

OPINION 6
OF SRI LANKA AND
THE ANDAMANS

WORLD 8
'SUSPICIOUS' BLACKOUT STRIKES
IRAN'S NATANZ NUCLEAR SITE

SPORT 12
PUNJAB VS ROYALS
IN IPL TODAY

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

5 new vaccines by year end: Govt

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



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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

Meanwhile, India recorded a new all-time high daily Covid-19 count at 1,57,028 cases with Maharashtra contributing maximum at 63,294.

"India currently has 2 Covid-19 vaccines being manufactured locally: Covishield

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

The report said out of the

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

UP schools shut, social gathering restricted to 50 in closed space

Lucknow: The Uttar Pradesh Government on Sunday ordered the closure of all schools till April 30 and directed the imposition of a night curfew in the districts, which report 100 new infections in a day or have 500 active cases.

The Government ordered that not more than 100 people be allowed to assemble at an open space, and 50 in closed spaces.

Detailed report on P5

almost 20 vaccines in various clinical and pre-clinical stages, Sputnik V vaccine would receive approval first, within the next ten days.

For the manufacturing of vaccine doses, the Russian Direct Investment Fund has partnered with a number of Indian pharmaceutical companies, including Hyderabad-based Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Hetero Biopharma, Gland Pharma, Stelis Biopharma, and Vichrow Biotech. Sputnik V will provide a big boost in the war against Covid-19, with a production capacity of 850 million doses in the country. "Sputnik is expected to be

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

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

India bans virus drug Remdesivir's export

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

The Government has

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

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

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

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

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

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

Opp seeks cancellation of CBSE, ICSE Board exams

X, XI exams scheduled from May 4

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Didi, Shah lock horns over election violence, deaths

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

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ NADIA



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

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

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

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

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

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

CAPSULE

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

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

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

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

Eliminated Ansar chief had planned to attack Amarnath pilgrims

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

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

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

According to police records, he had joined the



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

ranks of a terror outfit on Tuesday itself, the day he reportedly went missing from his home.

During the encounter, the security forces and his parents tried to persuade him to surrender, but the other terrorists did not allow him to do

so.

The security forces had launched these anti-terrorist operations to neutralise terrorists and create a conducive atmosphere ahead of the beginning of the annual Amarnath pilgrimage that is scheduled to start on June 28.

Experts fear Kumbh can be Covid super-spreader

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

"That person will not only



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

This year, Kumbh Mela which started on April 1 is expected to be attended by nearly 150 million visitors.

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

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

2 kids die, 150 shanties gutted in fire in Noida

PTI ■ NOIDA/LUCKNOW

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

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

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

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

Capt cautions Sukhbir says 'Kotkapura case far from over'

DECLARES TO STAND BY SIT PROBE, ASSURES TO PUNISH GUILTY

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Sunday ridiculed SAD president Sukhbir Badal for jumping the gun on the Punjab and Haryana High Court orders in the Kotkapura firing case, of which the Court is yet to release the copy, and urged the Akali leader to refrain from making merry as the matter was far from being over.

"At least wait for the copy of the orders, before claiming victory," the Chief Minister advised the SAD chief, mocking Sukhbir's reaction to media reports of the HC's decision on the investigation into 2015 incident by the Punjab Police Special Investigation Team (SIT). The fact is that there has been no official announcement yet of the Court verdict, he pointed out.

"In any case, whatever the verdict in the matter, I stand by the investigation of the SIT, which has, at no point, absolved the Badal family of involvement in the heinous incident, that led to innocent people losing their lives," Capt Amarinder said, vowing to ensure justice for the families and punishment for the guilty, irrespective of who they are.

Reiterating that his Government will challenge any Court order that either quashes the SIT probe or removes the officer-in-charge, Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh, the Chief Minister said that Sukhbir's desperation to celebrate his "non-victory" exposed his panic in the face of what he must have seen as writing on the wall, given the direction in which the SIT investigation was

pointing. The SIT has, so far, chargesheeted six persons in the Kotkapura case, including the then Kotkapura Akali MLA and halqa-in-charge Mantar Singh Brar. The chargesheet against Brar clearly mentions that "On the analysis of the call details, it has been established that he made phone calls to the then Chief Minister of Punjab Parkash Singh Badal through the Special Principal Secretary to the CM (Gagandeep Singh Brar) and OSD to the CM Gurcharan Singh."

Capt Amarinder derided Sukhbir's attempt to wriggle out of the corner in which he finds himself in the light of the chargesheet against Brar by screaming vendetta and witch-hunt.

Nothing else explains the haste of the former Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister of Punjab to seek validation of his innocence in a HC order that is yet to come, he added.

The Chief Minister also took a dig at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for trying to make political hay over the issue with their frivolous and unfounded allegations. Like Sukhbir, AAP MP Bhagwant Mann has also been shooting through his mouth without knowing the High Court's mind, he observed, adding that the theatrics of Arvind Kejriwal's party, which has no presence at all in the state, are a laughing stock.

"Mann's charge of collusion between Congress and SAD on the issue is not only ludicrous but logic-defying," he said, quipping that "to expect any AAP leader to be logical was like expecting the sun to shine

at night".

Besides Brar, the others chargesheeted in the Kotkapura case are all senior police officers, including the then Ludhiana Commissioner of Police Paramraj Singh Umanangal, then SSP Moga Charanjit Singh Sharma, then SHO of PS City Kotkapura Gurdeep Singh, then Kotkapura DSP Baljit Singh, and then ADCP Ludhiana Paramjit Singh Pannu.

In addition, one person, former DGP Sumedh Singh Saini, has been challaned in the case. Saini and Umanangal's anticipatory bail pleas were dismissed by the Sessions Court Faridkot on February 11, 2021, and they have not approached the High Court for the same.

Sidhu, Sukhbir condemn assault on youth by Delhi Police

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A day after cousin of gang-ster-turned-activist Lakha Sidhana, also one of the main accused in Republic Day violence case, was allegedly thrashed by the Delhi Police after his arrest from Punjab, Congress MLA Navjot Singh Sidhu and SAD president Sukhbir Badal condemned the development.

Sidhu, the former Minister, took to Twitter on Sunday to express his resentment for allowing the Delhi Police to torture Punjabis in Punjab's domain and territory, in a veiled attack on his bete noire, the Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh.

"Shameful that Delhi Police is allowed to torture Punjabis in our domain and territory. It violates Punjab Govt's author-

ity - with whose connivance was it done?? Lessons should be learnt from Mamata Banerjee who put CBI behind bars when they encroached in W. Bengal's jurisdiction," Sidhu tweeted.

Sukhbir, who also condemned the incident while holding the Chief Minister directly responsible, demanded registration of a criminal case against the Delhi Police team which allegedly abducted and tortured Mundi Sidhana.

Notably, Lakha Sidhana, who is on the run, on Saturday alleged that the Delhi Police abducted his cousin Gurdeep Singh from Patiala and beat him badly.

Sidhana said that the intelligence wing of the Delhi Police, which arrested Deep Sidhu, took away his cousin from Patiala who had gone there to give his law exam. He

alleged the police repeatedly asked Gurdeep to tell his whereabouts.

Sidhana said that he completely blame Capt Amarinder Singh government as how could Delhi Police officials come here and take away a youth without informing the police station concerned.

Gurdeep was brought to the Civil Hospital by Sidhana's supporters, where his condition is stated to be serious. Dr Ravinder Singh at the emergency ward said that Gurdeep suffered injuries on the back and legs.

Sukhbir demanded that the Chief Minister should stand up to protect the rights of the youth of the state and register a criminal case against the Delhi police team which abducted and tortured Mundi Sidhana.

Jab should have strict India-first rule: AAP



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national spokesperson Raghav Chadha has written to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying there must be a strict India-first rule as citizens' needs must be given priority over exports to other countries.

Termining vaccine universalisation and vaccine nationalism need of the hour, the AAP MLA in a letter said the Centre has chosen to export over 64 million doses to 84 countries while Indian citizens are desperately looking for a vaccination centre that is still open.

"Central Govt has exported 64million doses to 84countries. I wish to ask the Govt as to what its priority is- people of Delhi or Dominican Republic? Maharashtra or Mauritius? Bengal or Bangladesh? Gujarat or Guyana? Odisha or Oman? Uttar Pradesh or United Kingdom? Kerala or Kenya?" he said in another tweet.

Chadha urged the government to prioritise vaccinating the entire 135 crore in India before "earning trivial international laurels".

"I urge Government of India to adopt 'vaccine nationalism', and prioritise vaccinating the entire 135 crore in India before earning trivial international laurels. Do not let vaccination centres shut while doses are being



flown out of the country. "Countries like the US have even gone to the extent of banning export of not just vaccines but also raw materials used to manufacture vaccines. And here we, despite being a manufacturer of world class vaccines, are gleefully exporting it. We need vaccines now more than ever," he said in another tweet.

The APP spokesperson further said that it is further alarming to read reports that the Government of India will be exporting nearly 45 million doses to Pakistan in the coming days.

"On one hand, Government of India claims that Pakistan has only exported terrorism to India, on the other hand, we are exporting life-saving vaccines to Pakistan," he said.

Responding to Chadha, Delhi BJP Spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that the AAP leader Chadha's letter is neither motivated by nationalism nor any serious concern for the youth.

"The letter written by the AAP leader is just a part of his party's political game to create confusion and make the vaccination process controversial," he said.

Kapoor said that the centre is committed to speedy vaccination for all and taking steps like prohibiting covid medicine export same as it has banned export of Remdesivir injections on Sunday.

AAP lashes out at Capt over HC ruling in Kotkapura SIT case

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Reacting over the Punjab and Haryana High Court's decision to set up a new Special Investigating Team (SIT) by rejecting the probe reports of the Punjab Government-constituted SIT, headed by Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh, to investigate 2015 Kotkapura firing case, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday said that it sees less of the HC's decision and more the decision of mutual association between Capt Amarinder Singh and the Badals.

AAP's Punjab unit presi-

Mann demanded that if the Congress

Government really wanted to bring justice to the victims of this case and punish the accused, "they should bring good and big lawyers in the court on their behalf"

dent and Sangrur MP Bhagwant Mann, addressing the media, accused the Badals and Capt Amarinder of complicity, saying that the Badals



had withdrawn all of Capt Amarinder's cases at the last moment of their Government. "Now, Captain is withdrawing cases of the Badals in the last

Mann says Capt-Badals are together, blames A-G Nanda for deliberately weakening the case

year of his Government. The only difference between the two is that the witness in the Captain's case turned hostile and in Badal's case, the lawyer turned hostile," he added.

Accusing the Amarinder Government of having a "weak lawyer", Mann said that not having a big lawyer in such a big case was a planned conspiracy of the Captain government. Mann demanded that if the Congress Government really wanted to bring justice to the victims of this case and punish the accused, "they should bring good and big lawyers in the Court on their behalf".

Resume talks with protesting farmers, Anil Vij urges Tomar

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

In view of surge in Covid-19 cases across the country, Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij has written to Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, urging him to resume talks with farmers protesting against the Centre's farm laws.

Maintaining that a surge in Covid-19 cases is being seen across the country and the situation is turning bad in Haryana too, Vij said he is worried about the farmers protesting on the state borders with Delhi.

Vij, who is also Health Minister of the state, said that all possible efforts are being made to bring the situation under control in Haryana but my worry pertains to thousands of agitating farmers who are sitting on the borders of Haryana. I have to save them from COVID-19, he said.

In his letter, the Minister also said that there is also a worry that because of them the disease may not spread in the rest of the state.

He also mentioned that being in agitation mode, the



farmers are not able to follow all COVID-related guidelines.

Vij further said that a situation of uncertainty prevails as there have been no talks for a long time between the government and the agitating farmers. I am of the belief that a problem can be solved through dialogue.

Therefore, I request you that the talks should be resumed so that the issue is resolved and the protest ends, he said. The Centre has made a lot of efforts to resolve the problems of farmers and held multiple rounds of talks with them but due to some reasons, the solution is yet to come, he added, in his letter written in Hindi.

105-year-old Kartar Kaur Becomes mascot of vaccination against corona



PNS ■ MOGA

As every person above the age of 45 years is being vaccinated in India, 105-year old Kartar Kaur has become the unlikely mascot of awareness on Corona vaccination in the country.

While vaccination is being given full support by the educated and socially aware people, there are some under the influence of ignorance, who are creating superstitions and misconceptions about this. Kartar Kaur, the 105-year-old lady

from Moga, carried the flag to create awareness among the people, where she and her family have been vaccinated.

Although Kartar Kaur belongs to village Bhinder Khurd, she is now living with her son Harpinder Singh in Moga. She along with her family got vaccinated in a camp in Ward No. 3. The camp was organised under the leadership of her grandson and former councillor Manjit Singh Mann. More than 188 people were vaccinated in the camp. At present Manjit Singh Mann's wife,



Amanpreet Kaur Mann is the Councillor of Ward No.3.

The family informed that Mata Kartar Kaur has been vaccinated on the sheer strength of her will and determination and was not pressured by anyone. The 105-year old thinks that vaccination is mandatory to prevent this disease and said that even if it was not the turn of some people to get vaccinated, they should follow the instructions of the government and the health department. She said she did not have fever or any other

Camp was organised under the leadership of her grandson and former councillor Manjit Singh Mann

problem after being vaccinated, adding that a healthy person has no fear of any kind of problem.

Praising the spirit of Kartar Kaur, Deputy Commissioner Sandeep Hans appealed to the people above the age of 45 years to get rid of all illusions and get themselves and their families vaccinated. He said that this vaccination was being carried out in Civil Hospital Moga, all CHCs, 91 Health Wellness Centers. Apart from this special camps are also being organized in different areas.

Capt appoints Sonu Sood Punjab's Covid vaccine campaign brand ambassador

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Government has appointed Bollywood actor and humanitarian, Sonu Sood, the brand ambassador for its Covid vaccination programme. The Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Sunday made the announcement a day after meeting Sonu, who called on him at his residence.

"There is no one more ideally suited to inspire and influence people to take the vaccine. There is a lot of hesitancy among people here in Punjab. Sonu's popularity among them, and his exemplary role in helping tens of

thousands of migrants reach safely home since the pandemic broke out last year, will help counter their reservations," said the Chief Minister.

"When people hear this Punjab da puttara talk about the benefits of vaccine, and how safe and essential it is, they will believe him. Because they trust him," he added. Sonu said that he was happy and honoured to be appointed the brand ambassador for this life-saving product. "I feel blessed to be playing any part in this huge campaign of the Punjab Government to protect the lives of the people of my home state," he added.



On the occasion, Sonu presented to the Chief Minister his book 'I am no Messiah', which

he says captures his experiences of his journey from Moga to Mumbai.

Over 1.13L vaccine doses administered in Haryana

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Following the appeal of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to further augment the vaccination drive by observing "Teeka Utsav" from April 11 to April 14, the Haryana Health Department had set up 1,627 Covid-19 Vaccination Centres which administered 1,13,917 vaccine doses to the beneficiaries on Sunday in the State.

Additional Chief Secretary, Health, Rajeev Arora said that the Health Department has administered 1,13,917 Covid-19 vaccine doses on Sunday thereby enhancing the consolidated number of vaccine doses administered till date to 24,69,233 doses.

On the Covid-19 vaccine roll out plan, Arora said that, with an aim to ensure that the vaccine is administered to a maximum number of people, the Department had set up more Vaccination Centres across the state.

He elaborated that these Centres have been strategically placed in highly populated areas across the state and even in the rural areas to ensure



maximum penetration of the vaccine so as to curtail the spread of highly contagious COVID-19 virus. Most of the beneficiaries were above 45 years of age, he added.

On the administration of vaccines to Health Care Workers (HCWs), Frontline Workers (FLWs) and others, Arora said that 191251 HCWs have been administered the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and around 117123 HCWs have been administered the second dose.

Sharing the details of the Frontline Workers (FLWs) he said that 122226 FLWs have been administered the first dose of the vaccine and 47446 FLWs have been administered the second dose. Also, around 19,90,399 lakh doses of vaccine have been administered to beneficiaries above 45 years till today, he added.

E-conference soon to reduce level of air pollution



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government will organise an online round table conference with an aim to reduce the level of air pollution in Delhi. The Government has set a target of reducing the pollution level by one-third in the next five years and will formulate a long-term action plan based on the suggestions received from experts and organizations.

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai said that under the leadership of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the government has set a target of reducing Delhi's pollution level by one-third in the next five years.

He said that based on the suggestions received from experts and organizations, the Delhi government will formulate a long-term action plan to tackle pollution.

Rai also said, "The Delhi government is continuously working to reduce air pollution. The work that our government has done in the last 6 years to fix the environment and improve the environment-



tal situation has made a positive beginning in reducing Delhi's pollution, but it is not enough. Therefore, to fix the air quality of Delhi and to solve the crisis the government has set a target to significantly reduce the pollution level in the next five years."

The Environment Minister said that the government has set a target to significantly reduce the pollution levels in the next five years. "This round table conference is being organized by the Department of Environment, in which experts working in the field of environment, especially with regard to air pollution, have been called. Along with this, social organizations and NGOs doing different work in the field of environment are also participating in it," he said.

Two held for killing 35-year-old man in Mangolpuri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Having tricked the accused to confess with a NASA story, the Delhi Police arrested two men for allegedly killing a 35-year-old man who used to abuse the accused in northwest Delhi's Mangolpuri area.

The accused have been identified as Pradeep and Raju, both residents of Mangolpuri. Police said that body of one

Chandarbhyan, a resident of Mangolpuri, with injury marks was found on Monday at 9.35 AM and he used to work as a cardboard box painter in Rampura Industrial area.

According to Parminder Singh, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Outer district, during investigation, it was revealed that the deceased was last seen with two men on a bike.

Haryana reports highest ever daily cases

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana on Sunday reported 3440 fresh infections, the highest single-day spike since the Covid-19 pandemic began.

Earlier, it was on November 20 last year, when the state had reported the highest 3104 cases in a single day.

16 more people succumbed to the virus in the last 24 hours taking the toll to 3268 in the state while the caseload surged to 316881.

Three deaths were reported in Jind,

two each in Bhiwani, Yamunanagar, Ambala, Karnal and Panipat, one death each was reported in Sirsa, Gurugram and Hisar, the state's Health Department's bulletin stated. Among the COVID-19 patients, there were 263 critical COVID-19 patients in the state out of which 217 were on oxygen support while 46 were on ventilators.

Gurugram district continued to be worst affected and recorded the highest number of infections at 1084 followed by 445 in Faridabad and 264 in Karnal.

Among other districts, Karnal reported 264 cases, Kurukshetra 194 cases, Ambala 183, Panipat 110, Hisar 177, Sonapat 155, Panchkula 116, Yamunanagar 149 cases, Jind 138 cases.

The active cases crossed 20000-mark in the state and was recorded at 20981 till the evening. The worst affected district - Gurugram reported the highest number of active cases at 5548 followed by 2167 in Karnal and 1947 in Faridabad, the bulletin stated. The fatality rate was recorded at 1.03 percent in Haryana.

CM rushes officials to Maha, Hyd to secure Remdesivir

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Sunday told officials to visit Maharashtra and Hyderabad to coordinate with companies producing Remdesivir injection for the battle against Covid-19.

Remdesivir was the first drug approved by the USA's Food & Drug Administration to treat the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It is to treat Covid-19 in hospitalized adults and children aged 12 years and above who weigh at least 40 kg.

The Chief Minister while reviewing Covid situation in Chhattisgarh asked the Chief Secretary to send officials to Hyderabad and Maharashtra for coordinat-



ing with drug companies producing Remdesivir, a press release said. Through video conferencing, Baghel also interacted with hospital directors, members of the Indian Medical Association and experts and inquired about the

shortage of oxygen and other drugs, an official communication said.

"The increasing numbers of Covid cases in Chhattisgarh is alarming. If we deal with it in a planned way, definitely we will succeed," he said, adding that

strict surveillance was necessary at the Chhattisgarh-Maharashtra border.

He stressed the need for Covid testing at airports and railway stations.

Baghel said this time the pandemic has spread to villages. To halt its spread,

it was necessary to do Covid test of people coming from outside Chhattisgarh. He asked private hospitals to do better treatment of Covid patients and assured them all possible support from the government.



Policemen riding on bikes patrolling in Raipur on Sunday to strictly enforce lockdown in city. Raipur district has been placed under a ten-day total lockdown from April 9 at 6 pm amid massive spike in Covid cases. Pioneer Photo

Electric funeral houses to come up in six cities

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh government has decided to establish electric funeral houses in Raipur, Durg, Bilaspur, Korba, Bhilai and Rimali cities, it was announced on Sunday.

The decision was taken after delays in cremation of Covid patients were reported from cremation grounds in various cities.

Videos of bodies waiting for the last rites were widely shared on WhatsApp and other social media sites.

The Urban Administration department has been told to set up the electric funeral houses in the six cities, a press release said.

The department has provided a special permission for floating a seven-day short term ten-



der/expression of interest for setting up the funeral houses.

Officials have been told complete the work soon.

Forest Dept gives over 5 Cr man-days employment

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Despite the corona crisis, the Chhattisgarh Forest Department provided 5.23 crore lakh man-days of employment in 2020-21 under employment-oriented schemes including the collection of minor forest produce, it was announced on Saturday.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief of Forest Force Rakesh Chaturvedi said several works related to development and conservation of forests were done in the state, an official communication said. In the process, employment of 2.23 crore man-days was made available to the people. Similarly, 3 crore man-days of employment were made available through collection and processing of minor forest produce.

Budget will promote justice in C'garh: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh budget will advance the cause of justice, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said on Sunday.

In his 17th episode of Lokvaani radio programme, Baghel emphasized the lessons learnt during the Covid-19 crisis.

Answering questions from the audience, he said that interests of all the sections of the society have been taken into account while presenting the budget this year.

The Chief Minister said the objective of the Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana is to empower the farmers. He pointed out that the government procured 92 lakh tonnes of paddy from farmers, which is a record for paddy procurement in the state.

"We have made a budget provi-



sion of Rs. 5,703 crores to provide cash assistance to farmers under the Yojana."

Besides, a budget provision of Rs 150 crores has been made to improve nutritional security and

economic condition of farmers in seven tribal-dominated districts and 14 development blocks of Mungeli district.

To benefit farmers with interest-free agricultural loans, the government has set the biggest goal so far in the history of Chhattisgarh - to disburse loan of Rs 5,900 crores.

Baghel said the objective of the Naveen Nyaya Yojana is to ensure regular income to the landless laborers and to support the rural agricultural landless laborers.

He added that though the government has paid about Rs 90 crores against the procurement of cow dung, "I am happy to say that through gauthan self-help groups have earned nearly Rs 950 crores from the production and sale of vermicompost and items using cow dung."

'Nalanda Parisar' is now contact tracing center

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Nalanda Parisar, a high-tech library popular with students in Raipur, has been converted into a contact tracing center, the authorities said on Sunday.

A contact tracing center is already functioning at the new circuit house in Raipur, Additional Collector and nodal officer Padmini Bhoi said in a press release.

"We are taking contact history of at least 20 people who have come in direct contact

with a Covid positive patient," Padmini Bhoi said.

Raipur has emerged as the most severe Covid hotspot in Chhattisgarh.

The Health Department said 3,797 fresh Covid cases were reported in Raipur on Saturday.

By Saturday, there were 21,329 active cases in Raipur district and 1,155 Covid patients had died. Durg is the second worst hit city and saw 2,272 fresh cases on Saturday.

The nodal officer appealed

to Covid patients to provide their correct name, address and mobile number at the Covid testing center. People living around a Covid patient are at the most risk of catching infection. Also, people who have come in contact with Covid positives may get the infection, she said.

"Through contact tracing, we can break the Covid chain," she said. "Some people during Covid test give false contact numbers and address which is dangerous not only for them but for society as well."

80% oxygen made in C'garh to be given as 'medical oxygen'

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

In view of a sudden spike in Covid-19 cases and deaths, 80 percent of the total oxygen produced in Chhattisgarh will be supplied for medical purposes to hospitals in the state, it was announced on Sunday.

A notification to this effect has been issued by the Health Department under the Epidemic Diseases Act following a directive of Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, a press release said.

The manufacturers have been told to supply 80 percent of the total oxygen produced in their units to hospitals as medical oxygen, it said.

In case of further requirement, the remaining 20 percent of the oxygen produced will also be given to the hospitals, it added.



The manufacturers have been asked to ensure uninterrupted production of oxygen in their units.

All Divisional Commissioners and

Collectors have been asked to ensure proper implementation of the order. On Saturday, 14,098 new coronavirus cases were reported and 97 patients died in Chhattisgarh.

Now Covid tests for train passengers must before 72 hrs



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh government has made it mandatory for passengers to undergo Covid tests 72 hours before they reach the state by trains, it was announced on Sunday.

All Divisional Commissioners, District Collectors, Inspectors General of Police and

Superintendents of Police have been told to strictly adhere to the guidelines, a press release said.

Passengers without a test report will undergo Covid tests at the railway stations and will be in quarantine or Covid centre or hospital if the result turns out to be positive, the release said.

Similarly, action should be taken as per the Standard Operating Procedure prescribed for contact tracing of Covid positive passengers in trains, it added.

On Saturday, the government made it mandatory for passengers coming by plane to undergo RT-PCR tests 72 hours before flying to the state.

Hardcore Naxalite killed, Maoists burn vehicles

He was identified as Vetti Hunga, carried a reward of Rs 1 lakh on his head

STAFF REPORTER ■ DANTEWADA/BIJAPUR

A hardcore Naxalite carrying a cash reward of Rs 1 lakh on his head was killed in a gun battle with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district, police said on Sunday.

The incident happened in a forested patch between Gaadam and Jungampal, about 450 km from Raipur.

"In an exchange of fire between Dantewada DRG and Maoists of Katakalyan area committee at about 2 pm, a Maoist's body was recovered," Inspector

General of Police (Bastar) Sundarraj P said.

He was identified as Vetti Hunga, militia commander who carried a reward of Rs 1 lakh on his head, the officer said. More Maoists are suspected to have been killed or injured in the action.

An 8 mm pistol and a country made muzzle loading gun were recovered from the spot. Also, a 2kg IED, crackers, Maoist literature, medicines and items of daily were found.

In a separate incident, Maoists burnt five construction vehicles engaged in a water filter plant in Naimed police station limits of Bijapur district, the officer said.

Armed Maoists set ablaze two mixture machines, two poclaim machines and a tractor on Sunday afternoon.

Lockdown in 5 C'garh districts from April 13/14

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Amid a spike in Corona cases and fatalities in Chhattisgarh, lockdowns were announced on Sunday in Surguja, Surajpur, Gariaband, Janjgir-Champa and Bilaspur districts.

The lockdown will be imposed in Surguja, Surajpur, Gariaband and Janjgir-Champa from April 13 to April 23 and in Bilaspur from April 14 to 21.

The district boundary will be sealed and only essential services will be allowed during the lockdown, said identical orders from Collectors Sanjeev Kumar Jha (Surguja), Ranbir Sharma (Surajpur), Nisheshkumar Kshirsagar (Gariaband), Yashwant Kumar (Janjgir-Champa) and Dr Saransh Mittar (Bilaspur).

Medical shops and petrol pumps will function with conditional restrictions and only



movement of medical emergencies 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 operate 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 be closed. Telecom, sanitization, water supply, maintenance and health departments will work.

On Saturday, 14,098 new coronavirus cases were detected and 97 patients died in Chhattisgarh.

India should cherish peace process on LAC, says China

PNSPTI ■ NEW DELHI/BEIJING

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

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

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

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

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

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



they said.

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

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

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

In its press release on the latest round of talks between two militaries

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

Both sides should also adhere to the consensus reached in the previous talks, the state-run China Global Television Network (CGTN) on Sunday quoted the press release by a PLA spokesperson on the talks held at the Chushul border point on the Indian side of the LAC.

"We hope the Indian side could cherish the current positive trend of de-escalation and cooling in the border area, adhere to the relevant agreements between the two armies and the consensus of the previous talks and move towards the same direction as the Chinese side to jointly maintain peace and tranquility in the border area," a spokesperson for the Western Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) said in a statement.

The Indian Army statement said it was highlighted at the talks that completion of disengagement in other areas would pave the way for considering "de-escalation of forces" and ensure full restoration of peace and tranquility in the region.

The two sides agreed on the need to resolve the outstanding issues in an expeditious manner in accordance with the existing agreement and protocols, the statement said.

The two sides agreed that it was important to take guidance from the consensus of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

Best mango? Jury is out on social media

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Social media on Sunday debated which variety of mango-Alphonso, Dushehri, Langda, Maldah or Totapari is the best. The hashtag #Alphonso has gone viral on Twitter and it was trending at 13 numbers with many tweeting which variety of the king of fruit is the best in the country.

It all started when a Twitter user claimed that 'Alphonso' mangoes are the best, while responding to this tweet, a twitter user wrote no mango can aspire to come even within sniffing distance of the Langda/Maldah, no competition, Langda is King. One twitter user wrote 'Alphonso is the most overrated stuff' ever and that only "brand conscious babalog" have a taste for it. Several people tweeted for Alphonso mangoes. Twitterati from Bihar, Eastern UP and West Bengal tweeted Maldah is the best.

A twitter user Joey@Drjoyeeta claimed that Alphonso mangoes are the best! Specially packed by my dear brother for calling me a loser. PS: Let's start the mango war. Repeating in capitals: ALPHONSO MANGOES ARE THE BEST!

Responding to the tweet, Sankarshan Thakur tweeted: "No mango can aspire to come even within sniffing distance of the #Langda / #Maldah No competition. #Langda is King. Yashwant deshमुख responded to Thakur saying 'Alphonso



is the most overrated stuff you will ever come across. The brand-conscious Alphonso Babalog has no idea what real mango is. Try Dashahari, Chausa, Safeda and ultimate Langda/Maldah".

Another twitter user tweeted "Dashehri, Malgova and Sappattai for me. A little known variety called Panjavarnam from my home town is also very good, but sadly not available freely outside of that region. And yes, Alphonso is hell overrated". Another twitter user wrote 'One twitter user tweeted "Alphonso is overrated; Kesari is underrated".

Dubbed the 'King of fruits' in India, mangoes have an almost cult fanbase in India. With its pulpy, juicy flesh wrapped around a delightfully hardcore, the fruit comes in many shapes, sizes, flavours and varieties across the states of India. A large variety of mangoes are grown across India. Maharashtra is famous for Alphonso mangoes, Uttar

Pradesh is known for Dusheri. West Bengal is popular for growing Himsagar mangoes while Andhra Pradesh is known for the lighter coloured Safeda mangoes. Other popular varieties of mangoes in India include Chausa, Lengra, Kesari, Totapuri, Neelam and much more. Another netizen wrote: "Agree, Langra is just awesome..... although I have developed a taste for Banganapalli in recent years. Alphonso has a bad hit rate, but the odd one can be brilliant".

According to the agriculture ministry, mango production is estimated to increase 4.24 per cent to 21.12 million tonnes in the crop year 2020-21 ending June. The output of mango, the 'king of fruits', stood at 20.26 million tonne during the 2019-20 crop year (July-June). The arrival of mangoes from southern and western India has started, while the season in the northern states like Uttar Pradesh will begin from mid-June onwards.

Modi pays tribute to social reformer Jyotirao Phule

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday paid tributes to noted social reformer Jyotirao Phule on his birth anniversary, and said his commitment to reforming the society will continue to inspire future generations.

In a tweet, Modi also hailed him as a great thinker, philosopher and writer and noted that he was committed to women's education and empowerment throughout his life.

Born in an extremely

backward caste in 1827 in Maharashtra, Phule fought against social discrimination and strove to promote education among the most deprived communities.

He and his wife, Savitribai Phule, are considered pioneers for their efforts to promote education among women.

Modi had recently suggested a "vaccination festival" from April 11 to April 14, birth anniversary of Dalit icon Bhim Rao Ambedkar, to push inoculation against the coronavirus among the people eligible for the shots.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Gandhi, who had set in motion paperless working in the Central Information Commission a decade back said, "The Supreme Court E-Committee has been around since 2005 and it appears its real achievements are inadequate".

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

"If I presume an expenditure

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

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

Gandhi said the Committee mentions setting up of "some Virtual Courts", whereas all courts should be effective virtual courts.

"In fact, I would submit that all courts should be prepared and mandated to allow lawyers and litigants to appear virtually or physically without any specific need to inform anyone or take permissions," he said.

The former Information Commissioner said to achieve this there is no requirement for any serious training, but just ability to use a keyboard, which is a common skill available to any literate person and at best a two-hour familiarisation video should be adequate.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

The investors were promised plots/villas/apart-



ments against their investments. However, they were neither given the promised plots, flats, or villas. They were not even refunded the funds despite the plots or flats not being allotted to them.

Besides Singh, six directors of the two firms have also been

booked in a case of cheating and criminal breach of trust.

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

These droplets are now recognized as being the main way in which the virus spreads to other individuals and people are being advised to wear masks to curb contamination. Regularly airing indoor spaces to reduce the concentration of viral particles is also important.

Since the quality of air in a small space can quickly deteriorate even when there is just one person in that space (mainly because of the increased CO2 levels produced as we breathe



out), lift manufacturers routinely include ventilator systems. These can, however, increase the rate at which air - possibly laden with bacteria and viruses - circulates. While adding an air purifier to the lift in addition to the ventilator should help in theory, the way in which the purifier affects air circulation, and thus transmission of airborne viruses is unclear, said the researchers.

Air purifiers work by sucking in stale air and exhausting cleansed air, but this adds to the overall circulation of air - an aspect that previous studies, or indeed air purifier manufacturers themselves, have not considered.

To investigate this issue, Dimitris Drikakis and Talib Dbouk of the University of Nicosia analysed air circulation

and found that the air purifier actually increases the spread of saliva droplets in the cabin.

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

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

"The broader implications of the present findings are that health and safety authorities must revise guidelines accordingly by considering the flow circulation and droplet dispersion effects arising from air purifiers and sanitisers in confined spaces," say Drikakis and Dbouk.

Focus on micro containment zones to curb Covid march: Modi to K'taka CM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

"Spoke to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodiji and apprised him about the measures being taken in the state to mitigate second wave of pandemic. PM appreciated the Government's efforts and suggested to focus on micro containment zones to contain the spread of infection," Yediyurappa tweeted.

After the video conference with Modi, Yediyurappa on Thursday had announced a corona curfew between 10 PM to 5 AM in seven district centres of the state along with Manipal, from April 10 to 20, targetted to controlling the fast spread of COVID-19.

Untill Saturday the total number of active cases in the

state stood at 61,653.

The Chief Minister also appealed to the people, those eligible, to get vaccinated.

"Vaccine is the biggest weapon available to us in this battle against Covid-19. I urge all eligible citizens to get vaccinated and also encourage people around you to get vaccinated. Let us continue to stay protected by wearing masks and following social distancing," he said in another tweet.

As suggested by the Prime Minister at Thursday's video-conferencing with various Chief Ministers, the State Government is organising vaccination drives from April 11-Jyotiba Phule's birthday till April 14- Ambedkar's birthday.



said pitching for "zero vaccine waste" and urging the people to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour.

"This festival is, in a way, the beginning of another major war against corona. We have to lay special emphasis on personal hygiene as well as social hygiene," he said.

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

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

Most of these states have reimposed restrictions, including the closure of schools, night curfew, weekend and local shutdowns, while ruling out a total lockdown, but as the latest wave of patients

continues to flood hospitals, there are some signs of a rethink.

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

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

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

Enhance peacekeeping budget: Army chief to UN

PTI ■ DHAKA

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

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

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

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

UN peacekeeping missions should run on a participatory basis.

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

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

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

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

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

The changing situation further expanded the missions' responsibility

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

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

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

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

EXPLOSIVE-LADEN SUV-HIRAN MURDER CASES

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

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UP man held for announcing reward on priest's head

IANIS ■ MEERUT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

Navreh celebration in J&K from today

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

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

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

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

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

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

gious places.

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

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

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

Departmental probe against Param Bir

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TN logs 6,618 fresh cases

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Talking to media persons after the meeting, State Health Minister Rajesh Tope hinted that the government might impose full-fledged lockdown to arrest the rapid spread of Covid-19 infections.

Tope said that the chief minister would take a final decision on the imposition of full-fledged lockdown in the state. He said that if the lockdown was announced,

then the industries would have to take care of their workers. Meanwhile, he appealed the migrant labourers not to leave the state.

"The chief minister would be meeting top officials and on Wednesday, after which there will be a weekly Cabinet meeting where a decision regarding the lockdown would be taken," Tope said.

MAHA BECOMES FIRST STATE TO ADMINISTER 1 CR VACCINE DOSES

Mumbai: Amid a fierce controversy between the MVA government and the Centre over the discrimination in the distribution of vaccines to the State, Maharashtra on Sunday became the first State in the country to administer one crore doses to the Covid-19 patients.

"We have crossed one crore doses today. Till today noon, we have administered 1,00,38,42 doses," principal secretary (health) Dr Pradeep Vyas said.

Of one crore-odd vaccine doses, around 90 lakh people have been given the first dose, while the rest 10 lakh have received the two doses.

Maharashtra has worked out

a target of vaccinating 6 lakh people per month, 40 lakh a week – that comes to around 1.6 crore a month. However, it is facing a shortage of vaccines – and more than 30 per cent centres have run out of stock.

It may be recalled that State Health Minister Rajesh Tope had said on Thursday that given the gravity of the Covid-19 situation, Maharashtra would 7.5 lakh doses per week suffice for Maharashtra. "We need at least 40 lakh doses per week. In other words, we need at least 1.60 crore doses in a month. It is only then, we will be able to implement the vaccination programme properly," the state health minister had said.

People should follow Covid protocol to keep infections under check, says Raj CM



Jaipur: Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has said that with the ever increasing corona infection in Rajasthan, the State government will be forced to take strict action if people will not follow the health protocol of wearing masks, keeping proper distance and keeping away from the crowd.

He said that during the second wave, the infection is spreading very fast and all the people should follow the health rules and help the government

in keeping it under control.

Gehlot was presiding over the review meeting on infection and vaccination status at the Chief Minister's residence on Saturday night.

He said that during the spread of corona infection last year, the same spirit and support of the people of all classes and communities has given full support of the state government and all health rules and other guidelines are needed again.

UP schools shut till Apr 30, Govt orders night curfew in districts logging 100 new cases/day

Lucknow: The Uttar Pradesh Government on Sunday ordered the closure of all schools till April 30 and directed the imposition of a night curfew in the districts, which report 100 new infections in a day or have 500 active cases.

According to a government statement, the government also ordered that not more than 100 people be allowed to assemble at an open space for an event while the number has been put at 50 for closed spaces.

The fresh government directives have come on a day the state reported its highest single-day spike of 15,353 cases since the outbreak of the pandemic.

So far, 9,152 people have died from the infection in the state, which has reported 6,92,015 cases since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Earlier, a night curfew was imposed in Kanpur, Gorakhpur, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Allahabad, Meerut, Ghaziabad, Bareilly, Muzaffarnagar districts and the Lucknow civic body area.

On April 2, the UP government had extended till April 11 the closure of all schools for stu-

dents of Classes 1 to 8.

According to the statement issued on Sunday, all government and private schools will remain closed till April 30 while pre-scheduled examinations can be held.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said a night curfew be imposed from 9 pm to 6 am in the districts that report 100 fresh cases in a day or have 500 active Covid-19 cases.

Stressing the need to focus on the "test, trace and treat" approach, the government said the daily count of RT-PCR tests should be taken to one lakh.

Tracing of at least 30-35 persons who have come in contact with a COVID-19 patient should be done, the directives said.

The UP chief minister said an effective COVID-19 vaccination drive should be carried out as a four-day "Tika Utsav" began in the state on Sunday. The four-day vaccination programme, which began on the birth anniversary of Mahatma Jyotibha Phule, will continue till April 14, the birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar.

UP man, sister booked for 'forcing conversion' 2 years after marriage

IANIS ■ ALIGARH (UP)

Two years after marriage, a woman has accused her husband and his two sisters of "forcibly converting" her.

The woman said, she never realized that her husband was a Muslim and had never met her in-laws. She had retained her maiden name after marriage.

The Muslim man, 25, and his sisters have now been booked under the anti-conversion law.

According to reports, the woman, Puja Soni, 23, is from Chhattisgarh. She said she had married a man named Ashok Rajput in March 2019 in Delhi, where she works at a hospital.

She got to know the man,

who worked as a plumber, when they started talking over the phone.

They met and fell in love. "We got married in a temple," she said. The couple started living in Noida.

In her complaint to police, she said, "On February 7 this year, we had a daughter. On March 22, he took me to his home at the Rait village in Aligarh. There, I found out his name was Afzal Khan. I was forced to read the 'namaz' and stopped from offering my prayers."

She further said, "On April 8, they took my daughter away from me. Then, they converted me forcefully and renamed me 'Alna'."

She alleged her in-laws drove her out of the house and

dropped her off at Mathura.

SHO Abhay Kumar Sharma of the Lodha police station, where the FIR was registered, said, "Ashok Rajput a.k.a Afzal Khan has been booked under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance and Section 323 of the IPC (voluntarily causing hurt) along with his sisters."

No arrest has been made so far.

The woman's statement will be registered in court under Section 164 of the CrPC on Monday.

So far, 32 FIRs have been registered under the state's anti-conversion law since it came into effect in November last year.

Shot shortage

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

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

in the arm. It looked like we had it all under control, till the second wave hit.

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

PICTALK



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

AP/PTI

Deliverance

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

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



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

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

Of Sri Lanka and the Andamans

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



PRAFULL GORADIA

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AMP UP VACCINE PRODUCTION

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

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

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

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

NEED TO TAKE IT SERIOUSLY

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

Nix the corruption in Maharashtra



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

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

TV Jayaprakash | Palakkad

NO REASON TO LOWER GUARD

Sir — We are responsible for the rise in

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

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

Abhishek Singh | Varanasi

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

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

Jubel D'Cruz | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

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



Congress interim president
— Sonia Gandhi



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

Iranian Foreign Minister
— Mohammad Javad Zarif

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



Actor
— Swara Bhasker



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

Cricketer
— Virat Kohli

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



Delhi CM
— Arvind Kejriwal



FIRST COLUMN

BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

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



RIYA RAHIMAN

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



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

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

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

The big tent of the PPP decoded

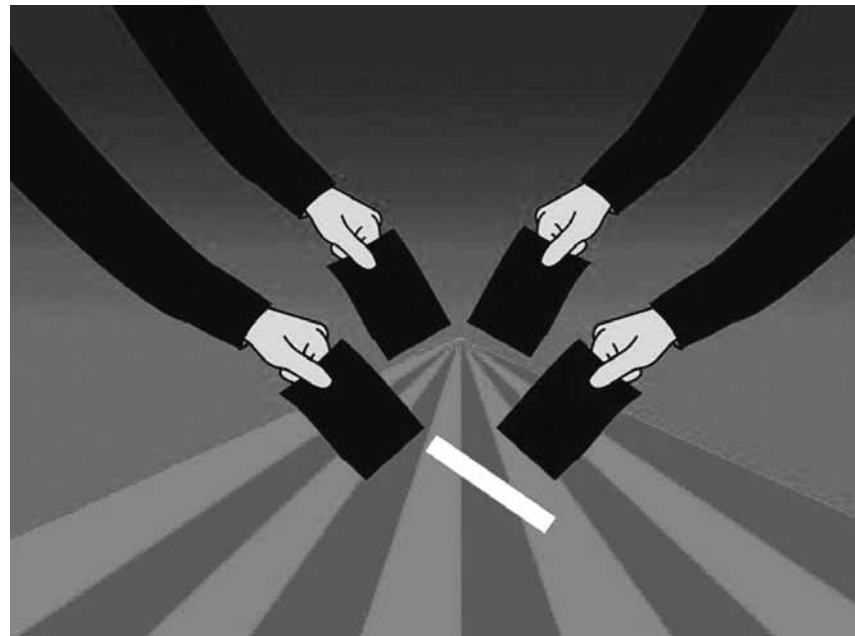
Pragmatic centrism and the need to remain a bridge between Sindh's electorate and the political fruits of federalism may help explain why the PPP made a grab for the Senate



NADEEM PARACHA



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



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

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

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

Punjab and Sindh.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

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



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

Quaking over Iran's phantom nuclear weapons

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

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

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

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



GWYNNE DYER

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

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

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

has already been some progress.

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

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

So that's probably sorted,



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Traditionally the UK's strategy is "no first use", which

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

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

Myanmar forces kill 82 in single day

AP ■ YANGON

At least 82 people were killed in one day in a crackdown by Myanmar security forces on pro-democracy protesters, according to reports on Saturday from independent local media and an organisation that keeps track of casualties since the February coup. Friday's death toll in Bago was the biggest one-day total for a single city since March 14, when just over 100 people were killed in Yangon, the country's biggest city. Bago is about 100 kilometers (60 miles) northeast of Yangon. The Associated Press is unable to independently verify the number of deaths.

The death toll of 82 was a preliminary one compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which issues daily counts of casualties and arrests from the crackdown in the aftermath of the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Their tallies are widely accepted as highly credible because cases are not added until they have been confirmed,



with the details published on their website.

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

The online news site Myanmar Now also reported that 82 people had been killed, citing an unnamed source involved with charity rescue work. Myanmar Now and other local media said the bodies had been collected by the military and dumped on the grounds of a Buddhist pagoda. At least 701 protesters and

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

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

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

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

including some bystanders — were reported killed.

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

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

demonstrators who consider themselves part of a civil disobedience movement.

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

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

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

'Suspicious' blackout strikes Iran's Natanz nuclear site



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

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

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

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

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

weapon if it chose. As news of the 'blackout' emerged, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin landed in Israel on Sunday for talks with Netanyahu and Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz. Power at Natanz had been cut across the facility comprised of above-ground workshops and underground enrichment halls, civilian

nuclear program spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi told Iranian state television.

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

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

GLOBE TROTTER

EX-B'DESH PM KHALEDA TESTS COVID POSITIVE
Dhaka: Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia tested positive for Covid-19 on Sunday, a year after she was released from jail temporarily amidst the pandemic, according to media reports.

RESCUERS FIND 4 DEAD FROM VESSEL IN ATLANTIC
Madrid: Spanish authorities said on Sunday that they had recovered the bodies of four migrants from a boat along with 19 survivors who had taken the treacherous route from West Africa to the Canary Islands. Spain's maritime rescue service said that its crews had responded to an alarm call by a fishing boat that had located the migrants in a flimsy craft unfit for the high seas.

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

IRAN REPORTS HIGHEST DAILY DEATH TOLL OF 2021
Tehran: Iran on Sunday reported its highest single-day death toll from Covid-19 this year, bringing the country's total deaths in the pandemic to nearly 64,500, state TV reported. The report said 258 new deaths were recorded in 24 hours. Iran's deadliest day of the pandemic was in mid-Nov, when over 480 deaths were tallied.

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

UK: Shops, pubs gear up for easing of lockdown

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

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

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

Trump: The key to Republican success is more Trumpism

AP ■ PALM BEACH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jordanian prince makes first public appearance since arrest

AP ■ JERUSALEM

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

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

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



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

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

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

ruption and incompetence.

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

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

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Religious leaders recall Philip's spiritual curiosity

AP ■ LONDON

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

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

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

Chadians vote as Deby seeks to extend 3-decade presidency

AP ■ N'DJAMENA

Chadian President Idriss Deby Itno was widely expected to win re-election Sunday, extending his three-decade-long rule in this central African nation after three top opposition politicians chose not to take part in the vote.

Some polling stations opened later than expected in the capital of N'Djamena, where streets are lined with giant portraits of Deby.

A constitutional referendum approved several years ago means he can now serve two more terms, potentially stay in power until 2033.

"I invite all Chadians to go to the polls to choose the candidate of their choice," the longtime president said after casting his ballot Sunday along-

side his wife. "I have seen since yesterday that the boycott order has not been respected, so people must go out to perform their civic duties."

While running for a sixth time in this oil-producing country, Deby has campaigned on promises of building schools, paving roads and improving living conditions in this country that remains one of the least developed in the world. The top opposition candidate remaining in the race is Albert Pahimi Padacke, a one-time Deby ally who served as prime minister from 2016 to 2018.

Five other lesser known candidates are also taking part, including one that has publicly accused Deby's party — the Patriotic Salvation Movement, or MPS, of using state resources to campaign.

US-Philippines officials discuss concerns over China's ships

AP ■ ABOARD A US MILITARY AIRCRAFT

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ BEIJING

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sanskrit, its associated culture and its development was

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Bollywood

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

—Adarsh Gourav

A GLIMMER OF HOPE

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

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

Safety of residents

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

To ensure personal liberty of under-trials

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



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

Women security

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

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

Traffic management

Traffic monitoring and management have grown to a whole new level

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

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



To stop terrorism

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

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

(The writer is the regional director of Oncam.)

WEBBED



THE DISCIPLE

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



SEXIFY

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



THINGS HEARD AND SEEN

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

A cause for concern

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

No competition between actors: Pratik Gandhi

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

—IANS

TRENDBLAZER

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

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

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

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

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

fairtalk

AAHANA KUMRA



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

dailytalk

RASHMIKA MANDANNA



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

SCARY TO HAVE A BABY IN PANDEMIC: JONES

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

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

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



EDUCATION: A POWERFUL WEAPON

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

One of the most important transformations that Radha brought to this panchayat was setting up a school till Class 12. Her persistent efforts to address the concerns of thousands of girls who had to give up education due to lack of a higher secondary school in their village led to this impact. The girls of the village, now, do not have to compromise on their dreams of completing school education.

Not just for girls, she soon started working towards the

education of the entire village. "In 2014, as a panchayat motivator, she took the initiative to educate 1,800 illiterate people of the village and encouraged them to sit for the examinations," said Panchayat Assistant, Hemraj Singh.

Shashi Kanwar, who was tutored by Radha, shared that there wasn't a single educated woman in the village. "It is a result of her hard work and efforts of the other adolescent girls associated with her that today, nearly 70 per cent of women in the village are literate." As far as the education of adolescent girls is concerned,

prior to 2013, only 30 per cent of girls in Lalwari panchayat were educated, while today, more than 80 per cent are linked with mainstream education. Not only this, 30 to 40 per cent of the girls are stepping out of the village boundary to pursue their dream of higher education.

"Overwhelmed by Radha's zeal to work for the better future of her community, she was requested by the girls, women and other responsible people of the village to contest the panchayat elections," said Maina Rana, a colleague of Radha's. She obliged their

request and contested the election but couldn't win. She, however, continued to support the winner, Devalal Gurjar, who is also her colleague, to serve the community with sincerity.

Babulal Sharma, a local teacher, said, "Radha has tried to raise social issues, problems and challenges not only at the panchayat level but also at the district and state level from time to time. It is the result of her dedication towards the society that she had the opportunity to meet the former Vice President of India, Hamid Ansari. Taking note of her confidence and her ability to lead the youth, local political groups had also offered her to join them. Radha, a true social worker, showed her will to rise above politics and work for all the sections of society.

Her life, however, is not only occupied with social responsibilities but is equally dedicated to her family. "I am a cancer patient. Radha, as responsible as she is, has taken the entire charge into her hands. Along with pursuing further education, she is working in a private firm. Currently, I am receiving free treatment with the help of Dr Prahlad Dhakad, a Senior Doctor working in Jaipuria Hospital. It is because of her that I am able to get this free treatment. I was completely against her education but now I realise my mistake and understood the importance of girls' education," said Radha's father.

Her struggle and passion for social awareness is an outstanding example of women's empowerment. While there are schemes like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* that aim to educate girls but continuous awareness and persistent effort are needed to enable them to benefit at the ground level. For women to become self-reliant and courageous, they should have equal right and opportunities to educate themselves.

—Charkha Features



LEARN AND UNLEARN

One should give up self-conceit and accept changes if one wants to do better in life, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

There is hardly any human being in the world who is not inclined to improve himself/herself. Of course, some aspire for improvement in their relationship with whom they have to live and work, whereas others work for improvement in their economic status. Some want to improve or enhance their personality, whereas others are more concerned about their spiritual progress. In any case, the will to make some progress is basic to all normal beings and the efforts to improve are a sign of life. And, the volition, under-lying all efforts of man to bring about improvement is mainly one's aspiration to be happier. If one ponders over this question of attainment of true happiness, one would come to the conclusion that man's happiness ultimately depends upon his behaviour or his reaction to the external stimuli and his ways of thinking which, in turn, depends upon his inner urges, his tendencies and the training he had. So, in order to have any other kind of improvement, man has to bring about improvement in his outlook, habits, mannerism and ways. For this, he has to pick up and learn certain things and unlearn others. If man's process of learning (or unlearning wrong things) stops and his effort to put into practice what he has learned already ceases or his capacity and will to make efforts are exhausted, his improvement and progress also come to a halt.

Not many are aware of the fact that the path to progress is paved with some obstacles which are mostly of man's own making. One of these is man's pride and arrogance about his own knowledge. It is easy to teach him who has no pride in his own intelligence. But he who regards himself as perfectly wise would say to others, "There is nothing that I do not know." It is difficult to offer correction to such a man, for he assumes air in such a manner that people would stutter in his presence; he loses temper no sooner than anyone would start informing him on any subject. So, if one wants to improve and, for that purpose, is inclined to accept some changes, one should give up self-conceit because it precludes the possibility of learning good things of life and unlearning wrong things.

Another major hurdle in man's path to progress is his attachment to worldly objects, his lust for sensual pleasures, his sense of deep involvement, and his attachment to his body. Little does man realise that, at this far-end of iron age, when a man has lost his morals, the worldly things are devoid of their original essence. One who wants spiritual improvement should know that the present unrighteous world has no substance. Is the bark of a sugar cane worth anything when the juice has been squeezed out of it? So has the world lost all its sap and truth because it has become debased. This body of ours is assailed by several different diseases and is made of debased matter. So one who aspires for self-improvement should push out attachment to objects of senses or thirst for these, with only one determined effort, as, otherwise, it would mean that one has lost or is losing one's precious life over a mere trifle.

Knowing all this, one should get rid of body consciousness. The first step for this is to withdraw one's attachment from 'religions' of the body, which rob one's life of its essence, and to devote one's mind and body and possessions towards the welfare of the world. This will bring in man qualities such as service, dedication, sacrifice, meekness, fellow-feeling, tolerance, and hundred-and-one other noble traits of high character. It will quicken his efforts for self-improvement.

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Whether working from home or office, toiling away for long hours without breaks and physical activity can begin to damage your body, vitality and even without tell-tale signs.

"It is important to achieve a healthy work-life balance in order to live a fulfilled life. But there are moments in life when you have to finish certain deadlines and cannot avoid spending a lot of time on your desk," says Beenu Rajpoot, noted filmmaker and a Fit India Champion.

The fitness expert has these suggestions for those busy hours that will not only nourish your body and mind, but also increase overall productivity:

Between emails, meetings and calls, try to take a stroll even for a few minutes to reset your body and brain. A little bit of movement during those long sitting hours will go a long way to ensure that your body and joints do not become too stiff by sitting.

Check your breath during intervals. Take a few long breaths engaging your abdominals to ensure that your body is getting enough oxygen. Learn some *Pranayama* techniques to recreate yourself quickly so that you can maintain a constant energy level throughout the long span of desk sitting.

Remember to do a few neck and shoulder stretches while on your desk to avoid neck pain or back pain later. It will also help in keeping your posture upright. Add useful stretches from your yoga class to these intervals.

Choose the appropriate ergonomic chair and table in order to maintain a good posture while sitting for long hours. Some of the important factors

Keep your body, mind active

Working long hours can damage your vitality even without tell-tale signs

to be considered are — shape of the chair, its height, height of the table, lumbar support in the chair, among others. Ensure that your chair has some kind of lumbar support. Lumbar support will protect your lumbar spine from pressures of excessive flexion during long sitting hours. It is also important to choose a chair where you can adjust the height of the chair so that you can adjust its height vis-a-vis your table. It will be good for your mid-upper back and shoulders. Often people who ignore this advice can develop health conditions like scoliosis and rounded shoulders.

Keep drinking water during a long shift. It's quite common that people under pressure keep suppressing their thirst subconsciously that makes them dehydrated. Remember to keep sipping the water every hour or so to keep your body rich in fluids that will improve the circulation and will keep your blood pressure in check, apart from many other benefits of drinking water.

Decorate your space nicely and keep it clean, organised and minimal. Avoid too much clutter around in your space. Too much physical clutter affects



the states of your mind, too. Practice the yogic principle of *Aparigraha* or minimalism to keep your space, physical as well as mental, free.

Ensure that you are getting some sun during the day. It will not only enrich your Vitamin D levels but also give a big

boost to your immune system. It is very common among the big cities in India that people don't get enough Vitamin D as they are not exposed to the sunlight often. Lack of exposure to the sunlight leads to Vitamin D deficiency that is often linked to other health issues.

Gives your eyes some rest in between after every half an hour or so by doing a simple yoga technique of palming. Rub your palms together and just cover your eyes with your warm palms. Your eyes will feel energised immediately.

—IANS

“ Invest in your dreams. Grind now. Shine later. —Unknown ”

TREATING SLEEP APNEA MAY REDUCE DEMENTIA

Older adults who received positive airway pressure therapy prescribed for obstructive sleep apnea may be less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease and other kinds of dementia, new research suggests.

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is a condition in which the upper airway collapses repeatedly throughout the night, preventing normal breathing during sleep.

OSA is associated with a variety of other neurological and cardiovascular conditions, and many older adults are at high risk for OSA.

"We found a significant association between positive airway pressure use and lower risk of Alzheimer's and other types of dementia over three years, suggesting that positive airway pressure may be protective against dementia risk in people with OSA," said lead author Galit Levi Dunietz, Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan.



CHILDHOOD DIET LINKED TO LESS ANXIETY LATER

Exercise and a healthy diet in childhood leads to adults with bigger brains and lower levels of anxiety, a new study suggests.

The mouse-model study determined that early-life exercise generally reduced anxious behaviors in adults. It also led to an increase in adult muscle and brain mass.

"During the COVID-19 lockdowns, particularly in the early months, kids got very little exercise. For many without access to a park or a backyard, school was their only source of physical activity," said researcher Marcell Cadney from the University of California - Riverside. "It is important we find solutions for these kids, possibly including extra attention as they grow into adults," Cadney added.

The researchers determined that early-life exercise generally reduced anxious behaviours in adults. It also led to an increase in adult muscle and brain mass. When fed "Western" style diets high in fat and sugar, the mice not only became fatter, but also grew into adults that preferred unhealthy foods.



OBESITY LINKED TO HEAVY PERIODS

Ladies, here is one more reason to reduce your body weight. Obesity is linked to greater menstrual blood loss, which may result from increased inflammation in the womb lining, delaying its repair, according to a study conducted both on women and mice.

The study, led by researchers from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, UK, found a weak but statistically significant association between increasing body mass index (BMI) and more heavy periods in women.

In the mouse study, the team found that after shedding their womb lining, the mice on a high-fat diet showed delayed repair of the remaining womb lining in comparison to mice on a normal diet.

Further examination of womb tissue from the mice indicated that inflammatory factors were also higher in mice with greater body weight. The findings are detailed in the Journal of Endocrinology.



'JUMPING' GENES CAN PREVENT BLOOD CANCER

US scientists have found that transposons, also known as jumping genes, can protect against certain blood cancers and help develop new therapeutic targets.

Transposons are DNA sequences that can move, or jump, from one location in the genome to another when activated. These "jumping" genes are a source of genetic mutations responsible for a number of human diseases.

The findings, published in the journal Nature Genetics, can help predict how patients will respond to cancer therapies and find new therapeutic targets for acute myeloid leukemia (AML) — the deadliest type of blood cancer in adults and children.

"Our initial finding was a surprise because it's been long thought that activated transposons promote cancer development by generating genetic mutations. We found it was the opposite for blood cancers, and that decreased L1 activity was associated with worse clinical outcomes and therapy resistance in patients," said Jian Xu, Associate Professor in the CRI.



NEW DRUG CAN STOP TUMOURS FROM GROWING

US researchers have found that an oral drug can be effective in stopping tumours from growing. The team from the University of Colorado Cancer Center found that slowing down NLRP3 can reduce inflammation and curb tumour growth and progression.

"NLRP3 is a member of a larger family that is involved in sensing danger signals," said Carlo Marchetti, from the varsity's School of Medicine.

It is a receptor that surveils the intercellular compartment of a cell, looking for danger molecules or pathogens.

"When NLRP3 recognises these signals, it leads to the activation of caspase-1, a protein involved in the processing and maturation of interleukin-1-beta into its biological active form, causing an intense inflammatory response. We found that in melanoma, this process is dysregulated, resulting in tumour growth," Marchetti said.



Rana, Tripathi power KKR to 187



Picture credits: IPLT20.com



Picture credits: IPLT20.com

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Opener Nitish Rana (80) and Rahul Tripathi (53) hit fluent half-centuries to propel Kolkata Knight Riders to a challenging 187 for six against Sunrisers Hyderabad in their Indian Premier League match, here on Sunday.

SRH's Rashid Khan (2/24) was yet again at his best, asking tough questions to the batsmen but most of his bowling colleagues proved ineffective on a batting-friendly wicket.

Dinesh Karthik (22 not out off 9 balls) provided a late flourish to KKR innings but they could gather only 42 runs in the last five overs.

Left-handed opener Rana struck the ball hard and clean to provide his side a confident start after they were asked to take first strike.

His strokes on the off-side —

NITISH RANA LAST SIX INNINGS IN IPL

Runs	Balls	Opposition team
0	1	RR
81	53	DC
0	1	KXIP
87	61	CSK
0	1	RCB
80	56	SRH

the drives and cuts — were of high-quality and a treat to the eye.

Neither Bhuvneshwar Kumar nor T Natarajan could stop Rana from hitting boundaries even as Subhan Gill was quiet initially. Sandeep Sharma was hit for three boundaries in a row by him.

Gill opened up his arms to hit a massive straight six off Natarajan to make it even better for KKR.

However, the run-flow was affected when ever-reliable Rashid got the ball in his hands. He also

provided the breakthrough when he deceived Gill with a wrong'un to find the stumps.

Rana though kept going strong, completing his half-century with a six off Vijay Shankar after surviving an LBW appeal off Rashid. He got the decision overturned, taking the DRS call. Rana's six-hitting continued after getting his fifty as he punished Natarajan and Sandeep again.

His colleague at the other end Rahul Tripathi also stroked confidently and fluently. He smashed a massive six off Bhuvneshwar and then followed it up with a cheeky four in the third-man region.

He completed his fifty with another boundary off Bhuvneshwar but was dismissed by Natarajan soon after when he top-edged a ball. Rashid too sent back dangerous Andre Russell (5) back.

Mohammed Nabi (2/32) got rid of Rana and Eoin Morgan (2) off successive balls in the 18th

PLAYER	RUNS
1. Shikhar Dhawan (DC)	85
2. Nitish Rana (KKR)	80
3. Prithvi Shaw (DC)	72

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

MOST SIXES	
1. Nitish Rana (KKR)	4
2. Suresh Raina (CSK)	4
3. Chris Lynn (MI)	3

SUMMER SLAM

MOTION PICTURE



Chennai Super Kings' Suresh Raina spends time in kitchen @chennaiIPL



David Warner's daughters Indi Rae, Isla Rose and Ivy Mae get ready to cheer for Sunrisers Hyderabad @davidwarner31

Big-hitters galore

RR, Punjab Kings aim for winning start to IPL campaign

KEY PLAYERS

BEN STOKES English all-rounder will have an extra responsibility with the ball this time in absence of Archer.	CHRIS GAYLE He will be the X-factor in Kings line-up. Gayle's power hitting can take PBKS to big total.
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PTI ■ MUMBAI

Another battle of big-hitters is on the cards as KL Rahul's Punjab Kings take on the Sanju Samson-led Rajasthan Royals, two line-ups dotted with expansive stroke-makers and in pursuit of a winning start to their IPL campaigns here on Monday.

Rajasthan will be banking heavily on their swashbuckling all-rounder Ben Stokes. Stokes will be keen to get some runs under his belt and so will be the likes of Englishman Jos Buttler and newly-appointed skipper Samson, who is a mine-field of talent.

The Royals could opt to open with the highly-rated Yashasvi Jaiswal and Buttler. While Samson, who would be itching to prove a point, and Stokes would then form strong middle-order.

If the four fire on all cylinders, they can pummel any attack into submission and Punjab would be no exception on the Wankhede track, which is usually batting-friendly.

Royals also have several other options at their disposal, including all-rounders Shivam Dube, Shreyas Gopal, Rahul Tewatia, Riyan Parag and Liam Livingstone.

Gopal, Tewatia and Parag, all bowl leg-spin, so it would be interesting to see whether the Royals opt to go in with two leg-spinners. Tewatia and Dube have the abil-

VENUE: WANKHEDE STADIUM, MUMBAI

HEAD TO HEAD

Matches	21
Rajasthan Royals	12
Punjab Kings	9

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

- Rajasthan Royals defeated Punjab Kings by 4 wickets at Sharjah
- Rajasthan Royals beat Punjab Kings by 7 wickets at Abu Dhabi

1922

Punjab Kings Skipper Lokesh Rahul who scored 1922 runs at an average of 54.91 in 42 innings of as many matches, needs 78 runs to become only second batsman after Shaun Marsh (2477 runs) to score over 2000 runs for Punjab Kings in IPL.

ity to whack the ball outside the park and look to be certainties in the playing XI.

With star pacer Jofra Archer missing due to injury, the pace attack will have to be led by Rajasthan's newest recruit — South African all-rounder Chris Morris, who will be eager to justify his huge price tag of Rs 16.25 crore.

RR will have to get their combination right as only four foreigners can make the playing XI.

So, it will be interesting to see whether Royals opt for left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman or go in with either Jaydev Unadkat, Kartik Tyagi or Chetan Sakariya.

Unadkat, with his experience, might get the nod.

On the other hand, Punjab boast of some hard-hitters like Rahul (670 runs in 2020 season), Mayank Agarwal (424 runs) and Chris Gayle.

Rahul and Agarwal formed a lethal opening combination in 2020 and would continue to open.

They also have the likes of Englishman Dawid Malan, one of the finest T20 batsmen currently, hard-hitting Tamil Nadu batsman M Shahrulkh Khan, and West Indian Nicholas Pooran.

For them too, it would be all about getting the combination right.

Shahrulkh could get the nod ahead of others like Deepak Hooda and Sarfaraz Khan, and could play the role of a finisher.

Dhawan impressed by Pant's calmness on captaincy debut

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Delhi Capitals experienced opener Shikhar Dhawan was mighty impressed with Rishabh Pant's leadership qualities, saying the youngster led the team in a calm and composed manner in his first match as captain and will only get better with time.

Pant was thrust into captaincy after regular skipper Shreyas Iyer sustained a shoulder injury during the recent ODI series against England and was ruled out of the tournament.

The 23-year-old wicketkeeper-batsman made a memorable start to his captaincy stint as he led DC to a convincing seven-wicket win over three-time champions Chennai Super Kings in their opening match of the IPL 2021 here on Saturday.

"He (Rishabh Pant) did quite well. First of all, glad that he won the toss. It was a bit of a sticky wicket, so it was good for us to bat second.



Picture credits: IPLT20.com

He kept his calm and kept on motivating the boys," Dhawan said during the post-match press conference.

"He made good changes as well. It was his first match (as captain), so I am sure it is only going to get refined from here. He has just

started and with experience, I am sure, he is only going to get better.

"The best thing about Rishabh Pant is that he stays calm. His presence of mind is quite there, which is very very good."

Asked if he gives his advice to Pant as a senior player, Dhawan said: "...Of course, I give my advice to him. The youngsters, whenever they come to me to ask for batting tips or mindset things, I always share my knowledge with them."

Dhawan smashed a 54-ball 85 studded with 10 fours and two maximums and alongwith Prithvi Shaw (72) shared a 138-run opening stand as Delhi chased down 189 with eight balls to spare.

Asked about his sweep shots against the pacers, Dhawan said: "I started practising it at the nets and then introduced it in the game. We have to play according to the field set. I knew Chennai keeps square leg and fine leg inside the 30-yard circle and keep covers behind for me.

Missing Jofra is big blow: Sangakkara

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Star pacer Jofra Archer's absence because of injury is a "big blow" to Rajasthan Royals but their new Director of Cricket Kumar Sangakkara is confident that the team's young Indian fast bowlers will rise to the challenge in this year's Indian Premier League.

Archer, who played with a hand injury during the India series, is currently recuperating from a surgery and the duration of his availability during the later part is still not clear.

"Sanju and I will both agree that it's a big blow for us. Jofra is a very vital part of our make-up and not to have him is unfortunately the reality of it. We have to work around it and plan contingencies," Sangakkara told PTI during a virtual press conference on Sunday ahead of the clash against Punjab Kings here on Monday.

The former Sri Lankan captain is, however, hopeful that Archer will be available at some point and "play his part in the IPL."



Picture credits: @rajasthanroyals

The weak link for Royals, over the years, has been their Indian pace attack where the most experienced name Jaydev Unadkat hasn't exactly set the stage on fire.

Apart from Unadkat, they have his left-arm back-up

Chetan Sakariya and the immensely talented Kartik Tyagi.

"Inexperience can probably work for you and it could mean that opposition hasn't seen you either. Fast bowling in IPL is not an easy task and we saw that yes-

terday (Delhi Capitals vs Chennai Super Kings) as well," said Sangakkara, who has played a number of seasons in the IPL.

"Most of the wickets are good for batting. So, you have to be quite skilful. We have Kartik Tyagi, who did pretty well last season in patches and this year we have new additions (pacer) Kuldeep Yadav (Jr) and Chetan Sakariya," he stated.

For Sangakkara, it is imperative that these youngsters are prepared to understand match situations and bowl accordingly.

"It's about keeping them focussed on what their job is and get them trained and prepared to execute different deliveries, scenarios and match plans for the opposition but at the same time, giving them confidence about their own strengths."

The Royals skipper Sanju Samson has gone slightly off the radar as far as the national team is concerned after having failed to grab even a single opportunity. However, Sangakkara believes that both the captain and Rahul Tewatia, who recently was in

India squad for the T20 series against England, could be national team regulars if they can trust their abilities a bit more.

"Pressure is always there. Whether it is Sanju or Rahul, reality is they will tell you that expectations and pressures will always be there. Everyone has various coping mechanisms to deal with it, focus is to stay in the moment," he said.

"It is very important to have those grand ambitions of playing regular international cricket, and both Sanju and Rahul are very capable of not just being regulars but great, outstanding performers at the international stage."

The eloquent former glovesman wants each of his 11 players to be "problem solvers," who can think on their feet and help the skipper.

"...That really helps the skipper Sanju a lot on the field when people are thinking themselves as to what's going on (match situation), and it also builds a lot of trust within the unit," he added.