses that COVAX counted on to supply around a third of the global population at a time coron-

WESTERN RAILWAY

E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE No. S/14/2021 Date 09.04.2021

Table with columns: S.No, Short Description of Item, Quantity, T.O.D.

JAIPUR DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Notice Inviting Bid
Bids are invited for works given below in various zones as per details given:-

Raina returns with firepower

Suresh's 54 in his first match since 2019 final, Sam Curran's quick 34 guide Super Kings to 188-7

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Suresh Raina announced his IPL comeback with a blazing 36-ball 54 and powered Chennai Super Kings to a solid 188 for seven against Delhi Capitals here on Saturday.

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

The last five overs yielded 52 runs for CSK, thanks to Curran's power-packed innings.

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

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

In the first ball of the third over, Woakes had Gaikwad caught in the slip cordon as CSK slipped to seven for two. The English pacer drew Gaikwad into a push with a ball that moved a slightly on pitching.

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

During his 24-ball 36, Moeen struck four boundaries



Chennai Super Kings batsman Suresh Raina raises his bat after he completes his fifty against Delhi Capitals



Sam Curran reacts as he hits his sibling Tom Curran for six during IPL clash between Delhi and Chennai

and two sixes, playing a fine helping hand to Raina. Experienced off-spinner

Ravichandran Ashwin cut short Moeen's innings when the all-rounder got himself into an

uncomfortable position while going for a reverse sweep, the ensuing top-edge ending in a

good catch by Shikhar Dhawan, who ran backwards from short third man to hold on to the ball.

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

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

Raina got himself going with a four off Woakes and then worked Ashwin for two successive boundaries, not afraid to dance down the wicket against the wily spinner's flight.

Using his feet well, the veteran southpaw hoicked leg-spinner Amit Mishra for two and also got a maximum against Ashwin.

It was no different with Marcus Stoinis as Raina pulled the Australian medium pacer for another six before being run-out following a mix-up with Ravindra Jadeja (26).

PLAYER	RUNS
1. Suresh Raina (CSK)	54
2. Chris Lynn (MI)	49
3. AB de Villiers (RCB)	48

PLAYER	WKTS
1. Harshal Patel (RCB)	5
2. Avesh Khan (DC)	2
3. Chris Woakes (DC)	2

MOST SIXES	COUNT
1. Suresh Raina (CSK)	4
2. Chris Lynn (MI)	3
3. AB de Villiers (RCB)	2

SUMMER SLAM



WE'RE A TEAM: Delhi Capitals players and support staff pose for group photo at the end of final training session ahead of IPL 14 first game against Chennai Super Kings



HE'S BACK: Rajasthan Royals pacer Mustafizur Rahman poses for photo after he joins Royals bi-bubble

Consistent Sunrisers meet flashy KKR

KEY PLAYERS

RASHID KHAN
Afghanistan premier spinner's four over spell will decide result of the game

ANDRE RUSSELL
After disappointing season last year, the West Indian will be eager to leave his impression

VENUE: CHIDAMBARAM STADIUM, CHENNAI

HEAD TO HEAD

Matches	19
Sunrisers Hyderabad	07
Kolkata Knight Riders	12

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

Kolkata Knight Rider defeated Sunrisers Hyderabad by 7 wickets at Abu Dhabi

Kolkata Knight Rider beat SRH in Super Over after match ended in a tie at Abu Dhabi

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Former champions Kolkata Knight Riders will look to strike a perfect balance under the astute leadership of Feroz Khan Noon when they open their IPL campaign against consistent Sunrisers Hyderabad at Chepauk on Sunday.

In his first stint as full time captain, all eyes would be on the ODI World Cup-winning English skipper who will look to transform the misfiring army of cricketers and bring back the glorious days of two-time IPL champions.

There is the skipper Morgan who will look to bat through the overs while hoping that 2019 MVP Andre Russell gets back his explosive touch after a quiet season in 2020.

Russell had the worst season by his standards averaging 13 in nine innings without a single match-winning performance as the over-dependency on the Jamaican cost KKR dear last season.

Another West Indian who flopped big time in the UAE was Sunil Narine.

It's time that they think beyond the Trinidadian and try out Shikhar A Hasan, their buy in this year's auction.

They also have a mystery spinner in Varun Chakravarthy who struck it rich in absence of Narine last year but his fitness remains a concern.

One the other end, SRH will be bolstered by the return of Bhuvneshwar Kumar who played just four games in last year due to a hip injury.

Fresh from his fine form during the white-ball leg of the England series at home, Bhuvneshwar will spearhead their attack with yorker specialist T Natarajan by his side.

Add Afghan star spinner Rashid Khan to the bowling line-up and the Orange Army looks

912

Sunrisers Hyderabad opening batsman and captain David Warner who scored 912 runs at an average of 45.60 in 23 innings of as many matches for Delhi Daredevils and Sunrisers Hyderabad is the second highest run-getter against Kolkata Knight Riders in IPL history.

1459

Andre Russell who made 1459 runs at an average of 31.04 in 57 innings of 67 matches, needs 41 runs to become the fourth batsman to score over 1500 runs for Kolkata Knight Riders in IPL

False Starts

pretty balanced in their attack. But the real strength of SRH will be their destructive top-order with the duo of David Warner and in-form Jonny Baristow. They also have Kane Williamson and Manish Pandey, forming a solid top four.

But it remains to be seen who will play the role of the finisher for the SRH as they seem to lack muscle power teams badly need in the last five overs.

Knew my role in RCB since I was traded: Harshal

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Harshal Patel was told well in advance that he will be death overs' points-man for Royal Challengers Bangalore, a role he played to perfection in the IPL opener against Mumbai Indians.

Harshal's career-best 5 for 27 was one of the two match-winning performances for RCB with the other coming from AB de Villiers.

"When I was traded from Delhi Capitals, I was told what role I will play for the franchise," the Haryana pacer said at the post-match press conference.

He was brilliant at the death and just like skipper Virat Kohli said, Harshal also knew that he is expected to perform the tough job for

which he had planned meticulously.

"There were clear instructions that I will be bowling in the last two overs (he bowled 18th and 20th). That gave me a lot of clarity. It helped me prepare certain plans against batters and kept my preparations concise."

Harshal said that change of pace and the slow yorkers have been his biggest strength.

"The ball started reversing at one stage. It was important to bowl the yorkers and slower balls," he said.

According to Harshal, he has been bowling those slower yorkers that got rid of Ishan Kishan and Marco Jansen, for almost two seasons now.

"Just that when you don't get wickets of slow yorkers, people don't tend to see that. I

always had the yorker but earlier couldn't take it into the game.

He did a lot of simulation of bowling yorkers during training session to get it right during the match.

"In the past 15-20 days, I was trying to put myself into situations."

'OUR DEATH BOWLER'

Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Virat Kohli was all praise for Harshal Patel's match-winning bowling performance, terming him their designated death bowler in this edition of the IPL.

"We brought Harshal in a trade from Delhi. He is relishing the responsibility and is clear with his plans. He is the difference today (Friday). He is going to be our death bowler. As a captain you want players with clarity, and he has that," Kohli said at the post-match press conference.

MI favourites to lift trophy: Anjum

HARSHIT BISHT ■ NEW DELHI

Former skipper of India's national women's cricket team and commentator Anjum Chopra backs Mumbai Indians to make a hat-trick of the IPL titles after winning back-to-back tournaments in the UAE last year.

The feat, led by Rohit Sharma, defeated Delhi Capitals in the 2020 final in Dubai on November 10 and, in five months, is back on the field to take part in the 2021 edition.

Speaking to *The Pioneer* ahead of the 2021 season, Chopra said: "Mumbai Indians will start as the favourites because there are no loopholes in that line-up. Just six (five) months back, they won the last championship. And they haven't changed many players from that squad. At least the playing eleven remains the same. The majority of their players are in good form and you can never discount them from the competition because of their consistency."

In March, Mumbai Indians middle-order batsman Suryakumar Yadav and Ishan Kishan made their India debut, with both scoring 50s in their maiden International innings against England in the recently-concluded T20 International series.

Also in the One Day Internationals,

Krunal Pandya hit 50 in his first match. Ahead of the auction in Chennai this year, Mumbai — who have lifted the trophy on five occasions — retained the core group, apart from adding the likes of experienced Piyush Chawla, Kiwi all-rounder Jimmy Neesham and pacer Adam Milne, besides a few rookies including Arjun Tendulkar.

In fact, the 20-year-old, 6'8" South African left-arm pacer Marco Jansen made his debut against Royal Challengers Bangalore in the season's opener on Friday and took 2-28 in his four-over spell. And if that was not enough, the return of Hardik Pandya as a bowler is a welcome boost for the side. Hardik didn't bowl in the last season but, with his remodelled action, picked up the ball against England in the T20 series.

However, whether he will bowl during the tournament is still

unclear.

Talking about other teams, Anjum, who is part of the *Star Sports* commentary team for this IPL, said the form of Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers will be crucial for Royal Challengers Bangalore's chances despite the team having the likes of T20 specialist Glenn Maxwell.

"Like every year, there are high expectations from RCB. Last time, they came close (finished third after losing Qualifier 2 against Delhi Capitals). But again the onus lies on two players — Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers. It's good to have Glenn Maxwell but Virat and AB's form will be decisive," she said.

After the final T20I against England on March 20, Virat announced that he will open the innings in IPL as well.

Anjum believes that it is a well-planned move by the Indian skipper to get into the groove ahead of the T20 World Cup in India later this year. "It (Virat as opener) just broadens the options. If he wants to open, no one will stop him and, I think, before he

decides to open, he definitely would have worked out the combination of the Indian line-up as well. The IPL matches are just going to give him that greater exposure to open and structure the innings because we (India) are leading into the World Cup.

"And if Virat and Rohit Sharma open in the World Cup and lay a strong foundation, it will be easy for players like Suryakumar and Hardik to follow," she added.

One thing that makes this edition different from yesteryears is that there are no home games for any team. It is going to play a key role in the tournament, according to the former India captain.

"The neutral venue concept will affect a lot in this tournament because teams make strategies according to home conditions. When it was announced that the tournament would be held in India, it meant seven home games for every team. So everyone picked the players according to that but now when it is not there, it will have an impact," Anjum opined.

"On the 'one player to watch out for' in the tournament, she put her weight behind Hardik Pandya. "He will have a fantastic tournament. He had one in Dubai too and, this time, he will do even better," she concluded.



Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma wore shoes highlighting the great one-horned rhinoceros during the IPL opener against Royal Challengers Bangalore on Friday to help build awareness about conserving the endangered species

COVID-VE REPORT MUST AT WANKHEDE

The Mumbai Cricket Association has asked its Apex Council members to produce a Covid-19 negative certificate in order to enter the Wankhede stadium, which will host 10 matches of the 14th edition of the IPL. Dear Apex Council members. As per BCCI's protocol, all the officials who would be attending the IPL 2021 matches at Wankhede Stadium are required to produce a negative report of RT-PCR test conducted within 48 hours of the match day. MCA secretary Sanjay Nalk, wrote in a note to all the members. "The tests are mandatory even for those who have been vaccinated. The report will have to be produced at the time of entry to the stadium on each match day."