

OPINION 6 ELECTIONS IN THE TIME OF COVID

WORLD 8 IRAN PREZ CALLS 60% ENRICHMENT AN ANSWER TO 'EVILNESS'

SPORT 12 PSG, CHELSEA IN CL SEMIS

RAIPUR, THURSDAY APRIL 15, 2021; PAGES 12 33



TIE UP WITH CAUSES: SONAKSHI 10 VIVACITY

CBSE Class X board exams cancelled

Govt defers Class XII examinations amid rising Covid concerns
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday announced the cancellation of CBSE Board examinations for Class 10 and postponed Class 12 exams in the wake of the coronavirus crisis. Both board examinations were scheduled for May-June. The revised dates will be announced after June 1. The decision was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the wake of rising cases of Covid-19 cases and concerns raised from various quarters, including a few Opposition parties. The meeting was attended by Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' and other officials. The meeting also discussed a uniform policy or guidelines on board exams across States as it was demanded by several State Ministers. The CBSE, which is the promoter of national board for school examinations, said it is reviewing the situation and will come up with a decision soon in this regard. According to the official



sources, Modi said the Government would keep in mind the best interests of the students and ensure that their health is taken care of at the same time their academic interests are not harmed. After the announcement, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi tweeted that a decision must be taken for Class 12 too. "Glad the Government has finally cancelled the 10th standard exams, however a final decision MUST be taken for the 12th grade also. Keeping students under undue pressure until June makes no sense. It's unfair. I urge the Government to decide now," she tweeted. The decision by Centre on CBSE will affect over 21 lakh students across the country. This is the first time that the Central Board of Secondary Education has altogether cancelled the board examinations conducted by it. Last year, the exams were partially cancelled in Delhi in the wake of riots in northeast Delhi and Covid-19 cases. The CBSE will review the situation on June 1 to decide on the Class 12 exam schedule while objective criteria will be decided for Class 10 results. In a statement issued after the meeting, the Union Education Ministry said, "Looking to the present situation of the pandemic and school closures, and also taking in account the safety and well-being of the students, it is decided as follows."

India's daily Covid count nears 2L

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
India's daily Covid-19 count neared the 2-lakh mark on Wednesday as the situation turned alarming in several States and reports of unavailability of hospital beds, ventilators, and oxygen cylinders poured in from all over the country. India recorded 1,94,108 cases and 972 deaths late on Wednesday. The country case-load spiked despite a certain degree of containment achieved in Maharashtra where the daily surge has remained confined in the range of 55,000 to 60,000. During the last 24 hours, Maharashtra recorded

58,952 fresh cases and 278 new deaths. On a day when the Maharashtra Government began to enforce stringent restrictions, including a ban on the movement of people in public places without a valid reason, prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPc and night curfew for 15 days, the number of infections dropped from Tuesday's tally of 66,212 to 58,952, while deaths came down from 281 to 278 in various parts of the State. With 58,952 fresh cases,

the total infections climbed from 35,19,208 to 35,78,160. Similarly, with 258 new deaths, the total Covid-19 toll rose from 58,526 to 58,804. However, Covid-19 cases continued to hit new peaks on daily basis in States such as Uttar Pradesh (20,510 new cases), Delhi (17,282), Karnataka (11,265), Chhattisgarh (12,603) and

Madhya Pradesh (9,720), Gujarat (7,410) among others. In terms of death, Maharashtra accounted for 278, Delhi 104, Chhattisgarh (90), UP 67, Karnataka 38, and Gujarat 73. In Uttar Pradesh, panic set in after Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, former Chief Minister and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav and a couple of Ministers and top bureaucrats tested positive for novel coronavirus infection as the State recorded 20,510 cases in the last 24 hours. Officials claim that 68 people died of Covid-19 during this period.

Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad said 20,510 new cases of Covid were reported in the State during the past 24 hours.



Health workers conduct Covid-19 testing of passengers at Anand Vihar Bus Terminal in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Yogi, Akhilesh, test corona +ve

PNS ■ LUCKNOW
Panic has set in after Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Samajwadi Party president and former Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav and a couple of Ministers and top bureaucrats tested positive for coronavirus. Yogi had isolated himself on Tuesday after some officials in his contact tested positive for the infection. "After initial symptoms, I got myself tested. My report is positive. I am in self-isolation and following doctors' advice. I am doing all works virtually," he tweeted, advising those who came in his contact to get themselves tested and take precautions. There was a panic in the air after the CM tested positive. "When will the Government announce a lockdown? Is it waiting for Lucknow to perish before it goes for strict measures," a social media post from the Department told this reporter on Wednesday. Meanwhile a team of Health Department officials air-dashed to Ahmedabad and returned with 25,000 shots of Remdesivir injection, considered a key antiviral drug in the fight against Covid-19.

6 pm to 6 am night curfew in all cities in Rajasthan

Jaipur: Rajasthan on Wednesday night announced a 12-hour daily curfew — from 6 pm to 6 am — starting Friday across all cities, as part of a series of measures to combat a worrying spike in Covid cases. The curfew will be in effect till the end of the month.

21 at women's national boxing camp Covid +ve

New Delhi: Indian women's boxing's High Performance Director Rafeale Bergamasco and head coach Mohammed Qamar are among 21 campers who have tested positive for Covid-19 at the Indra Gandhi Indoor Stadium here but none of the infected pugilists are bound for Olympics.

UK strain, double mutant cases found in J'khand

SAURAV ROY ■ RANCHI
The UK mutant strain and double mutant strain of coronavirus has been found among Covid patients in Ranchi and East Singhbhum districts, the Regional Genome Sequencing Laboratory (RGSL) at Bhubaneswar-based Institute of Life Sciences (ILS) confirmed on Wednesday. The Health Department had sent as many as 52 Covid positive samples to Bhubaneswar last week for genome sequencing, and the test reports confirmed that at least nine of these samples were of UK mutant strain while four were double mutant, a press communication from the Government stated, asking residents to be cautious.

Covid-19 IN INDIA	
TOTAL CASES:	1,40,65,822 (+1,94,108)
DEATHS:	1,73,087 (+972)
RECOVERED:	1,24,23,992
ACTIVE:	14,62,828
MAHARASHTRA:	35,78,160
KERALA:	11,89,176
KARNATAKA:	10,94,912
ANDHRA PRADESH:	9,37,049
DELHI:	7,67,438 (+17,282)

CAPSULE

HIRING TO GROW BY 7% IF NO MORE LOCKDOWNS
Mumbai: The intent to hire in the current quarter is likely to rise by 7 per cent over the previous three months if further lockdowns and workplace operating rules are not enforced, mainly driven by demand in healthcare, pharmaceuticals, educational services, e-commerce and technology start-ups and IT, according to a report.

CBI grills Maha ex-HM for 8 hrs on Param Bir's extortion charge

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI
The CBI grilled Maharashtra's former Home Minister Anil Deshmukh for eight-long hours on Wednesday in connection with the Preliminary Enquiry (PE) into the allegations of corruption made against him by Mumbai's former Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh. Three days after it questioned his personal assistants Sanjeev Palande and Kundan Shinde, the CBI subjected the former Home Minister to intense grilling on various issues relating to the former police commissioner's allegation that he had asked now suspended and incarcerated police officer Sachin Vaze last month to "collect" a staggering ₹ 100 crore per month from bars, restaurants and other sources. Deshmukh reached the DRDO Guest House at Kalina in north Mumbai around 10 am. He was questioned by two Superintendent of Police Ranjiv Deshmukh and Anand Akhada. Deshmukh was quizzed by the CBI on various issues relating to the letter written by the former police commissioner to the Chief Minister.

Over 13.51 lakh take holy dip in third Shahi Snan Covid norms flouted despite Govt efforts; Random tests indicate 4% positivity

PNS ■ HARIDWAR
The third Shahi Snan of the Kumbh Mela held on the occasion of Mesh Sankranti here on Wednesday saw more than 13.51 lakh people taking the holy dip in the Ganga till late evening. However, despite efforts by the authorities, it was difficult to ensure social distancing and wearing of masks while with all the devotees throughout the occasion. Random tests among the sadhus at the akhadas indicate a coronavirus positivity rate of nearly 4 per cent. So far, 19 of the 500 samples from the mela site have come back positive. The Shahi Snan began early in the morning with the Sadhus of the Panchayati Akhada Sri Niranjani, Niranjani Akhada and Anand Akhada reaching Har Ki Pauri. The Sadhus first worshipped their tutelary deities and then took the holy dip in the Ganga. These Akhadas were followed by Sadhus of the Sri Panchdashnam Juna Bhairav Akhada, Sri Agni Akhada and the Ahawan Akhada. Members of the Kinnar Akhada accompanied the Sadhus of these Akhadas. Third in the sequence were Sadhus of the Sri Panchayat Akhada Mahanirvan Kankhal and Sri Shambhu Panchayat Atal Akhada who chanted 'Har Har Mahadev'.



A devotee unfurls the national flag as others gather to offer prayers during the third 'Shahi Snan' of the Kumbh at Har Ki Pauri Ghat in Haridwar on Wednesday.

Russia swears by India friendship to allay Pak-ties fear

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
Days after promising military equipment to Pakistan, Russia on Wednesday tried to pacify India by assuring that Moscow's ties with New Delhi and Islamabad are independent. Moreover, India is a "trusted partner" of Russia, its envoy said here. His statement came after Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's recent visit to New Delhi and then to Islamabad. In Pakistan, Lavrov said Russia was ready to supply special military equipment to Pakistan to boost its counter-terror capabilities. Allaying apprehension, Deputy Chief of Russian Embassy Roman Babushkin said India is a "trusted partner", and there were no divergences or misunderstandings between the two countries and that it has "limited cooperation" with Pakistan based on "independent" relations. He also welcomed the recent commitment by India and Pakistan to follow the 2003 ceasefire on the Line of Control (LoC) and said these are "very important steps" for regional stability. However, at a joint media briefing with Babushkin, Russian Ambassador Nikolay Kudashov criticised the Indo-Pacific strategy by western countries describing it as "dangerous" and an effort to revive the cold war mentality. Babushkin said India must be part of the process of shaping regional consensus on Afghanistan and that New

Beat corona with 30-minute brisk walk daily!

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI
Regular exercise or a 30-minute brisk walk in your neighbourhood park every week while following the social distancing norms can go a long way in beating Covid-19. Physical inactivity may land you in ICU or also prove fatal for you in case the pathogen catches you, according to a study that analysed nearly 50,000 Covid positive adults. Even patients who were inconsistently active had lower chances for a severe Covid-19 infection, suggesting any amount of physical activity has benefit, said the findings published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine. "This is a wake-up call for the importance of healthy lifestyles and especially physical activity" said Robert E

Physical inactivity may land you in ICU or also prove fatal for you in case the virus clings to you, claims study



Sallis, a physician at the Kaiser Permanente Fontana Medical Centre in the US. Researchers said the potential for regular physical activity to lower the severity of Covid-19 illness should be promoted by public health agencies and that pandemic control recommendations should include regular physical activity across all population groups. "People who regularly exercise had the best chance of beating Covid-19, while people who were inactive did much worse," Sallis added. For the study, the team identified 48,440 adults with a Covid-19 diagnosis from January 1, 2020, to October 21, 2020. They found 6.4 per cent were consistently active and 14.4 per cent were consistently inactive, with the remainder falling in the inconsistently active category. Among all Covid-19 patients, 8.6 per cent were hospitalised, 2.4 per cent were admitted to the ICU, and 1.6 per cent died.

Congress' INC TV on YouTube to start on April 25

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
The Congress on Wednesday launched its own digital media platform, INC TV, on YouTube on the birth anniversary of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. The party has, over the years, alleged that the mainstream media is biased against the Opposition, and the YouTube channel will allow it to convey its message directly to the public. The ruling BJP already has a YouTube channel with 3.67 million followers. Party chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said INC TV will start airing shows from April 24, National Panchayati Raj Day, and would be live for at least eight hours every day.

Eyeing Dalit votes in Punjab

POLITICAL PARTIES SET OUT TO WOO THEM AHEAD OF ASSEMBLY POLLS

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

The political parties in Punjab are exercising their franchise in favour of the reserved category vote bank with elections now less than a year away. Giving a go bye to merit, the dominant parties in the State have made it clear that the top or the top-most slot will go to a candidate from the reserved category. And, this is just one of the promises made to the reserved category voters.

As the country was celebrating the 130th birth anniversary of Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar — a great champion of the dalit rights, all the major political parties went all out to woo the SC community.

Shriomani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Badal on Wednesday announced to appoint a Dalit leader as the Deputy Chief Minister if voted to power, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) declared to have a Dalit candidate as state's Chief Minister.

Trashing the announcements as "nothing but poll optics", Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh listed out all the "decisions" to benefit the state's SC population, while highlighting how the Dalit community was harassed during the previous SAD-BJP regime.

This was not the first time that any political party has made such announcement to persuade the Dalit community. In 2016, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had also promised a Dalit Deputy Chief Minister if voted to power before the 2017 Punjab assembly elections.

The ruling Congress, with an eye on 2022 polls, is also planning to appoint a senior Dalit leader as president of the state party unit to balance the caste equations. Also, in its last budget before the 2022 polls, the Government proposed to spend Rs 100 crore on a BR Ambedkar Museum at Inder Kumar Gujral Punjab Tech. from University in Kapurthala.

"The Museum will be on the lines of the Statue of Unity in Gujarat", said the Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal while presenting the budget in March this year. The government has also proposed a BR Ambedkar Institute of Management at IKGPTU, Kapurthala.

"That was not all! The staff-run party, which is facing immense opposition and criticism from all quarters in view of the ongoing farmers' agitation against the farm laws, is now trying to win over the SC community."

The BJP in February, appointed former Union Minister and Hoshiarpur's former MP Vijay Sampla, who is the party's senior Dalit leader, as the chairman of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes. Also, the BJP's lone MP — Som Parkash from Hoshiarpur — is the Union Minister.

On constituting 32 percent of the state's population, the Dalits are concentrated in Punjab's Doaba region, comprising Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur, and Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar. A majority of them belong to the Ravidasia community.

DALIT TO BE THE DY CM IF VOTED TO POWER: SUKHBIR

SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal, while addressing a gathering in Jalandhar, said that if the party were voted to power in 2022, the Deputy Chief Minister would

from a particular community."

RIDICULOUS POLL OPTICS: CAPT AMARINDER

Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Wednesday ridiculed the Akali and BJP promise of appointing Dalits as Deputy Chief Minister and Chief Minister, respectively, if voted to power. Given the shockingly poor track record of both the parties, which did nothing for the SC community during their term in power, the Chief Minister said that SAD and BJP had failed to ensure the welfare of the Dalits in the state for 10 years, and were now resorting to political gimmickry to woo the community with an eye on the 2022 elections.

"Sukhbir Badal is now promising a deputy chief minister, but has nothing to show what he or his party, in alliance with the BJP ever did for the community," remarked the Chief Minister, terming it a political antic aimed at misleading the people with an eye on votes. "It is ridiculous the way the BJP has also quickly jumped on to the wagon to promise a Dalit chief minister if elected to power in Punjab," said Capt Amarinder adding that given the angst against the party in the state over the farmers' issue, even finding one single candidate would be a challenge for them.

Pointing to the pitiable condition of Dalits in the State under the previous SAD-BJP regime, Captain Amarinder said the SC community was struggling to survive under the rule of the most apathetic government ever in the state. "Soon after the government took over, it implemented all the poll promises made to the SC community, one by one," said the Chief Minister, speaking earlier at the virtual state-level function to celebrate Ambedkar Jayanti.

BJP TO HAVE DALIT AS PUNJAB CM: CHUGH

BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh on Wednesday announced that if the staff-run party came to power in the next Punjab Assembly elections, it would have a Dalit Chief Minister for the State. Chugh lambasted the Congress and the SAD for trying to mislead the Dalits in Punjab by alluring them with false promises of giving the deputy CM seat to the Dalits. ridiculing SAD president Sukhbir Badal for announcing that Akali Dal would appoint Deputy CM from Dalits, Chugh asked, "Why not the CM? ... The Dalits showed that if the party were voted to power in 2022, the Deputy Chief Minister would

Punjab to spend 30% of funds in all Govt schemes on SC welfare

schemes on SC welfare

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Wednesday announced that the State Government will spend at least 30 per cent of funds under all government schemes for the welfare of the state's SC population.

Capt Amarinder also announced other measures and decision to uplift the Dalit community, as a mark of homage to Dr BR Ambedkar, who he said should be remembered as the first Indian who achieved so much for the Dalit Samaj.

Paying floral tributes to the architect of the Indian Constitution at a virtual state-level event, the Chief Minister also announced filling up of the SC vacancy backlog in all departments on priority, while promising to explore a post-matric overseas scholarship scheme for SC students, on the lines of the Baroda State

Scholarship Scheme awarded to Baba Sahib under a scheme established by Sayajirao Gaekwad III.

The Chief Minister further announced a special Rs 500 crore Rural Link Roads project for the financial years of 2022. The project will encompass construction of new link roads to the Bastis of Scheduled Castes and other poorer sections of the society, which do not currently have road connectivity.

Shamshan ghats and places of worship will also be connected through the project.

A special allocation of Rs 100 crore is proposed in 2021-22 for modernization of villages having more than 50 per cent SC population, said the Chief Minister, adding that this was aimed at providing further support to existing grants in the villages having Scheduled Caste population greater than or equal to 50 per cent of the total population.

Govt well prepared to deal with the second wave of Covid: Chautala

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala on Wednesday said that the State Government is completely prepared to deal with the second wave of COVID-19 and there will be no imposition of lockdown in the state.

"Only the night curfew will continue in view of increasing cases of Covid-19 in the neighbouring states," the Deputy Chief Minister said while interacting with media persons after unveiling a 350-litre bottle of Babasaheb Dr BR Ambedkar in Rewari on the occasion of Babasaheb's

birth anniversary.

He said, "Currently, there is no such situation to impose lockdown in the state. The government is completely prepared to deal with the situation. In order to break the chain of the second wave of COVID in the state, the Tikakaran Utsav is continuously running for the last four days. While replying to a question regarding the closure of the schools from 1st to 8th classes, Dushyant said that this decision has been taken by the government after 160 children including two from COVID-19 infected has Sainik School Kunjura.

Delhi police chief reviews night curfew enforcement, visits several places

visits several places

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police Commissioner S N Shrivastava on Tuesday night visited several places across the national Capital to review enforcement of night curfew imposed by the Delhi Government due to soaring coronavirus cases.

The CP inspected enforcement orders, only those involved in health care and other essential services, and people on personal emergencies have been exempted from curfew on possession of valid movement pass, while rest people have to stay home for the checking the spread of coronavirus.

The CP also directed the staff to facilitate movement of people who have movement passes.

"Delhi Police is taking strict action against violators and till April 14, 2021 First Information Report (FIR) has been registered under Indian Penal Code (IPC) and other laws, in addition to preventive action against 18,329 persons for during night curfew orders. A total of 42,577 challans have been issued since March 10th for violations of COVID protocols," said Chinnoy. Delhi's Public Relation Officer (PRO) of Delhi Police, 2047.

Delhi CM welcomes cancellation of CBSE exams

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal welcomed the Central Government's decision of cancelling Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) board exams for class 10 and postponed for Class 12 which were scheduled for May-June in a view of rising cases of Covid-19 cases in India. He termed the decision a 'great relief' for lakhs of students and their parents.

Kejriwal tweeted: "I am glad that the exams have been cancelled/postponed. This is a great relief for lakhs of students and their parents."

Deputy Chief Minister and Education Minister Delhi Manish Sisodia also welcomed the Union Government's decision and said, "I am happy that Class 10 exams are being cancelled and dates are being rescheduled for class 12 exams. I know that Class 12 students will be anxious over the rescheduling," said Sisodia.

For more information on the decision to postpone exams for Class 10 students, I appeal to the government to promote Class 12 students on the basis of internal assessment and pre-board exams. It is very important to stay at homes during these troubled times," he added.

The Central Government on Wednesday announced the cancellation of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) board exams for class 10 and postponed for Class 12 which were scheduled for May-June in a view of rising cases of Covid-19 cases in India. The revised dates will be announced after June 1.

The decision was taken in a high level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in which Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal and Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Cabinet Secretary, School and Higher Education Secretaries and other senior officials were present.

In a statement issued after the meeting, the Union education ministry said, "Looking to the present situation of the pandemic and school closures, and also taking in account the safety and well-being of the students, it is decided as follows."

The Board Exams for Class 10 will be held from May 4th to June 14th, 2021 are hereby postponed. These exams will be held hereafter. The situation will be reviewed on 1st June 2021. The Board will be shared subsequently, the official statement read.

Over 6.37 lakh Covid vaccine doses administered during 'Tikka Utsav' in Haryana

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Government has administered 6,37,327 Covid-19 vaccine doses during the 'Tikka Utsav' from April 11 to 14 in the state.

The 'Tikka Utsav' was observed to ensure intensified administration of Covid-19 vaccine with optimum utilisation of resources and minimum wastage.

The Chief Minister Manohar Lal said that the success in the four days exercise has been possible due to the

unfiring efforts of the health-care workers who have been working day and night since the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Sharing details, Additional Chief Secretary, Health, Rajeev Arora said that the much anticipated four days long 'Tikka Utsav' was successfully implemented across the state with 1,39,17 vaccine doses being administered on April 11, while on April 12, around 1,79,570 doses were administered, on April 13 around 1,68,828 vaccine doses and on the con-

cluding day 1,75,012 vaccine doses were administered.

Arora said that he had focused on mass administration of vaccine doses at work places across the state by government or private with sufficient number of employees above 45 years of age.

On the various activities carried out to ensure optimum administration of vaccine doses he said that all the health care workers, asha workers were mobilized to attract maximum people for the administration of the vaccine.

First edition of Babasaheb Digital Kala Festival launched

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government launched the first edition of Babasaheb Digital Kala Festival, a week-long exhibition marking the 130th birth anniversary of social reformer and revolutionary Bhim Rao Ambedkar.

The festival will commemorate the memory of Baba Sahib Ambedkar, an ardent advocate of human rights and education, who has played a pivotal role in drafting the constitution of India. Through such a festival, the Delhi Government seeks to promote the teachings of Baba Sahib Ambedkar in the youth in Delhi.

Marking the launch of the festival, Deputy CM and Minister in Charge of Languages Manish Sisodia said, "The Delhi Government

is constantly striving to promote the values and teachings of Baba Sahib Ambedkar, along with the contributions made by him as a leader in framing India's constitution. Such events will instil and encourage a sense of pride in the people, while they work around the theme of equality for all, which has, in today's times, is struggling to regain its lost essence."

The festival, curated by Anurag Minus Verma, will be launched on the lines of Babasaheb's renowned quote, "We are all equal under the blue sky" which will also be the theme of the festival. Through such a festival, the government seeks to encourage out-of-the-box and unique interpretations of this quote by Baba Sahib Ambedkar, along with creating a new sense of patriotism in the participants.

The winners of the competition will be announced on April 11 and the winner will be awarded Rs 75,000, the first runner-up will be awarded Rs 50,000 and the second runner-up will be awarded Rs 25,000. DCPCR has initiated the process of inviting the winners and participants can visit arandculture.delhigovt.nic.in.

Haryana records major spike in Covid-19 with 5,398 fresh cases, 18 fatalities

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

In a huge jump in the number of Covid-19 infections, Haryana on Wednesday reported 5,398 fresh cases, the highest-single day record since the pandemic began.

18 more people died due to the virus in the state in the last 24 hours. The active cases jumped to 27,421 while the total case tally stood at 329,942. The death toll reached 3,316 in the state.

According to the state's Health Department's bulletin, three people died in Karnal, two each in Kathal, Fatehabad, Ambala, Yamunanagar and one each in Hissar, Gurugram, Faridabad, Panchkula, Kurukshetra, Sirsa and Bhiwani.

A day before, the state had recorded 3,845 fresh infections and 16 deaths.

Commenting on the prevailing situation in the state, Home-cum-Health Minister Anil Vij said that the State Government is fully prepared to fight the second wave of Coronavirus in Haryana.

There is no shortage of resources to fight COVID-19, he said.

In view of the second wave of COVID, we have given instructions to the authorities regarding proper arrangement of PPE kits, masks, beds, medicines and staff in all the hospitals. Under the Epidemic Act, the Administrations have

Punjab sees 3,329 fresh cases, 63 deaths

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Continuing its trend of registering over 3,000 cases daily, Punjab on Wednesday reported 3,329 fresh cases of the novel coronavirus and 63 related deaths, pushing the State's infection tally to 2,82,505 and the Covid-19 death toll to 7,672. Highest 11 casualties were reported from Amritsar; followed by seven from Jalandhar; six each from Patiala and Ludhiana; four each from Hoshiarpur and Fazilka; three each from Bathinda, Kapurthala, SAS Nagar (Mohali), and SBS Nagar (Nowanshahar); two each from the districts of Patankot, Sangrur, and Tarn Taran; and one each from from Barnala, Ferozpur, and Muktsar.

Among the districts, maximum 508 cases were reported from Mohali, followed by Patiala 347, Amritsar 316, Jalandhar 276, Bathinda 202, Ludhiana 198, Gurdaspur 147, Roopur 109, among others.

Despite reporting a high number of deaths, the state's death toll has come down to 2,72 percent that is still the highest in the country. In fact, the state's positivity rate recorded on Wednesday was as high as 9.14 percent. What is more, the number of new infections has grown by an average of 1.2 percent every day in the state in the past one week.

DCPCR facilitates rescue operations of 331 children

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) has facilitated the rescue operations of 331 children of different age groups in the year 2020-21.

These children were rescued with the help of Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), Delhi Police, Labour Department, Child Line and Child Welfare Committee (CWC) from different places such as factories, bakery units, kharat machines units and auto center units as well as residential colonies where they were working as domestic servants.

Accordingly, the compounds have been sealed by the SDMs and FIRs registered by the Delhi Police. "These children have been produced before the Child Welfare Committees the same day which conducted their social investigation to trace families for their restoration and reintegrating." DCPCR said in a statement.

Non-payment of mini-

It also becomes critical as the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent joblessness followed by reduced family income has pushed children towards the menace of labour

increase of nearly 490 per cent displaying DCPCR's renewed commitment to eliminate child labour from Delhi.

It also becomes critical as the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent joblessness followed by reduced family income has pushed children towards the menace of labour. Therefore, these children's rehabilitation becomes of utmost significance.

DCPCR has initiated the process of payment of back wages to these children who have been rescued so that their financial integration can begin immediately.

Anurag Kundu, Chairperson, DCPCR said that the menace of child labour can be curbed only through citizen reporting and therefore he is strongly encouraging citizens to report instances of child labour through DCPCR's WhatsApp number (9599001855). He highlighted DCPCR's scheme of rewarding citizens who report instances of child labour over all. This is an

Speed up admission for infected, LNJP directed

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the cases of Covid-19 increasing at an alarming rate in the national Capital, Delhi Health Minister Sayedraj Jain said a surprise announcement was made regarding the facilities available and encourage the staff and doctors.

The Health Minister directed the hospital management to speed up the admission process for people infected with Covid-19. "The hospital authorities must ensure that sufficient ICU beds are available to treat the patients," he said. He also talked to the patients, their family members and took feedback.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is directly monitoring the status of beds and facilities available for patients in all government hospitals, he said, adding that the government has ramped up the infrastructure available and is fully equipped to combat the virus.

The minister also met with the family members of the patients admitted and buoyed up their spirits. He said that the LNJP Hospital has treated the maximum number of patients in India. The doctors and staff have been working really hard and I am very grateful for their dedication," he added.

"The management has been directed to ensure a quick response to the needs for severely sick patients. The hospital must make sure that there is zero rejection of patients. It must be watched over that sufficient ICU beds should be available for covid patients," he said.

The government has ramped up the infrastructure to combat the surge. "Delhi is seeing an unprecedented surge. In view of the same, I visited the patients at LNJP Hospital. LNJP has treated the maximum number of patients in India. The doctors and staff have been working really hard and I am very grateful for their dedication," he added.

"The management has been directed to ensure a quick response to the needs for severely sick patients. The hospital must make sure that there is zero rejection of patients. It must be watched over that sufficient ICU beds should be available for covid patients," he said.

The minister also met with

the family members of the patients admitted and buoyed up their spirits. He said that the LNJP Hospital has treated the maximum number of patients in India. The doctors and staff have been working really hard and I am very grateful for their dedication," he added.

Remdesivir black marketing will lead to jail

STAFF REPORTER ■ DURG

Chhattisgarh's Durg Collector on Wednesday told officials to send to jail anyone involved in black marketing Remdesivir injections, which is used for Covid-19 patients. The Collector instructed the hospital managements not to prescribe the injection to the medical stores in case of non-availability. He told the hospitals

to properly use the existing stock. Strict action will be taken if there is black marketing and the person involved will be sent to jail, a press release said. The Collector said the Nodal Officer will audit the stock of medicine in the hospital every day and action will be taken in case of any irregularity. He also urged people not to rush to buy Remdesivir injection in the market.



All-party meet today to discuss Corona



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Amitsuya Uike and Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel at the Chief Minister's residence, a press release said. It will be followed with a meeting with social organizations, it said. The discussion will be about the steps taken by the government to check, control and treat corona infection. Suggestions will be taken to control and prevent corona infection further, it added.

The treatment of Covid-19 patients in Chhattisgarh's private hospitals under the Dr. Khoobchand Baghel Health Scheme and Centre's Ayushman Yojana will cost up to Rs 9,000 a day depending on the seriousness of the situation. The Chhattisgarh government announced this on Wednesday. According to the Health Department, it will cost per day Rs 2,000 in the general ward, Rs 5,500 in High Dependency Unit (HDU) with oxygen, Rs 7,000 in Intensive Care Unit (ICU) without ventilator and Rs 9,000 in ICU with ventilator for each patient, an official press release said. RTPCR test will cost Rs 350 under the scheme for the admitted

Rates for Covid treatment under govt schemes

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

patients. The package rate will be applicable as per AB-PMJY 2.0 Guideline, it added. The restrictions on CT scans tests are lifted under special circumstances to facilitate the patients admitted during the Covid pandemic, it said. On Monday, the Health Department reserved 20 percent of the beds in private hospitals for Covid patients treated under the Dr. Khoobchand Baghel Health Scheme and Ayushman Bharat Scheme. The Department has fixed the rates of treatment of corona patients in private hospitals ranging between Rs 6,200 and Rs 17,000 a day. On Tuesday, 15,121 people detected Covid-19 positive in Chhattisgarh while 109 patients died.

Health and Family Welfare Department. Sharma was posted as the Rajnandgaon Additional Collector while Thakur was the Durg Deputy Collector. Soni was the Assistant Director at the office of Land Records in Raipur. Jageshwar Kaushal (2018) has been made the Deputy Collector in Durg. He was the Director (Estates) in the Home Department.

Four state cadre officers get fresh posting

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh government on Wednesday issued fresh posting orders for four State Administrative Officers. Harikrishna Sharma (2008 batch), Raviraj Thakur (2015) and Poonam Soni (2016) have been appointed Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in the Public

Health and Family Welfare Department. Sharma was posted as the Rajnandgaon Additional Collector while Thakur was the Durg Deputy Collector. Soni was the Assistant Director at the office of Land Records in Raipur. Jageshwar Kaushal (2018) has been made the Deputy Collector in Durg. He was the Director (Estates) in the Home Department.

No order issued for opening liquor shops : CSML

The reported order which went viral on social media is "totally fake"



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh State Marketing Corp Ltd (CSML) on Wednesday described as "completely wrong" that it has set up a panel to initiate the opening of liquor shops during lockdown in the state. The CSML clarified that no such order has been issued. The reported order which went viral on social media is "totally fake", it said in a press release.

Before the lockdown was imposed in the state last month, the CSML ruled that liquor will only be sold for customers who wear face masks. Lockdown was imposed this month in 20 districts due to a spike in Corona cases and deaths in the state. All Collectors ordered closure of liquor shops during the lockdown.

Spokesperson of C'garh Corona cell dies of Covid

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Dr. Subhash Pandey, spokesperson of the Chhattisgarh Corona cell and Joint Director in the Health Department, died on Wednesday, five days after he developed Covid infection for a second time. After his death, the medical fraternity demanded that the doctor who died battling Covid must be officially declared a Martyr.



Dr. Pandey, who took ill on Friday, was admitted in AIIMS Raipur on Monday. But despite all attempts, he could not be saved, a doctor

said. Condoling the grieving family, Health Minister T.S. Singh Deo tweeted: "Saddened to hear about the demise of Dr Subhash Pandey due to corona. He was a very prominent member of our medical team in this battle against the pandemic. I offer my humble tributes for his services and sincere condolences to his family and loved ones." A child specialist, Dr Pandey was the son of a freedom fighter, Jay

Narayan Pandey. He was also the vaccination officer in the state for 15 years. The spokesperson for the Chhattisgarh Junior Doctor Association, the Prem Choudhary, told the media: "We have demanded that doctors who die due to Covid infection on duty should be officially recognized as 'Martyr'."

"We are continuously providing treatment to Covid infected patients and fighting a war against Covid in the service of the nation. We will soon send a letter to the Chhattisgarh government in this regard," he said.

CAF officer shoots self

STAFF REPORTER ■ BASTAR

A 59-year-old Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) officer committed suicide on Tuesday by shooting himself with his service weapon in Bastar district, police said on Wednesday.

Kuber Singh, Company Commander of CAF's 19th Pokhran Battalion, shot himself with his Insas rifle at his camp in Karanpur village in the Nagarnagar police station limits, Bastar Senior Superintendent of Police Deepak Jha said. When his colleagues heard the gunshot, they rushed to the barracks and found him dead. Singh was declared dead on arrival by doctors. Why he took this step is being probed, Jha said. Singh was from Chhatrapur in Madhya Pradesh but his family lived in Bihail in Durg district.

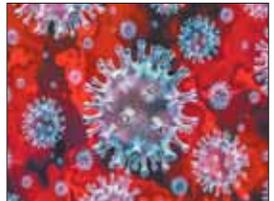
FOUR IN FIVE URBAN INDIANS CLAIM THEIR SHOPPING HABITS HAVE CHANGED DUE TO THE PANDEMIC



Number of elderly Covid positive drops in Raigarh

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIGARH

There has been a significant drop in the number of elderly people catching Covid-19 in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh district, the Health Department said on Wednesday. "Ninety-four percent of people above 45 years in Raigarh have received the first dose of Covid vaccine and its effect is visible. In past 13 days, 2,932 Covid cases were registered in Raigarh of which only 235 patients were above 60 years," a press release said. District Collector Bheem Singh has made vaccination a priority.



The number of reported in the age bracket 31 to 44 and 16 to 31 years. Chief Health and Medical Officer Dr S.N. Kesari said on Tuesday that 388 fresh cases were detected in Raigarh. Most of them were under 45 years.

Navy Chief calls for better synergy among Quad navies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Underlining the high level of synergy among the navies of the Quadrilateral countries, Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh on Wednesday said these forces can come together in a plug-and-play mechanism in case of a military need in the Indo-Pacific region.



The grouping can come together and also include more like-minded countries.

Making this observation here during the ongoing three-day Raisina Dialogue, the Navy chief said there is immense interoperability between the navies of the Quad grouping.

His remarks came months after the Quad navies including India, US, Japan and Australia carried out the Malabar series of naval drills off the Indian coast.

Participating in the Dialogue inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday, Admiral Philip Scott Davidson, Commander of the US's Indo-Pacific Command, identified the Quad as a strategic opportunity diplomatically, militarily and economically as he designated China as "the greatest strategic threat" to rules-based international order.

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

The US Navy commander said the Quad is working for the common good outside these four countries; he said. "The vaccine approach is a powerful signal to the region that the Quad is working for the common good outside these four countries," he said.

Similarly, he pointed out that India has been carrying bilateral naval exercises with Japan since 2012 and with the Australian Navy for the last six years. "So if an opportunity

Well done, Modi! says Cong after Govt cancels CBSE Class X exams

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Soon after the CBSE Class 12 examinations were postponed and Class 10 exams cancelled, the Congress took to social media and messaged "well done Modi ji".

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had been rallying for putting off the board exams.

The decision was taken by the Prime Minister after a meeting with Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' and other top officials amid growing demands for cancelling or postponing the board exams as Coronavirus cases have seen an unprecedented surge across the country in a deadly second wave.

"Well done Modi ji, listening to sound advice from Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi and the Congress will go a long way in mending our nation. It is our democratic duty to work together for the betterment of the country," the announcement, Priyanka

Gandhi tweeted that a decision must be taken for Class 12 too.

"Glad the Government has finally cancelled the 10th standard exams however a final decision must be taken for the 12th grade too. Keeping students under undue pressure until June makes no sense. It's unfair. I urge the Government to decide now," she tweeted.

She had earlier said it would be "downright irresponsible" of boards like the CBSE to force students to sit for the exams in the circumstances. "Board exams should either be cancelled, rescheduled or arranged in a manner that does not require the physical presence of children at crowded exam centres," she wrote last week to Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank last week.

"I am glad that the exams Arvind Kejriwal, who had also urged the government to postpone or cancel the exams, also welcomed the move.

Ambedkar gave a strong base to Independent India: Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Paying tribute to the framer of the Indian Constitution Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said Ambedkar gave a strong foundation to independent India so that the nation could move forward while strengthening its democratic heritage.



Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu remembered Ambedkar

President Ram Nath Kovind also paid rich tributes to Ambedkar on his 130th birth celebrations.

Prime Minister also released four books related to B.R. Ambedkar, whose birth anniversary falls on April 14. The books are written by Kishor Malsawa.

Addressing the Association of Indian Universities' 95th annual meet and a national seminar of vice-chancellors through video conferencing, Modi said that Babasaheb Ambedkar gave a strong foundation to independent India so that the nation could move forward while strengthening its democratic heritage," he said.

"How to the great Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar on his birth anniversary. His struggle to bring the deprived sections of the society into the mainstream will continue to be an example for every generation."

"Today, the country is also working to spread the message of Babasaheb to the people. Places associated with Baba Sahab are being developed as Panch Tirtha," said the Prime Minister.

On account of the Covid-19 surge, the authorities are keeping the celebrations in a low key.

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu remembered Ambedkar for "bridging the gaps of inequality".

Senior BJP leader and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh paid tribute to Ambedkar saying "Baba Sahab should not just be seen as a Dalit icon. He was a renowned name among world intellectuals not just in India, but globally as well."

Lois Sabha Speaker Om Birla paid floral tribute to Ambedkar saying "Owing to Babasaheb's visions, India progressed at a fast pace after independence that benefitted all fractions of society."

The Centre has announced April 14 as a public holiday for all Central Government offices including industrial units.

India will raise its climate ambitions but not under pressure: Javadekar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday made it clear that it will raise its climate ambitions but not under pressure and that it was suffering because of the mistakes of others and "is not responsible for climate change that is happening".



Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar

Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar in his speech after a meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian at the French Embassy also said that India will not allow anybody to forget their historical responsibility.

French minister le Drian said the consequences will be disastrous if the world is not able to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, or even 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.

"That's why it is absolutely indispensable that all countries increase their climate commitments by the time the COP26 takes place in Glasgow, as required by the Paris Agreement," he said.

"This increase in ambition must include setting new nationally determined contributions by 2030 and also long-term strategies to achieve carbon neutrality. We must stop building new coal-based power plants and it is essential that we progressively stop this mode of electricity production at a global level," le Drian said.

Javadekar said, "We will complete our commitments, raise our ambitions but not under pressure. And we will also ask countries to provide finance and technological support and about their (climate

He said India is the only G-20 country to walk the talk on the Paris climate agreement and "we have done more than we promised". The Minister said that the frequency of abnormal (weather) events has increased but "let us not forget that this is not a new phenomenon".

"What we are suffering today was caused 100 years ago, European and American countries and China, in the last 30 years, emitted (greenhouse gases) and therefore, the world is suffering... India is suffering because of the actions of others," he said, adding that historical responsibility is a very important aspect in climate debate.

"We cannot just forget it (historical responsibility), and we will not allow anybody to forget it," Javadekar said.

Everyone is facing common threats, but those who have polluted will have to act more, he said, adding that they (developed countries) committed in Copenhagen, 100 billion dollars per year, but where is the money. There is no money in sight," he said.

Under the Copenhagen Accord, developed countries committed to a goal of mobilising 100 billion dollars a year by 2020 to help developing countries mitigate climate change.

AYUSH manufacturing unit makes record ₹164-crore turnover

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In view of increased demand for AYUSH products and services by people amid Covid-19 pandemic, the Indian Medicines Pharmaceutical Corporation Limited (IMPLC), a public sector manufacturing unit of the Union Ministry of AYUSH, has recorded its highest-ever turnover of ₹164 crore in 2020-21.

The company has recorded an all-time high profit of approximately ₹12 crore, the Union AYUSH Ministry said in a statement here on Tuesday.

Its previous highest turnover was ₹97 crore in 2019-20.

Adding another feather in IMPLC's cap, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation recommended its 18 Ayurvedic products for WHO-GMP/COPP certification subject to certain observations in March 2021.

The WHO provides certification for WHO-GMP/COPP certification to companies after conducting an inspection.

This certification is an endorsement of the quality of IMPLC's products. It will help IMPLC to compete export of quality medicines.

IMPLC is one of the most trusted manufacturers of AYUSH medicines in the country and is known for the authenticity of its formulations.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was able to cater to the needs of the country in the shortest time, probably the first company in the country to co-ordinate India's exports from Ludwig-Maximilians University (LMU) in Germany.

This makes the Indian economy and food system highly sensitive to volatile monsoon patterns," said

Maldivian Foreign Minister to begin two-day India visit today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Maldivian foreign minister Abdullahi Shahid

Maldivian foreign minister Abdullahi Shahid will begin a two-day India visit on Thursday with a focus on further deepening of ties between the two countries.

Announcing the visit, the Ministry of External Affairs said it is expected to lend further momentum to the close bilateral cooperation.

It said Shahid will hold talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday covering bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest.

"Foreign minister Shahid's visit is expected to lend further momentum to the close bilateral cooperation between the two countries," the MEA said in a statement.

It said Shahid will participate in the Raisina Dialogue in virtual mode.

Maldives is India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region and occupies a central and special place in the prime minister's vision of 'SAGAR' - Security and Growth for All in the Region, the MEA said.

Pongratz. A look into the past underlines that human behaviour is behind the intensification of rainfall, according to the researchers.

Starting in the 1950s, human-made forcings have begun to overtake slow natural changes occurring over many millennia, they said.

"We see more and more that climate change is about unpredictable weather extremes and their serious consequences," said group leader and co-author Anders

Vardhan launches initiative to spread awareness about nutrition

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan

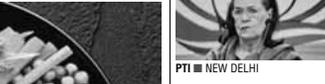
Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan has launched an initiative aimed at spreading awareness about nutrition and locally available nutritious food, fruits, and vegetables, a statement said on Wednesday.

"Widely Bharati (Vibha), 'Global Indian Scientists and Technocrats' (GIST) Forum, Vignyan Prasar, and Pravasi Bharatiya Academic and Scientific Sampark (PRABHASS) have come together to launch mission 'Aahaar Kranti' with the motto of 'Uttam Aahaar-Uttam Vichaar' (Good Diet-Good Connection).

Launching the initiative on Tuesday, Vardhan said, "Today, when the country is reeling under the onslaught of

Cong always striving towards achieving Ambedkar's goal: Sonia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Congress president Sonia Gandhi

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday said her party is always striving towards achieving the path shown by B.R. Ambedkar of building a strong nation which every citizen progresses without discrimination.

Paying rich tributes to Ambedkar on his 130th birth anniversary, she said the Congress has always emphasised on the establishment of an egalitarian society.

"Today, when the thinking of conservatism and discrimination is trying to weaken the society, the Congress party is always conscious that every section of the country should progress equally and without discrimination, we all together build a strong nation. This is the unshakable path of Babasaheb," she said.

"Congress party is always conscious that every section of the country should progress equally and without discrimination, we all together build a strong nation. This is the unshakable path of Babasaheb," she said.

"In accordance with Baba Sahab's ideals, the Congress party has always emphasised the establishment of an egalitarian society in the country and waged a decisive struggle against centuries of discrimination, untouchability and inequality."

"Today if even the weakest person in the margins of society can reach the highest position of the country in a democratic manner, then this is our biggest achievement in 73 years and is a true tribute to Baba Sahab's dreams and aspirations," the Congress chief said.

Global warming making Indian monsoon seasons stronger, more chaotic: Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Climate change will make summer monsoon rainfall in India stronger, more erratic, according to a study that predicts extremely wet years in the future, with potentially grave consequences for over a billion people's well-being, economy, food systems and agriculture.

Greenhouse effect Global warming



"Hereby we were also able to confirm previous studies but find that global warming is increasing monsoon rainfall in India even more than previously thought. It is dominating monsoon dynamics in the 21st century," Katzenberger said.

The researchers noted that more rainfall is not necessarily a good thing for the farming in India and its neighbouring countries. "Crops need water espe-

Access to professional education not Govt largesse, says SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Access to professional education is not a "Governmental largesse" and state has an affirmative obligation to facilitate its reach at all levels, the Supreme Court has said.

This obligation assumes far greater importance for students whose background imposes formidable obstacles on their path to access quality education, the apex court said.

A bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud and M R Shah made these observations in a verdict on separate pleas filed by two students from Ladakh who were not admitted to MBBS degree course in medical colleges here despite due nomination by the Union Territory and in terms of the

seats notified by the Centre. "While the right to pursue higher (high status) education has not been spelt out as a fundamental right in Part III of the Constitution, it bears emphasis that access to professional education is not a governmental largesse. Instead, the state has an affirmative obligation to facilitate access to education, at all levels," the bench said in its judgement delivered on April 9.

"This obligation assumes far greater importance for students whose background (by virtue of such characteristics as caste, class, gender, religion, disability and geographical region) imposes formidable obstacles on their path to accessing quality education," it said.

While allowing the petitions filed by the two students, the top court directed that the admission formalities be completed immediately and, in any event, within a week.

The bench noted that both the petitioners were nominated by the Ladakh administration for admission to MBBS degree course under the 'central pool' seats set apart by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. "We have been constrained to take up the issue under Article 32, since the fundamental rights of students from Ladakh to pursue professional education are implicated," it said.

Ex-Chief Election Commissioner GVG Krishnamurthy dies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Chief Election Commissioner Dr GVG Krishnamurthy passed away on Wednesday morning due to a prolonged illness. He was 86. He is survived by his wife Padma Murthy, son and senior Supreme Court advocate G.V. Rao, and daughter Dr Radha Bodapati.

Mourning the loss of an illustrious former member of the EC family, Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra recalled that Dr GVG Krishnamurthy made exemplary contribution during his tenure in the Commission as Election Commissioner from 1st October 1993 to 30th September 1996.

Modi, Didi two sides of same coin: RaGa

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Beginning his election campaign in Bengal for the Left-Congress-IPF alliance in Bengal Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday launched a massive broadside against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee saying each was complementary to the other insofar as the State's contemporary politics was concerned.

Attacking Modi for trying to defile Bengal's rich culture by inciting hatred and peddling false dreams of 'Sonar Bangla' (golden Bengal) which he called a 'mirage' he said the Prime Minister and his party BJP was dividing Bengalis for votes.

Like in Assam, Tamil Nadu and elsewhere the BJP is trying to spread hatred amongst the people and divide them in the name of caste and religion... the people of other states have learnt with experience that the BJP have only hatred and divisive politics to offer in the name of lofty dreams like Sonar Bangla that they are peddling. RaGa had told a rally at Goolkangpur in North Dinajpur district of North Bengal.

The so-called Sonar Bangla was a 'mirage' which the BJP was selling in every state to hide

its failures at the Centre he said. Criticising each and every step taken by the Modi Government he said "they promised you unearthing of black money through demonetisation but could they do it... they failed in that... and ended up bringing hardship to common man."

Attacking the Modi Government for "its insensitivity when thousands of people were walking back home hundreds and thousands of kms," the former Congress president said, "those thousands of people from your area know it well how they returned home during the lockdown... instead of putting money to your pocket to lessen your hardship they were waiving tax burdens on the large corporate houses of India."

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BJP 'outsiders' raised corona cases: Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Apparently putting a new coating to her 'outsider' weapon, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said that the "BJP outsiders" were responsible for the increase in the number of corona cases in Bengal.

Intensifying her tirade against the "BJP outsiders" she said "in Bengal we had controlled corona... the cases had been reduced" to negligible numbers but "as the election campaign it started spreading because the BJP's outsiders brought it from other states."

Alleging that the State Government had been continuously asking for vaccines from the Centre she said "now they are coming to ask for votes... but when we asked for vaccines they would not give it to us... we have deposited the required money for the vaccines but they are still not coming."

With the daily cases rising by more than 10 percent... the latest figure reaching to about 4,800 on Tuesday... there has been a huge shortage of vaccine in most Bengal hospitals.

Kolkata on Wednesday noon and another badge of 2 lakh Covaxin would reach the State by Wednesday night.

Referring to the Cooh Beach police firing that killed four people in Stalkuchi constituency of the North Bengal district Banerjee on Wednesday said she would get the matter probed and ensure justice for the kin of the victims.

Banerjee visited Mathabhanga Hospital where the injured were being treated three days after the Election Commission lifted the 72-hour ban on political leaders visiting the district.

"I can assure you that whosoever is guilty will be brought to justice after the elections," Banerjee said adding her Government would support the victims family with all kind of support.

Four persons Manirul Karim, Hanidul and Nur Alam were killed in the firing. Banerjee also met a distant relative of BJP supporter Ananda Burman who was shot dead on the same day by alleged TMC goons in the same constituency and assured them justice too.

Bhangipara: Cold horror stalks villages in Sunderbans

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ SANDESHKHALI

Cold horror is a small expression to depict the prevailing tension among the locals in this back-of-beyond village bordering Sunderbans.

Outsiders are clearly not welcome at Bhangipara. Such is the fear that not a single soul here would volunteer to talk. After much cajoling Rani Mondal (name changed) decides to show some courage but on conditions of anonymity.

Who would she not talk of the young men? 'Beche thakle to bolbo (how can I refer to the young men? Are they alive)... they have been killed by the BJP of Shahjahan' (a local TMC tough) she alleges.

Even as she walks up to the Jora Mandir area around where

the incident took place she says, "our fault was that the BJP got a lead of 150 votes from this area (though the TMC won the seat) during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections... violence started only after that as their goons came and attacked our men just because they were doing BJP."

He is named Hari (name changed) says "they came like an Amphan (the cyclone is the latest symbol of horror in the locals' collective mind), charged bombs... we along with our women hid on the roof or beneath our beds... there were gunshots all around. As the men ran towards the Bheris (fish ponds) they were chased... by the evening it was all over... no bodies were fished out" subsequently.

The two victims were Sukanto Mondal and Pradip Mondal. A third Devdas Mondal is missing still now. His father says "My son was raising a BJP flag at the shop which irked them... they were already wounded by the lead BJP got here

... in front of my house my son ran away for his life towards the Bheri... they followed him... there after we do not know what happened. They later killed two bodies but my son has not returned even today... almost two years... look at my eyes... can you find any tears... they have dried up. He helplessly looks at heavens hurling all his complaints up there."

And then he shows his two grand children and a young daughter-in-law. "There is no more and now they are blaming the TMC. When told to explain his meteoric rise from rags to riches he says "we have been doing business for so many years."

Cut to the nearby village where the family of Abdul Kayum Mollah, have a different tale to tell. "It is the BJP men who attacked us and killed the man then... he was charged and shot dead because he was a TMC; say the victim's family members asking in a hushed tone "Dada BJP ki sotti aschhey (elder brother is

BJP really coming).

When asked about the source of the family's earning they say "we do odd work like farming, fishing and some construction labourers..."

When reminded that there is no material difference between the earthly condition of the two sides, both being poor Asaf Sik Dada jante to... agey to ekom chilo na... ekhon ho (we know it... earlier it was not like that... today it is like that... When asked about their real problems both the sides have similar things to say: lack of income, lack of education and health facilities, lack of job and corruption.

"I went for Ana Karmi... they asked for Rs one lakh" says Ameena Khatoun adding the job still eludes her as she could not pay the amount.

Keralites celebrate Vishu amid pandemic fears

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Despite the emergency situation prevailing in the State, Keralites celebrated Vishu (the Malayalam New Year Day), a day which marks the annual agricultural operations with gaiety though in a subdued manner.

Family members woke up early in the morning to see the Kani (first sight) made up of a picture of Lord Krishna resplendent with ornaments, grains, seeds, new cloth and a bunch of currency, which assures an year filled with prosperity and happiness.

The eldest member of the family gave Vishu Kaineettam (a token gift) in the form of a coin and new cloth to members of the family. Nostalgia marked the occasion as 85 year old V B Radha, the patriarch of Perumbavoor Vembanattu family gave away Kaineettam to his children, grand children and great grand children.

The cattle herds in agricultural family too were in for a treat in the morning itself as they were worshipped as 'Kani' and pictures of Lord Krishna. Farm workers toiling in the paddy fields assembled in the farm lands in the early hours itself to commence symbolic agricultural operations.

It is an age old tradition for the village astrologers to call on families to provide the annual forecast, popularly known as Vishu Phalam. Village astrologers are gone long back and people call on them in the morning hours to know what is in store for them in the coming year.

"Things will not be as bad as it was in 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic will definitely subside and normalcy would gradually return to the country. There are signs of negativity giving way to opti-



Family members woke up early in the morning to see the Kani (first sight) made up of a picture of Lord Krishna resplendent with ornaments, grains, seeds, new cloth and a bunch of currency, which assures an year filled with prosperity and happiness.

misim," said Parappanangadi Unnikrishna Panicker, Sanskrit and Vedic scholar about the coming days.

True to the prediction, it rained heavily in the State on Vishu Day and the chief minister, who was undergoing treatment for Covid-19 at the Kozhikode Medical College Hospital for the last three days returned to his palatial home at Pinarayi in Kaner. Speaker P Sreedharankrishnan, who was in the ICU since he was questioned by the Customs Department in connection with hawala transaction, was moved back to the hospital ward after it was found that he too had defeated the pandemic.

"Vishu is always the beginning of a new dawn. It is a harbinger of happiness and peace... That's why it is being celebrated in unison by all sections of Kerala society," said Prof P G Haridas, eminent historian.

Goa to extend 'Tika Utsav' by 10-12 days: CM

Panaji: The Goa government will extend the Covid-19 vaccination drive, Tika Utsav, by 10-12 days, said Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Wednesday, urging people above the age of 45 years to take it immediately if you have COVID-19 signs and symptoms and maintain home isolation. If we need to contain the spread of the infection, then the people who have to cooperate. The government will not lag behind when it comes to hospitalisation or providing Covid-19 care kits. Early treatment is the

key," said the Goa Chief Minister. Tika Utsav programme was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a four-day mass vaccination campaign for inoculation of people above the age of 45 years from April 11 to April 14.

The CM will hold discussions with them and request cooperation from every community in the fight against the virus. He will also meet a meeting with many religious leaders of the state at 4 p.m. in the evening on Wednesday. Many dignitaries from various religious communities like Ratanasundari Maharaj

Saheb, Namramuni Maharaj Saheb, Vraj Rajkumar, Dwarkesh Lalji, Brahmarshi Swami, Sant swami of Vadnal Temple, Tyagaraj Swami, Shernath Baba, Avichaladaji Maharaj, Dilipdaji Maharaj, Shaumbh Prasad Tundiya, Maulana Lukman Tarupari and Right Reverend Sivas Christian will participate in the meet.

Gujarat CM to meet religious leaders on Covid situation

Gandhinagar: The Gujarat Chief Minister, Vijay Rupani on Wednesday evening will hold a virtual meeting with various religious leaders of the state on the prevailing situation of Corona infection in the state.

The CM will hold discussions with them and request cooperation from every community in the fight against the virus. He will also meet a meeting with many religious leaders of the state at 4 p.m. in the evening on Wednesday. Many dignitaries from various religious communities like Ratanasundari Maharaj

Saheb, Namramuni Maharaj Saheb, Vraj Rajkumar, Dwarkesh Lalji, Brahmarshi Swami, Sant swami of Vadnal Temple, Tyagaraj Swami, Shernath Baba, Avichaladaji Maharaj, Dilipdaji Maharaj, Shaumbh Prasad Tundiya, Maulana Lukman Tarupari and Right Reverend Sivas Christian will participate in the meet.

The CM will have discussions with them regarding the current Covid situation in the state, and their role in the fight against the pandemic. IANS

Andhra logs 4K more Covid cases, active cases cross 28,000 mark

Amaravati: Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday reported 4,157 new Covid-19 cases, taking the tally to over 9.37 lakh, while active cases reached 28,383.

The state, which was logging over 2,000 cases for some days, has now the tally double to over 4,000 cases. There were also 18 more deaths, in the past 24 hours, pushing the total to 5,326.

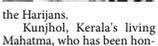
Meanwhile, 1,606 more persons have recovered in the last 24 hours, raising the number of recoveries over 9 lakh. IANS

East Godavari district reported the highest number of cases at 617, followed by Srikulam (522), Chittoor (517), Visakhapatnam (417), Kurnool (386), Anantapur (297), Nellore (276), Prakasam (230), Vizianagaram (154), Krishna (135), Kadapa (112) and West Godavari (60). East Godavari's tally has crossed 1.27 lakh, the highest among districts. The positivity rate rose to 6.03 per cent, against the national average of 5.32 per cent. IANS

Renaming Harijans as Dalits sabotaged Gandhi's dream: Acharya Kunjhol

KOCHI: On the occasion of the 130th birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar, the chief architect of Indian Constitution, a vedic scholar of repute has called for the abolition of the word Harijan and for ever and to bring back the name Harijan used to denote the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

"Harijan is the most sanguine word which accorded respect, sanctity and beauty to the depressed and oppressed communities. The word was introduced by Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation. He even named the world famous magazine he launched as Harijan. But certain vested interests sabotaged Gandhi's dream of renaming the communities as Dalit, a term which has no Indianness in it," said Acharya M K Kunjhol, the chief patron of Kerala State Harijan Seva Samam, a 64 year old organisation working for the upliftment of



Acharya M K Kunjhol

the Harijans. Kunjhol, Kerala's living Mahatma, who has been honoured with the Padma Sri by the President of India for the selfless and dedicated work he is doing among the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes for the last 60 years, said "the government will not lag behind when it comes to hospitalisation or providing Covid-19 care kits. Early treatment is the

Migrant workers from Bihar relieved after return but worried about work

Patna: After the recent surge in the number of Covid cases in newly opened parts of the country amid the second wave of the pandemic, the people living outside Bihar are being returned to their native State. The Indian Railways have also run special trains to facilitate their return. The migrant workers who have returned to Bihar have now begun to worry about finding work here. Some are thinking about doing farm work in their native villages, thinking about engaging in contractual labour.

Hundreds of people from Mokama, adjoining Bihar's state capital Patna, have returned to their native villages. Anand Kumar, a resident of Ghoswari village, says that dozens of people from his village had gone to other states to earn money and have now returned home or are preparing to return to their native place fearing a lockdown.

He said he had also come back to his native place when the lockdown was imposed last year in view of the pandemic. He was left with

out work after the lockdown was lifted following which he had returned to Bihar. Now once again due to the lockdown people are forced to return to their native places.

Subodh Rai, a resident of a village near Ghoswari used to work as a security guard in Mumbai. His whole family was infected with coronavirus and his wife died of the infection. Following this, he left Mumbai and returned to his native village. He said nobody cares in his village. "I have returned to my native village facing a lot of trouble. Now come what may, I will not leave Bihar. I will work in the fields," he added.

Ram Surat, a labourer who works in a Pune factory, has also returned to Bihar. He had returned home last year when the situation due to the pandemic had worsened. When the situation improved, the factory owner called him back to work, but now everybody has returned to their homes. He has a family in Bihar. "I will stay in Bihar for a few days and when the situation improves, then I will return to

work." He is relieved that he has returned to his native place.

However, asked how he will get employment here, he says that he could survive for some days but if the situation due to the pandemic persists for a long time, then it would become difficult.

Rammandan, who lives in Chanka village of Purnia district, does not want to leave Bihar. He said he returned home last year and has returned to his native village. He said he is using in moving out of Bihar. Advising other people, he says that one should search for work in Bihar. He said the state government is also trying towards giving work to people.

People from Bihar travel in search of work to most parts of the country. Due to the surge in Covid-19 cases, factories and businesses are being shut down in many states, due to which people are returning to their native states. However, the number of infected cases is also rapidly increasing in Bihar. The people who have returned to their states are relieved that at least they have returned to their villages. IANS

Maha logs 58,952 new corona cases, 278 deaths

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Notwithstanding a marginal drop in the number of Covid-19 cases, the pandemic situation continued to be grim in Maharashtra on Wednesday, as the state recorded 58,952 fresh cases and 278 new deaths.

On a day when the Maharashtra government began to enforce stringent restrictions, including a ban on the movement of people in public places without a valid reason, prohibitory orders under section 144 of Cr.P.C. and night curfew for 15 days, the number of infections dropped from Tuesday's tally of 60,212 to 58,952, while deaths came down from 281 to 278 in various parts of the state.

With 58,952 fresh cases, the total infections climbed from 35,19,208 to 35,78,160. Similarly, with 258 new deaths, the total Covid-19 toll rose from 58,526 to 58,804. As 39,624 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March last year went up to 29,05,721. The recovery rate in the state for the first time in several days

dropped from 81.44 per cent to 81.21 per cent. The number of "active cases" total cases in the state rose from 5,93,042 to 6,12,070. The fatality rate in the state dropped from 1.66 per cent to 1.64 per cent. With 54 fresh deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Mumbai rose from 12,023 to 12,066, while the infected cases went up by 9931 to trigger a jump in the infections from 5,35,264 to 5,45,195.

While Pune accounted for a maximum 1,12,123 "active cases" in the state, Mumbai stood second with 86,635 active cases, followed by Thane (84,098), Nagpur (65,368), Nashik (84,880), Anantapur (276), Nellore (276), Prakasam (17,937), Nanded (13,917), Bhandara (12,993), Jalgaon (12,126), Latur (13,622) Buldhana (48,499), Parbhani (88,477), Beed (85,179), Nandurbar (71,588), Chandrapur (78,988) and Gondia (65,368).

Of the 22,820,200 samples sent to laboratories, 35,78,160 have tested positive (15.86 per cent) for COVID-19 until Wednesday. Currently, 34, 55,206 people are in home quarantine while 28,494 people are in institutional quarantine.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Going all out

The Govt's decision to procure COVID jabs from abroad should be welcomed for a variety of reasons

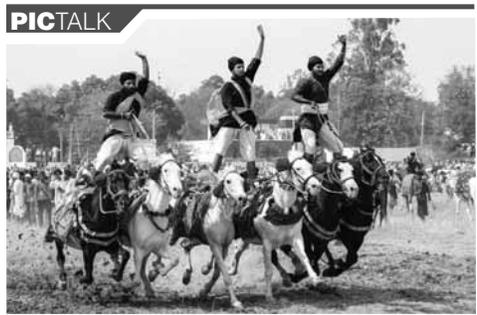
The Indian Government's "vaccine *maatri*" may have earned it laurels among the nations that received the approximately 6.45 crore COVID shots, but it has left it clutching at straws and getting the flak in its own backyard. With the Coronavirus cases rising exponentially across India and with more deaths being recorded due to its new strains, the Centre is facing criticism that in its enthusiasm to earn global brownie points it put its own citizens at risk by distributing the shots to other nations instead of ensuring that all its citizens were inoculated first. As the second wave of infections tears across the country, there are calls for opening up the inoculation process for everyone as the new strain is not sparing children and the youth this time around.



Hence, faced with a shortage of the COVID jabs the Centre first gave the nod for the use of Russia-made Sputnik Vaccine for emergency use and moves are now afoot to enlarge the COVID-19 vaccine basket by giving approval to the shots manufactured in the US, the UK and Japan. The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEGVAC) has recommended that shots being manufactured abroad as well as those which have already received approval for "restricted use" by the USFDA, EMA, UK MHRA, PMDA Japan may be granted emergency use approval in India. It is understood that the "vaccines, which

are listed in the World Health Organisation's emergency use listing, may also be granted emergency use approval in India".

The decision has come at the right time as it would encourage imports of bulk drug material and help in optimal utilisation of domestic fill-and-finish capacity which will, in turn, provide a fillip to our vaccine manufacturing capacity and total job availability for domestic use. The Centre, trying its best to calm the citizens, has assured them that there is no vaccine shortage and over 1.67 crore doses are still available. While there is some strength in the argument that the Government should have catered to its citizens first, the fact remains that the healthcare authorities and the public, too, is to a certain extent responsible for the state we are in today. First of all, given the fact that vaccines are direly needed at this time, how do we explain the criminal average wastage of 6.5 per cent in India? Plus, if people had listened to the Government, got inoculated in massive numbers and observed the Corona protocols diligently, there would not have been such a surge in cases. When the number of infections dipped after the first wave, had we shunned vaccine hesitancy, things would have moved with assembly-line precision and a large part of the population would have had the shots by now. However, it's not too late and the Centre is doing its bit to provide succour to its citizens. We need to cool down, behave like responsible citizens and help the Government in its endeavour in any way we can. After all, this is a situation that none of us had ever faced before.



Nihangs show their horse-riding skills on the last day of Baisakhi Mela in Bathinda district

Double whammy

Our insouciance is responsible for the alarming rise in pollution and Corona cases in the Capital

Both the pandemic and the pollution have made life miserable for the residents of Delhi. It's a double whammy this year — unlike last year when Delhiites had some relief during the Coronavirus-induced lockdown as the level of pollutants fell drastically, thanks to the restriction on vehicular movement and the ban on industrial activity. However, this relief was short-lived since the Capital's air quality started to deteriorate with the lifting of curbs. As the COVID-19 cases surge towards another peak, Delhi is witnessing the worst air quality since 2018. As the country is fighting the pandemic with indigenous vaccines (now with the imported ones, too), masks, social distancing and the "Test-Track-Treat" methodology, it must also think of cutting down on pollution. We must remember that one's immunity plays a vital role in fighting the virus and pollution certainly doesn't help it. Hence, lowering the pollution level will only aid our fight against the contagion. The Particulate Matter (PM) is the biggest contributor to Delhi's pollution and



the main factors behind the increase in its concentration include vehicular emissions, biomass and garbage burning and industrial smoke effluents.

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a meeting with the Chief Ministers stressed that there is no need for another lockdown as the country now has enough infrastructure to control the infection. But unfortunately the Governments have failed to control the pollution in Delhi — which is ranked the world's most polluted Capital and 10th most polluted city across the globe in the *World Air Quality Report 2020* by a Swiss air technology company, IQAir — and the only solution in sight to control the PM levels in the Capital is another lockdown. But it's not right to blame only the Governments as the citizens also are no less responsible for this pathetic situation. Actions like car pooling, switching off the ignition at stop signals, using public transport, use of electric vehicles, and so on, are far from being our habit. Similarly, simple things like wearing masks properly, maintaining social distance, sanitising hands regularly and strictly adhering to the COVID-appropriate behaviour are not followed, which helps the infection spread. Until we mend our ways, we are doomed to lose both battles, against the pandemic and the pollution.

Elections in the time of COVID



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

With half the phases in the Bengal polls remaining, the virus management measures appear to be missing on the ground

The Congress candidate from the Srivilliputhur Assembly constituency, 63-year-old PSW Madhava Rao, passed away of COVID-19 complications five days after the Tamil Nadu election concluded on April 6. If he wins the election posthumously, the constituency will head for a by-election. Tamil Nadu is one of the 16 States in India experiencing a significant surge in fresh Coronavirus infections. However, the pictures of bulging election rallies/road shows there capture only people's indifference towards the virus. The wearing of masks seems to be a luxury rather than a compulsory practice.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has laid down strict COVID-19 protocols for the elections in five States. It forms a part of the February 26 announcement of the poll schedule. The guidelines remain virtually unchanged since the Bihar Legislative Assembly election in October-November 2020. However, they seem to be honoured more in the breach than in observance, at least with regard to campaigning.

The instruction is that the District Election Officer (DEO), who is mostly the District Magistrate should identify dedicated grounds for public gatherings with clearly marked entry and exit points, put measures to ensure social distancing norms by the attendees, and the nodal district health officer should ensure that the COVID-related guidelines are adhered to by everyone in the district. The DEO and the District Superintendent of Police should ensure that the number of attendees does not exceed the limit prescribed by the State Disaster Management Authority for public gatherings. However, the swelling crowds at the rallies/road shows seem to throw these protocols out of the window.

While elections in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and Assam were over by April 6, those in the State of West Bengal will continue till April 29. There,



only four of the eight phases have been completed until now. The elections are already scarred by violence, and the media is fully fixated on it. By contrast, the large-scale flouting of the pandemic norms has not engaged the media's attention sufficiently.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi repeatedly exhorts people to wear masks and maintain physical distancing norms in public. He is emphatic that nobody should be lax about the COVID-19 protocols. These are indeed meant for the people's own safety, and tens of millions of ordinary Indians like me follow his own advice at the mammoth rallies that he has been addressing frequently in West Bengal? The crowd strength at his rallies is so oppressive that there is hardly any place to stand. There was palpable fear of a stampede at his rally in Kolkata's Brigade Parade Ground on March 7.

As the camera zooms in on different segments in the crowds at the Prime Minister's numerous rallies, it is easy to spot that masks are a rarity. Does Modi demand that those not wearing masks



AHEAD OF THE FOURTH GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 1967, THE CHIEF MINISTERS OF TAMIL NADU AND WEST BENGAL SHOWED THE WAY FOR DEVELOPING A CODE OF CONDUCT THROUGH ALL-PARTY MEETINGS. THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA OFFICIALLY ADOPTED IT IN 1968

or flouting the social distancing norms should leave immediately? Far from it, the Prime Minister seems to be oblivious of the subject as he vigorously launches a broadside on Mamata Banerjee's "misrule". The official candidates of his party — who otherwise pretend to follow Modi religiously — throw their masks (read caution, please) to the wind while going to file their nomination papers or campaigning.

None of the political parties seem to behave responsibly against the threat of COVID-19. Their delinquency is punishable under Sections 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code as specified in Order No 40-3/2020-DM1 (A) of November 25, 2020, by the Ministry of Home Affairs. However, there are hardly any publicised attempts of punishment on this account until now.

With respect to the Coronavirus, no political party can evade moral responsibility. They should have by themselves appointed nodal officers-bearers for ensuring COVID-appropriate arrangements. If

electors to govern, they themselves will have to deal with the pandemic upsurge. It is shameful that their behaviour should be COVID-inappropriate in public while seeking votes. The battle against the virus cannot be wholly dependent on vaccinations. Experience has shown that even those vaccinated can contract COVID-19.

The second wave of the pandemic has gripped India even as half the phases in the West Bengal election remain. It devolves upon all political parties to come together and take recognisable measures so that the poll campaign does not aggravate the situation. It might involve curtailing big rallies/road shows featuring star campaigners. One is reminded here ahead of the Fourth General Elections in 1967, the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal showed the way for developing a Code of Conduct through all-party meetings. The ECI officially adopted it in 1968. Such all-party meetings on the COVID-19 situation are the need of the hour.

(The writer is an author and independent researcher based in New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WE ARE NOT PREPARED AT ALL

Sir — This refers to the editorial "Double mutant strikes" (April 14). Your article is right on the money when it says that this variant multiplies quickly. You rightly raised the point about the lack of data and studies — that is peer-reviewed — it does not give the guarantee that these vaccines would work. One does need to be an Einstein to know that if things keep spiralling downwards, the day is not far when we surge past the US in becoming the worst-hit country.

We are importing vaccines but the recent halt in the rollout of Johnson & Johnson's vaccine in the US is also concerning as blood clots have been reported in patients who took this jab. It is bizarre that a country producing top doctors and scientists cannot figure out how this virus operates. The health briefings are an elephant dart to the public's face as all it does is present a rosy picture. It seems that our pandemic response is absolutely misguided and an absolute disgrace.

Sadly, our people could not refrain from going to events like the Kumbh Mela. Even the politicians are busy holding rallies as their priority is to win elections rather than to control the virus. All this has led to a pandemic fatigue as people have been following the rules for long, for something that isn't even their fault. It's too late in the day to wish for this pandemic to have never afflicted humankind. The only thing to do now is to just mask up and stay home!

Sean Colin Young | New Delhi

EXERCISE CAUTION WHILE CAMPAIGNING

Sir — It doesn't behove Prime Minister Narendra Modi to speak insultingly of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and repeatedly call her "Didi o Didi". Such words belittle the dignity of a woman and the Election Commission must take note of it. Mamata was right in saying that the way the PM is cracking jokes on her, it sounds like a young man making a pass at a local woman. This is certainly below standard. "I know many things about you, Modi and Shah. But I have the dignity not to stoop so low," she said. She targeted Modi, saying that

Punish vaccine hoarders



injection despite standing in queues for hours, how did 5,000 injections reach Patil? Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani's innocent response was that he is unaware of Patil's claim. "I don't know. Ask Patil," said Rupani. This inquiry is needless and is not supported from a CM. It is a blatant case of corruption and a CBI inquiry must be initiated to find out how he managed to stockpile the Remdesivir injection. Worse still, this is the situation despite the Gujarat High Court pulling up the State Government over the worsening Coronavirus situation.

The COVID-19 patients are experiencing unimaginable difficulties due to the shortage of beds, oxygen and medicines supply and lack of proper testing and tracing. Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi claims that India has "walked the talk" on helping the world counter the pandemic despite its "limited resources", much is needed to be done to effectively deal with the rising COVID cases at home. Nailing the corrupt politicians who stockpile or hoard the vaccine is one such step.

Bitoyt Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

only someone who did not give due recognition to the women in his life can crack such jokes. However, Mamata also has crossed her limits in the use of anti-rival drug

Our political leaders must exercise caution while speaking in public. The common people follow the politicians blindly and such statements set a wrong precedent in politics. There are politicians like Uttar Pradesh former Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan who have made insulting remarks against women. The politicians should maintain dignity and decorum in public life.

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

STOP THE HATE SPEECHES

Sir — The overzealous campaign of the BJP's Suvendra Adhikari, with the choicest of abuses for our Islamic brethren, follows the culture of his new political masters. Sadly, such

leaders vouch for the constitutional ethos and cry "India first" at every possible opportunity! Despite the rampant abuse of religion and attempts to create a rift among communities, these leaders surprisingly are not prosecuted. Hate speeches have become the order of the day in elections.

These things work in elections since the people are still not educated or well-informed enough and fall into the trap of the political leaders. We will never have good and accountable governance unless and until we vote for those who are secular in the real sense and do not create rift among people. Else, we cannot continue to blame the politicians for our plight as we only vote them to power and give them the opportunity to make the laws to govern us.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

SOUNDBITE

The 'Tika Utsav' will continue for 10-12 days. Lockdown is not the solution for COVID-19 but vaccination, social distancing and wearing masks is.

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant

It is the lockdown that has been overwhelmingly important in bringing down infections and deaths. It has not been achieved by the vaccination programme.

British Prime Minister — Boris Johnson

I have always been in favour of staying in. It's my second love after acting. I am so glad that my fans have loved my renditions. I hope to do a lot more soon.

Actor — Sara Khan

I'm very happy with the progress of the team over the last 18 months. If we continue to build on this, I am sure we can defeat any team.

Indian hockey captain — Manpreet Singh

The UP Government is playing not with statistics, but with the lives of people. The situation in the State has turned explosive.

Congress leader — Priyanka Gandhi-Vardha

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SOUTH

If we want real integration, North Indians must study the history and literature of South India, too, right from school



MARKANDEY KATJU

All Indians, including those from the South, have read about the great Mauryan Empire, the Gupta Empire, the Empire of Harshavardhan, the Mughal Empire, and so on in their school history books. But, how many North Indians have heard of Krishnadeva Raya of the Vijayanagara Empire (whose statue along with his two queens, still stands in the Tirupati temple), or of the great Chola and Pandya kings? Regrettably, very few North Indians would be aware of these great kings from the South. Most Indians have read the 'Ramayani' and the 'Mahabharata', which are epics about North Indian kings, and most Indians have read the works of Surdas, Tulsidas, Kabir, and the stories of Munshi Premchand. But how many North Indians have read the great Tamil epics 'Silappathikaram', 'Mavinakalai', or the great Tamil treatise 'Tirukkural' by Tiruvalluvar, about whom the great Tamil poet Subramania Bharati wrote: "Tamil Nadu is known throughout the world because of Tirukkural." How many have heard the 'Tiruppavaai' by the poet saint Andal, which is sung in the month of January all over Tamil Nadu, or the great poetry of Subramania Bharati who wrote powerful verses for women's emancipation around 1910 much before anyone dared to do so in the country? Very few.



North Indians know of Hindustani music but how many know of Carnatic music, and its trinity of Tyagaraj, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Shyama Shastri? Hardly any. How many North Indians have heard of the great Kerala social reformer Narayan Guru, who belonged to the low-caste Ezhava community and fearlessly criticised and campaigned against the inhuman caste system? Practically none. For long, North Indians have regarded South India as a dark land populated by uncivilised people and are blissfully unaware of the South's great achievements in various fields. Indeed in the 'Ramayani', Kishkindha, which is believed to be in the present State of Karnataka, was regarded to be a land populated by monkeys from whom Lord Rama raised a 'vaanar sena' (monkey army) to invade Sri Lanka. Regrettably, even today, many North Indians look down on South Indians due to their ignorance of the culture and achievements of the South. For instance, South Indian temples are massive and unbelievably beautiful. They reveal the high level of knowledge of architecture and geometry of the ancient and medieval South Indians. For example, the Brihadishwara temple of Tanjore is simply astounding and one wonders how the builders could use such huge stones to create it. In fact, it reminds one of the Egyptian pyramids. The gigantic rock relief 'Descent of the Ganges' in the ancient port city of Mahabalipuram, capital of the Pallava Empire, is truly amazing.

The large number of Roman coins found in South India show the extensive trade between it and ancient Rome from the time of Emperor Augustus (who reigned from 27 BC to 14 AD). This indicates how highly developed the economy in ancient and medieval South India was as they, unlike North Indians, were seafaring people, with extensive commercial contacts in Southeast Asia. The Chola king Rajendra Chola is believed to have executed military campaigns in Southeast Asia (Sri Lanka, Sumatra, and so on), which could only have been possible with the aid of a powerful navy. In Ilango's epic 'Silappathikaram' one comes across these lines: "May the Pandya king prosper, who ruled over the South, after conquering the Ganga and the Himalayas in the North." At first I thought this was only poetic exaggeration, however, later I read of credible accounts of a South Indian king (perhaps Rajendra Chola) leading a Napoleonic invasion of North India up to the Ganga and even beyond (apart from invading Sri Lanka, the Malaya peninsula, southern Thailand and so on.) If we want real integration of India, North Indians must study the history, culture and literature of South India, too, right from school and give the South Indians the respect they deserve. (The writer is a former Judge of the Supreme Court of India. The views expressed are personal.)

Irreconcilable differences?

While India insists on de-escalation in Eastern Ladakh, the Chinese prefer the status quo. As it appears, both sides are unwilling to relent



ANIL GUPTA

The 11th round of India-China military talks to defuse tension in Eastern Ladakh, that was held after a gap of nearly two months, has again ended without any major breakthrough. The marathon talks lasted 13 hours as has been the trend in the past, but the Chinese side this time was rigid and uncompromising. Ever since the successful disengagement of troops from the lake area and the Kailash Range in February this year, a stalemate exists as far as further disengagement is concerned from the areas of Hot Springs, Gogra, Demchok and over stopping of Indian patrols in Depsang.

Immediately after the disengagement was completed, the 10th round of talks was held between the military commanders of the two nations. But it failed to arrive at any consensus as far as further disengagement from the remaining areas was concerned. However, the talks were dubbed as "constructive" and both sides hoped for a fruitful outcome. A joint statement issued by the two countries after the talks positively appraised the disengagement from the lake area, terming it a significant step that would provide a good basis for resolution of other remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Western Sector.

Through the much-awaited 11th round has once again ended in a stalemate, there are two noticeable differences. Unlike in the past, no joint statement has been issued by the two nations. In another first, the Chinese side has responded with a statement from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with the Press statement issued by the spokesperson of its Western Theatre Command instead of its Defence Ministry. The statement issued by the PLA was full of rhetoric and laced with diplomatic niceties, indicating that it may have been drafted at the Ministry level but was issued by the PLA. This indicates some sort of unhappiness or disagreement which may need intervention at the highest level.

The PLA's statement said, "We hope India can treasure the current positive situation of de-escalation in the China-India border regions, abide by related agreements reached by the two countries and the two militaries in previous meetings, meet China halfway and safeguard peace and stability in the border regions together"; once again reiterating the "half-way" offer rejected outright by India in the past. What's the point of talking about de-escalation when the Chinese have not even completed the promised disengagement?

A couple of weeks earlier, General Naravane, the Indian Chief of the Army Staff, had observed that the threat in Eastern Ladakh has "not gone away altogether" since the PLA was still maintaining its considerable troop strength in the "rear areas" as before. "De-escalation will take place only when these elements go back to their garrisons," he had said. The much-needed de-escalation still eludes both sides.

While the Indian side insisted on complete disengagement from Hot Springs, Gogra, Kongka La and Demchok, including the lingering issue of Depsang, the Chinese did not concede to troop pullback from these friction sites as earlier agreed to, leave alone discussing Depsang. The disengagement from the Depsang plains is believed to be the bone of contention since it is not directly relat-



TO WARD OFF ANY THREAT IN THE AREA, INDIA HAS ALSO BUILT UP A STRONG FORCE THERE, INCLUDING ARMoured VEHICLES, THE LOGISTICS OF SUSTENANCE OF SUCH A LARGE FORCE AND KEEPING THE ARMoured FLEET FUNCTIONAL IN SUCH EXTREME CONDITIONS IS A HERCULEAN TASK

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ed to last year's aggression. Hectic diplomatic activity had preceded the 11th round of talks for "maintaining peace and tranquillity and providing conditions for the progress of bilateral relations." The Indian Foreign Minister, in a telephonic conversation with his Chinese counterpart, had insisted on "early resolution of remaining issues along the LAC and disengagement at all friction points."

In a virtual meeting of the Working Mechanism of Consultation and Coordination on India China Border Affairs (WMCC), held in the last week of March, it was decided to hold the 11th round of talks between the Corps Commanders as early as possible in order "to further ease the situation on the ground and jointly safeguard the hard-won peace and stability in the border areas."

All eyes were thus set on the 11th round of negotiations, hoping not only for disengagement from the remaining areas but also for the resolution of the Depsang imbroglio. So, the big question is why are the Chinese so sensitive about this area and unwilling to concede? The Depsang plains are sandwiched between the Aksai Chin and Siachen glacier. Located at the height of 16,000-17,000 feet above sea level, the area provides good mobility to the armoured vehicles. The Karakoram Pass and the Sasser Law Pass, both strategically important to India and located within its territory, are on its flanks. Much of these plains had been

under Chinese control since the mid-1950s. Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) is also located adjacent to the plains. In 1962, the Chinese occupied much of the Depsang plains west of the DBO, with India left with a small bulge. The new road built by us to connect the DBO with the SPOK area and beyond is under the observation of the Chinese and remains vulnerable to its artillery fire. The area is strategically important because China and Pakistan can jointly threaten India with a pincer movement in a strategic collusion and cut off the vital area from the rest of Ladakh. Conversely, India can threaten Aksai Chin and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), though a build-up for any large-scale offensive would pose serious challenges.

Apart from the varying perception of the LAC, another peculiar factor in the area is the Limit of Patrol (LOP). India and China differ on the alignment of the LOP as well. The Chinese perception of the LOP is almost 20 km beyond our perception inside our territory. The tensions in this area are not recent. The Chinese had intruded in the area in 2013 and again in 2015 during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping and then during the 2017 Doklam crisis.

The crux of the problem lies in both sides denying each other access to the Patrolling Points (PPs) located on the LOP. Earlier Indian troops had been patrolling up to PP 11, 12, 12A and 13 and had not moved beyond that till the perceived

LAC. But lately, the PLA has been preventing Indian troops from even patrolling till these PPs and the phenomenon has become more pronounced after the Doklam stand-off. Unlike the Chinese incursions in the Fingers Area (between Finger four-eight), the Chinese did not physically move into the area.

The Indian patrols can move in vehicles only up to an area called "Bottleneck" beyond which their movement is on foot. A kilometre or so beyond the bottleneck is "Y-Junction" where the route bifurcates, with one fork leading to PP10 to 12 and the other fork leading to PP13. When Indian patrols approach Y-Junction, the PLA troops come in vehicles from a nearby post and stop them from going further up to the LOP. In a *quid pro quo*, the Indian troops prevent the PLA's men from going ahead of the "Bottleneck" area to their perceived LOP.

To ward off any threat in the area, India has also built up a strong force there, including armoured vehicles. The logistics of sustenance of such a large force and keeping the armoured fleet functional in such extreme cold weather conditions is a Herculean task. While India insists on de-escalation in this area simultaneously with the others, the Chinese prefer the status quo. As it appears, both sides are unwilling to relent. Indian troops are still in possession of a feature in the lake area that can prove as a "trump card" for hard bargaining with the Chinese to secure our interests in the Depsang plains.

POINT-COUNTERPOINT

IN THE ELECTION, THE CONSCIOUS PEOPLE OF BENGAL HIT SO MANY FOURS AND SIXES THAT THE SEATS OF THE BJP HAVE BECOME CENTURIES.

—PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI



I CAN SAY THAT AFTER THE ELECTIONS ARE OVER, THE BJP WILL NOT EVEN GET 70 OUT OF THE TOTAL 294 SEATS.

—WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE

Time to bridge the healthcare gap and tap indigenous potential

There has to be support from the Government for medical Research and Development activities towards advanced health solutions

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the disparity among the haves and have-nots in access to healthcare in the country. However, everyone should have working and living conditions that are conducive to good health. The collaboration of various stakeholders in the health sector, who must work as a team as well as individually, is essential to create a fairer and healthier world in which all members of society have access to quality healthcare services irrespective of their socio-economic status.



KM CHERMAN

The first step towards achieving universal access to affordable health services is to have uniform, unbiased and economical healthcare facilities available for all. This will help in early detection and treatment of various diseases and infections. Preventive healthcare measures are of

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utmost importance in ensuring the overall health of a community.

While we have a plethora of health schemes in India like the 'Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)' to cater to the health of our citizens, it's the execution part of such schemes that we lack in. Efforts are required to ensure that people are enrolled, databases are updated regularly and citizens avail the benefits of the scheme.

The Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model can help in achieving the goal of accessible healthcare and realising the targets in the field. Private and Government entities need to collaborate and work in consonance, supplementing each other's effort. They have to come up with specific strategies for various sections, such as those below

the poverty line.

It is imperative to monitor health inequities and help provide better access to affordable and quality healthcare. Many people in our country struggle to avail primary healthcare services. It is important that the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in every State cater to the healthcare needs of migrant workers who are from varied backgrounds. Fostering and nurturing indigenous technology is extremely important in building affordable healthcare infrastructure in India. There has to be support from the Government for medical Research and Development (R&D) activities towards advanced health solutions.

As far as possible, bureaucratic hurdles must be removed so that innovators and scientists are able to avail the benefits of various policy



These procedures popular, without really thinking about the long-term results.

initiatives. There has to be some provision for financial support and tax benefits so as to encourage these R&D entities. For instance, if a patient needs a heart valve replacement, Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR) is an alternative to conventional heart surgery but the long-lasting results of it are still in question. It seems that there is an industry-wide push to make

these procedures popular, without really thinking about the long-term results. Currently, these valves are highly expensive in India (approximately ₹22.5 lakh) owing to which a majority of the people cannot afford it. Even the cost of conventional valve replacement (approximately ₹3 lakh) is also out of reach for many. The solution is indigenisation. The Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR) is an alternative to conventional heart surgery but the long-lasting results of it are still in question.

We all know that several organs are received only from human donors and there is a wide gap in the supply and

demand. Today, science has reached a stage where these organs could be manufactured using one's own cells through the 3D printing technology or by using a biological scaffold — like a shark fin — on which it could be grown. Shark skin is another potential tissue in view of its inherent tensile strength and durability. The Governments, both Central and States, as well as financial institutions mainly banks, should support these initiatives.

Unfortunately, due to ignorance on the part of regulatory bodies and other law enforcing agencies, even the licence for producing or manufacturing these has been poorly formulated and prioritised. Another important area is the realm of stem cell research with its tremendous regenerative potential, but we

face too many hurdles in manufacturing and commercial production.

Further, it's critical to create awareness about various health issues in regional languages that people understand. Plus, there is a pressing need to emphasise upon the importance of nutrition and immunity development in maintaining individual health. Vaccination can help in keeping vaccine-preventable diseases away but there are new viruses and strains that are being discovered every day. Recently, we have witnessed how the second wave of the COVID-19 virus has taken the country by storm. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that our population has a fairly strong immune system, along with affordable healthcare and indigenous R&D in medical science.

Iran Prez calls 60% enrichment an answer to 'evilness'

Dubai: Iran's President on Wednesday called his country's decision to dramatically increase its uranium enrichment after saboteurs attacked a nuclear site "an answer to your evilness," saying Israel hoped to derail ongoing talks aimed at reviving Tehran's stalled nuclear deal with world powers.

This weekend's sabotage at the Natanz nuclear facility appears to be part of an escalating shadow war between the two countries. Israeli authorities have not commented on the attack, but are

widely suspected of having carried it out.

Iran announced on Tuesday it would increase uranium enrichment up to 60%, its highest level ever, in response to the attack. That could draw further retaliation as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed never to allow Tehran to obtain a nuclear weapon. While Iran's move keeps enrichment below weapons-grade levels of 90%, it is a short step away.

Speaking to his Cabinet, an impassioned President Hassan Rouhani said the first genera-

tion IR-1 centrifuges that were damaged in the attack would be replaced by advanced IR-6 centrifuges that enrich uranium much faster.

"You wanted to make our hands empty during the talks but our hands are full," Rouhani said.

He was referring to ongoing talks in Vienna that are aimed at finding a way for the United States to re-enter Tehran's nuclear agreement with world powers and have Iran comply again with its limits. The accord, which former President Donald Trump with-

drew the US. From in 2018, prevented Iran from stockpiling enough high-enriched uranium to be able to pursue a nuclear weapon in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

Rouhani added: "60% enrichment is an answer to your evilness... We cut off both of your hands, one with IR-6 centrifuges and another one with 60%."

Rouhani also accused Israel of being behind the Natanz attack.

"Apparently this is a crime by the Zionists. If the Zionists

take an action against our nation, we will respond," he said, without elaborating.

In Jerusalem at a Memorial Day commemoration, Netanyahu appeared to refer to Iran.

"We must never remain apathetic to the threats of war and extermination of those who seek to eliminate us," he said.

Rouhani in his comments Wednesday insisted Iran is still hoping that the Vienna talks lead to a negotiated settlement over its program — and the accompanying lifting of pun-

ishing sanctions.

France, Germany and the United Kingdom, all parties to the nuclear deal, issued a joint statement Wednesday expressing their "grave concern" over enrichment.

"This is a serious development since the production of highly enriched uranium constitutes an important step in the production of a nuclear weapon," the countries said.

"Iran has no credible civilian need for enrichment at this level."

Saudi Arabia, a

regional rival to Iran, similarly issued a statement, saying enriching at that level "could not be considered a program intended for peaceful purposes."

"The kingdom calls on Iran to avoid escalation and to subject the security and stability of the region to more attention, and to engage seriously in the current negotiations," Saudi Arabia said.

Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful, though the West and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Tehran had an organized mil-

itary nuclear program up until the end of 2003. An annual US intelligence report released Tuesday maintained the American assessment that "Iran is not currently undertaking the nuclear weapons development activities that we judge would be necessary to produce a nuclear device."

Iran previously had said it could use uranium enriched up to 60 per cent for nuclear-powered ships. However, the Islamic Republic currently has no such ships in its navy.

AP

GLOBE TROTTING

TERROR RE-EMERGES IN BALUCHISTAN

Quetta: Pakistan's Balochistan continues to keep the country's security forces under constant check as terror elements continue to surface from different parts of the province, carrying out terror attacks, targeted killings, kidnappings and bomb blasts, raising serious questions about the performance of the security forces and sending fear down the spines of the locals.

RISE IN AFGHAN CIVILIAN CASUALTIES: REPORT

Kabul: A UN report on Wednesday showed that at least 573 civilians were killed and 1,210 others wounded in the first three months of 2021, which is a 29 per cent increase as compared to the same period last year.

GLOBAL COVID CASELOAD TOPS 137.2 MILLION

Washington: The overall global Covid-19 caseload has topped 137.2 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 2.95 million, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

Nancy invites Biden to address joint session of US Congress

Washington: US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi has invited President Joe Biden to address a joint session of Congress on April 28.

"This would be President Biden's maiden address to a joint session of Congress."

"Nearly 100 days ago, when you took the oath of office, you pledged in a spirit of great hope that 'Help is On The Way.' Now, because of your historic and transformative leadership, Help Is Here!" Pelosi wrote in a letter to Biden on Tuesday.

"In that spirit, I am writing to invite you to address a joint session of Congress on April 28, to share your vision for addressing the challenges and opportunities of this historic moment," she said.

PTI

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that M/s. Shakti Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. is now manufacturing 75, 50, 100, 150, 200, 250, 300, 350, 400, 450, 500, 550, 600, 650, 700, 750, 800, 850, 900, 950, 1000, 1050, 1100, 1150, 1200, 1250, 1300, 1350, 1400, 1450, 1500, 1550, 1600, 1650, 1700, 1750, 1800, 1850, 1900, 1950, 2000, 2050, 2100, 2150, 2200, 2250, 2300, 2350, 2400, 2450, 2500, 2550, 2600, 2650, 2700, 2750, 2800, 2850, 2900, 2950, 3000, 3050, 3100, 3150, 3200, 3250, 3300, 3350, 3400, 3450, 3500, 3550, 3600, 3650, 3700, 3750, 3800, 3850, 3900, 3950, 4000, 4050, 4100, 4150, 4200, 4250, 4300, 4350, 4400, 4450, 4500, 4550, 4600, 4650, 4700, 4750, 4800, 4850, 4900, 4950, 5000, 5050, 5100, 5150, 5200, 5250, 5300, 5350, 5400, 5450, 5500, 5550, 5600, 5650, 5700, 5750, 5800, 5850, 5900, 5950, 6000, 6050, 6100, 6150, 6200, 6250, 6300, 6350, 6400, 6450, 6500, 6550, 6600, 6650, 6700, 6750, 6800, 6850, 6900, 6950, 7000, 7050, 7100, 7150, 7200, 7250, 7300, 7350, 7400, 7450, 7500, 7550, 7600, 7650, 7700, 7750, 7800, 7850, 7900, 7950, 8000, 8050, 8100, 8150, 8200, 8250, 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Bollywood
 'I am very happy that I am able to keep the audience entertained through my work.'
 —Fatima Sana Shaikh

TAKE YOUR CALL

One out of five students face the indecision of whether they should study in India or abroad. **ASHISH FERNANDO** shares six factors that can help you decide



One out of every five students face the indecision of whether they should study in India or abroad. Here are six factors that can help you have a better future.

Every student planning their higher education faces many choices. Some of the most important decisions to make range from choosing the right course, a good university and even the right country. Where you choose to pursue your education can drastically change your future. Most students who decide between their country options, compare the pros and cons with the same burning questions:

How does the cost of education differ?

Depending upon the course you choose, studying in India can be cheaper than studying in a university abroad. India has some of the world's most affordable higher education options. Thus, Indian universities also attract a lot of global students, especially from

European and African countries.

However, that does not mean that studying abroad cannot be affordable. Students from all financial and academic backgrounds study abroad. If you seek hard enough, you are bound to find an institution that has education costs similar to what you would pay in India. The cost of your education also includes your cost of living, of course. It's important to consider that while living abroad may provide a global outlook on things, staying with your families might be more cost-effective. So, if you're still confused, it's better we consider the next factor.

How do we judge the education quality?

The curriculum, the faculty and the scope of research or the subjects taught are the three things every student should look at when judging the education quality of an institution. In India, most institutions fall under a standard government set curriculum or a private education system. However, get-

ting into the apex universities like the IITs and IIMs can be highly competitive with an admission rate as low as 7 per cent. However, institutions abroad tend to have coursework that differs slightly for each university. This means that a student who plans to apply for an MBA can choose to do so in STEM specialisations instead of a traditional module. These kinds of niche specialisations and programmes are often unavailable in India. The handpicked faculty members, advanced teaching methods and higher admission rates in universities abroad, often make it a better option for students.

What about job opportunities?

The intention behind almost the entire higher education journey leads to one destination: A well-paying, satisfactory job. Since the degrees from Indian universities are sometimes more affordable, the return on investment is often considerable. However, foreign university degrees are often held in

The curriculum, the faculty and the scope of research or the subjects taught are the three things every student should look at when judging the education quality of an institution

the same regard as a degree from a prestigious Indian university. This gives students an edge over others applying for similar jobs in India. Applying to one of the numerous jobs overseas also gives you diverse career options and a higher return on investment.

Where is it safer?

The physical safety concerns are an inevitable issue faced by every institution worldwide. Many students feel a modicum of comfort in studying in your own country. However, there are many others who note the safety protocols in universities abroad and pursue education there. Student concerns are taken very seriously and help is immediate. In times such as the global pandemic when education has largely gone digital, safety is a severe concern. Indian universities have put strict restrictions on campus learning. While many universities abroad have also done the same, most institutions in countries like the USA, the UK, Australia and Canada, have intro-

duced a partial lecture schedule on campus.

Which option is better for a career profile?

Whether you plan on staying overseas or coming back to India, pursuing education abroad gives you a global outlook on life. It develops your perspective and decision making skills, thus, helping you build a well-rounded career. However, if you plan on choosing a career that has a greater scope and career options in the Indian industries, staying in India might be what you need to do.

As you might have noticed, all these factors depend upon one major choice — the course. Be it the curriculum, cost, career or even jobs, the decision you make hinges upon the programme of your choice. The only thing to keep in mind is that country choices are never limited, all that matters is a student's preference. (The writer is the founder and CEO of iSchoolConnect.)



'A great reference point'

Actor **NUSHRRATT BHARUCCHA** shares how her househelp enabled her to get a deeper understanding of her character in *Ajeb Daastaans*

Actor Nushratt Bharuccha plays a househelp named Meenal in the forthcoming anthology film *Ajeb Daastaans*. She recalls how her own help at home helped her prepare for the role.

"I started observing my own househelp to understand her mannerisms and characteristics. She was a great reference point for me and, unknowingly, helped me to get a deeper understanding of my character," the actor shared.

"For three to four hours that she would come, she would make all of us at home happy and 'feel at home' with her fun banter. That is what I wanted my character to portray," she claimed.

The segment featuring Nushratt is titled *Khilana*, and it stars Abhishek Banerjee and child star Inayat Verma in pivotal roles. It is directed by Raj Mehta, who shot to fame making the comedy *Good Newz* in 2019. His segment in *Ajeb Daastaans*, however, comes with a dark twist.

Ajeb Daastaans has four segments, with the other stories directed by Shashank Khaitan, Neeraj Ghaywan, and Kayoze Irani. The anthology also stars Fatima Sana Shaikh, Jaideep Ahlawat, Konkona Sen Sharma, Aditi Rao Hydari, Shefali Shah, Manav Kaul and Tota Roy Chowdhary.

"Meenal's story is that of an ordinary girl who is struggling to make ends meet, and provide for the best for herself and her sister. I could feel a similarity in Meenal's life and my househelp, who too works hard to provide for her son," Nushratt said.

Dying to collaborate with Mohit again: Arjun

Actor Arjun Kapoor is heading to Goa to start shooting for *EK Villain 2* that also stars John Abraham, Tara Sutaria and Disha Patani. The actor last shot in Goa for his critically acclaimed film *Finding Fanny* with Deepika Padukone and he is excited to go back to the picturesque locations to reunite with his *Half Girlfriend* director Mohit Suri.

Arjun says, "I have been dying to collaborate with Mohit again and we had an amazing time during *Half Girlfriend*, a very different film for me. I really enjoyed myself. He has given me my career's best music. I always say this to my friends and people around me that apart from Aditya Chopra, it is Mohit who has always believed in me so much."

He adds, "He is somebody who I am looking at keeping my head down and learn from again. I really want to get into doing action big time again and



I want to experience working with Mohit on such a big film. To do a sequel, to do a franchise, and to be able to work with an ensemble cast, it's a big one. He, as a director, has been able to bring together John, Me, Tara, Disha, and of course, banging music."

Arjun says he has been a big fan of Mohit since the beginning and is supremely excited about the magic he will make with his music again. He says, "I am a big fan of Mohit Suri. I loved *Awarapan*. I have to say I have been very fortunate that I have had *Lohagaade*, *Two States* and *Half Girlfriend*. I really feel I have been lucky."

He adds, "He is a great guy to collaborate with. He is so young with his thinking and he allows you to be you. So for me, I think that balance is very important. I am looking forward to working with him again and hoping to give something new to the audience."

TREND TOOL To keep your car safe...

...here are five anti-theft devices

The announcement of the vehicle scrappage scheme by the government of India has brought a significant change in the Indian automobile industry and is expected to generate demand for new vehicles. While buying a new car/vehicle is on a surge, buyers/owners of new cars need to take care of its security. We have shortlisted top anti-theft devices that one should have to secure his/her brand new car.



SAFE CAMS DASH CAMS: Installation of CCTV security cameras in your neighbourhood or society won't be enough to protect your car from being stolen. A dash cam provides you with a security system for the vehicle. Usually, the dash cameras are used to record the on-road activity

while the vehicle is on move, but when the vehicle is parked, it keeps the view of interiors as well and the installed sensors help to figure out if a car is being broken into and start recording. Safe Cam's SC02 Dual Dash Camera with 64 GB memory would be your best option for

ensuring the security of your car both on-road and in the parking lot.

STEERING WHEEL LOCK: This is one of the oldest and most widely used theft prevention devices across the globe. There are many brands and variants available in the

market with different specification. Disklok Security Wheel Lock is the strongest and the premier wheel immobiliser.

GPS TRACKERS: If all the installed devices failed, a GPS tracker will be there to locate your car in real-time. There

are many trackers available in the market and most of them allow for live tracking and other important features like controlling engine immobilising. LetsTrack is one of the companies that provide 24 hours real-time tracking of your vehicle.

VEHICLE ALARM SYSTEM: Alarms systems are the first line of defence against theft as they start ringing as soon as something untoward happens with the car. Avitax's Omega K-9 1 is one of the top sellers on Amazon. Car alarm with keyless entry vehicle security system with shock sensor.

SECURITY TIRE CLAMP: One of the best methods to keep a car safe is to lock its tyre with a tyre security clamp. It is the cheapest of all security devices and can be easily available both online and at car servicing vendors.



SHEFALI SHAH ON WHAT TERRIFIES HER

Actor **SHEFALI SHAH**, who took her acting to the next level with the International Emmy-winning series *Delhi Crime*, says she tackles self-doubt every day.

"It's every single day I go to work. For me, it gets difficult to get out of the vanity van because I have this fear that I am going to stand there dumbfounded when the director says 'action'. Not one day has gone by where I am not terrified. There is a fear that I might just not know," Shefali said.

fairtalk



"I tie up with causes I strongly believe in and, as celebrities, I feel we can make a difference because we have a voice. It should be used to make the world a better place. So, if there is any cause that is for the upliftment and development of society, why not?"

dailytalk



"I feel there is an impact of social media but everyone thinks differently. Social media numbers can get you work. But the process which I follow, it doesn't matter to me. I only cast people on acting skills. If I want to be cast, it also has to be (based) on my work."

OLLY TO RELEASE HIS 'BEST' SONGS

Singer **OLLY ALEXANDER**, who was part of the band Years & Years with Mikey Goldsworthy and Emre Turkmene, will soon be sharing some unreleased songs.

"Some of the songs I never want to throw them away because they still are my babies and I still like parts of them. Maybe another artist would listen and like it, and want to do something, like their own thing, so I've kept a lot of them just in case. But, to be honest, the ones that are the best ones, I'm going to put them out," he said.



STEP TAKEN TO RELIEVE JAIPUR TRAFFIC

A major step has been achieved for solving the traffic congestion in Jaipur by creating the Jaipur Central Region as a traffic light-free city. In a meeting, chaired by the Minister of Urban Development, Shri. Dharam Singh, a few important decisions were taken. It was attended by Gaurav Goel, IAS, JDC, VS Sunda, Chief Engineer, JDA and Anoop Bartaria, Consultant Designer and CMD, Sincere Architects along with their team.

The feasibility report of four intersections — B2 Bypass, Laxmi Mandir Tiraha, OTS Crossing and Jawahar Circle — were discussed and approved.

These projects have been designed to create a confluence of art, heritage and technology in pursuit to remove the traffic lights on these junctions. The feasibility report included the construction of heritage structures on all the four crossings conserving the heritage and architectural style of Jaipur. In all the crossings, the salient features of them are as under:

B2 BYPASS

□ A grand arch in marble and stone craft will be built on the B2 Bypass, which will be 80 feet high.

□ An underpass connecting the Jaipur Circle to the Mansarovar side will be built. The underpass will be six lanes, which will be unique and decorated with traditional murals of art on both the sides. For turning traffic, two clovers are to be built.

□ A detailed traffic survey and analysis has already been conducted.

□ Smart underpasses and smart cloverleaf bridges will be created, which will be equipped with all IT based systems and IoT platforms.

□ Street illumination and heritage lighting has been made a part of this project.

□ Beautiful marble sculptures and traditional scenes of Rajputana will be sculptured in marble and metal on the heritage structures.

□ First time in Jaipur, you will have pedestrian crossing, which will be totally ramped. It is going to be friendly for physically-challenged and senior citizens.

□ A crossing for cyclists along with pedestrian crossings will be made.

□ The project will tantamount to multiple benefits — it will save fuel around 9.5 lakh liters every year, which will, in turn, result in substantial reduction in air pollution and improve its quality; ease of travel will result in ease of living; it will



also result in reduction of stress levels in travellers as there will be no congestion and of course, will save time.

JAWAHAR CIRCLE

□ The traffic light on the interface of JLN Road and Jawahar Circle is being removed by creating two major entry transitions, cuts in the median towards Jawahar Circle. The outer ring of Jawahar Circle is going to have a dedicated cycling

track and outer ring will be treated for pedestrian comfort and vehicular travel by stone cobble floorings.

□ A welcome monument abutting the road coming from airport on the south end of Jawahar Circle has been planned. The monument will be built in white marble and there will be series of

arches and pillars highlighting the elements of Jaipur architecture. In this entire development of Jawahar Circle, major plantation will also be done to enhance the lanes.

□ The parking on the inner road has been designed strictly according to the traffic engineering norms and the entries and exits will be controlled for security and safety of the people.

□ Heritage lighting and signages will be also undertaken in the project.

□ Pet friendly stations, WiFi zones, cafe huts, senior citizen support services and more has also been planned.

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Gandhi Nagar traffic light is also proposed to be eliminated by creating an underpass and cloverleaf bridge.

□ A statue of freedom fighters will be built in the garden court of Laxmi Mandir Tiraha.

□ Sufficient parking facilities for the occupants abutting the road is also being planned.

□ Around 6.50 lakh litres of fuel will be saved per annum.

□ The OTS *Chauraha* will also be free of traffic light and will result into a smooth movement in all directions.

□ After an in-depth study of movement of traffic, a design has been prepared, which will take care of the six lane traffic on JLN Road. A clover on the Jhalana road will be made, which will take care of the turning traffic.

□ A unique gallery of heritage pictures for pedestrian and cyclist traffic connecting all four directions has been planned. This will save 7 lakh litres of fuel per annum. The design has been done by Anoop Bartaria of M/s Sincere Architects Engineers Private Limited.

All the projects will have unique heritage lighting and night illumination will be built in this. The innovative sculptures will enhance the night life of Jaipur.

CRPF celebrates Valour Day

On the occasion of Valour Day, Kuldeep Singh, DG, CRPF paid homage to the bravehearts who sacrificed their lives at the altar of duty. In a solemn ceremony, he paid rich tributes to the martyrs by laying a wreath at the National Police Memorial at Chanakyaपुरi, New Delhi. Later in the day, an investiture ceremony to facilitate the Gallantry Medal recipients and families of those bravehearts who were awarded Gallantry Medal Posthumously was conducted at Shaurya CRPF Officers Institute, New Delhi. Kishan Singh, the surviving veteran of the Sardar Post Battle, was also facilitated in the ceremony.

Extending his best wishes to the personnel and their families, the DG said that the force owes its numerous milestones of success to the martyrs and veterans who scripted several sagas of valour while serving the nation with courage and commitment. He said that the force shall remain indebted to 2,235 martyrs who laid down their lives at the altar of duty.

Valour Day is celebrated each year to commemorate the exceptionally awe-inspiring battle at Sardar Post in Ramn of Kutch, Gujarat where mere two companies of CRPF repulsed the attack of a full fledged Pakistani military brigade on April



9, 1965. Even when faced with sudden onslaught from a numerically superior enemy carrying modern arms and ammunition, the bravehearts of CRPF fought with exceptional courage and bravery. Not only did the CRPF repulse the attack, but it also neutralised 34 Pakistani soldiers and captured four alive. In this battle, seven bravehearts of CRPF made supreme sacrifice.



Powergrid bags ISTD national award

Maharatta entity, Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID) has bagged the third place for Innovative Training Practices (Public Sector category) 2018-19 at the 29th National Award ceremony held

recently at New Delhi by Indian Society for Training & Development (ISTD). The award was received by Anil Sabarwal, Executive Director (HRD, RB & CC) at SCOPE Complex, New Delhi.

Fact check

Bharat Bhushan Ashu categorically refutes media reports of Bardana shortage as malicious misinformation



Outrightly rejecting the media reports regarding non-availability of bales with procurement agencies as malicious propaganda, Bharat Bhushan Ashu, Food & Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister, Government of Punjab, underlined that there is no question of shortage of bardana in the mandies at all.

Tendering for Bardana procurement is a continuous process which starts much before the season as part of planning and goes on as and when the need arises. One cannot be sure of full quantity receipt through one tender only, the Minister pointed out that the last tender floated on April 12 and was necessitated only because permits and form of GoI to use used bags was received very late.

We have already got the bales indented through the Jute Commissioner and NAFED, Ashu said that PP bales are also being received from various HDPE/PP bag suppliers. This, in addition to the permission to use good quality used bags already received by the state from Government of India on April 12, he pointed out hitting out at

those trying to create an issue where none exists.

Pointing out that season is already in full swing with farmers bringing their crops to mandies, Ashu said that as on Tuesday, 5,44,334 MTs of wheat has already been procured in the mandies by the procurement agencies out of which 44,728 MT has been procured under DCP for distribution in the state under Smart Ration Card Scheme.

Urging all the farmers to follow all health advisories as a safeguard against COVID, the Minister said due arrangements have been made to ensure that farmers bring their produce in a staggered way as per token issued by Mandi Board Punjab so that COVID-19 protocol can be maintained in order to curb the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

Reiterating Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh government's commitment to ensure smooth procurement experience for farmers, Ashu said that state is fully geared up to ensure our farmers don't have to face any difficulty whatsoever during the season like last four years.

DOPPW & NCC commemorate Amrut Mahotsav

Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare is organising various activities to commemorate 75 years of Indian Independence — *Bharat Ka Amrut Mahotsav*.

The department has started an awareness campaign entitled series of 75 important rules for family pensioners to know on social media, which was started from March, 2021. In this campaign two tweets per week are being disseminated through social media during coming year. These tweets are put in the form of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). As on April 12, 2021, five tweets have been disseminated by DoPPW on Rules for Family Pensioners to create awareness.

In another initiative, 75 offices across Ministries/Departments have been identified by DoPPW for extensive training on *Bhavishya* system. All these offices will be imparted training through VC followed by question-answer session to clear any doubt. Training (online pension processing module) will be across the Central Government Organisations. CAPs offices covering different locations across country will also be covered in this regard as maximum number of cases pertain to them.



DoPPW has also planned to arrange an online workshop on pension awareness rules for senior central govt pensioners/family pensioners aged 75 years and above covering different cities in India. It will be started from May 2021. It will cover maximum number of cities from all parts of India. The workshop will be conducted region wise.

Besides, DoPPW will also publish a digital publication of 75 *anubhav* write-ups, including those already awarded. It will be starting from June 2021.

As part of the *Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav*, National Cadet Corps (NCC) also paid homage to the martyrs of the nation's freedom struggle, who



lost their lives on April 13, 1919 at the Jallianwala Bagh. National Cadet Corps also launched the pan India campaign to educate people against use of single use plastics. NCC has a strong cadet base of 14 lakh in the country, who have been quite vocal about environment issues. Cadets throughout the country gathered at 75 places. The



cadets remembered and paid gratitude to the freedom fighters through *nukkad natak*, patriotic songs, speeches and skits. This enthusiastic and patriotic tribute by the cadets of NCC filled the environment with patriotic fervour with many locals also joining the event. The social media was flooded with the #NCCmembersJallianwala.

The cadets gathered at these 75 locations after doing plug run and spreading the message of cleanliness and a special message to the countryside to stop using single use plastics. The message was spread on the social media by #NCCAgainstPlastic.

SCOPE organises tika utsav

Partaking in Prime Minister's call for *Tika Utsav* (National Vaccination Festival) to combat COVID-19, Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE) organised a workplace vaccination camp for employees of Public Sector Enterprises.



Guardeep Singh, CMD, NTPC; Atul Sobti, DG, SCOPE; B V N Prasad, CMD, CCI, Directors and other senior officials were among those who got vaccinated at the camp.

The vaccination drive was held in coordination with Chief District Medical Officer and District Magistrate (South East), New Delhi. Earlier, SCOPE had avidly participated in Government's Public Health Response Campaign for COVID-Appropriate Behaviour.

Jammu Tourism celebrated Vaisakhi

Directorate of Tourism Jammu organised the Vaisakhi Festival at Dera Baba Banda Bahadur, Reasi, in collaboration with the District Administration, Reasi. The festival was celebrated with great fervour while following the COVID-19 protocol and guidelines.

Hundreds of devotees paid obeisance at the revered shrine at Dera Baba Village of Reasi, which is situated approximately 30 km from the Katra town. The devotees from across the UT and also from neighboring states of Punjab and Haryana visited the Dera Baba Banda Bahadur Shrine.

It is worthwhile to mention here that the shrine is situated at

the village of revered Sikh warrior and leader Baba Banda Bahadur Singh ji who was a close confidant and follower of Guru Gobind Singh Ji. On this occasion, one medical camp was also organised by the District Administration Reasi and RT-PCR tests were conducted randomly. All necessary protocols which are in place were followed during the said festival.

SRH keep RCB down to 149/8

Holder takes 3/30 as Maxwell's first IPL fifty (59) since 2016 helps RCB to reach fighting total



Sunrisers Hyderabad skipper David Warner chats with his teammates during IPL game between Royal Challengers Bangalore and Sunrisers Hyderabad

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Glenn Maxwell hit a 41-ball 59 to lift Royal Challengers Bangalore to a modest 149 for eight against Sunrisers Hyderabad in an Indian Premier League match here on Wednesday.

SRH bowlers, led by West Indian all-rounder Jason Holder (3/30) and star spinner Rashid Khan (2/18), put up superlative show and picked up wickets at regular intervals.

For RCB, Maxwell was the top

MOST INNINGS BETWEEN TWO 50+ SCORES IN IPL

Innings	Player	Time Span
49	Yusuf Pathan (2010-13)	
48	Deepak Hooda (2015-20)	
44	Dwayne Bravo (2009-15)	
40	Glenn Maxwell (2016-21)	

scorer, hitting five fours and three maximums with skipper Virat Kohli (33) Shahbaz Ahmed (14) and Kyle

Jamieson (12) providing valuable contributions.

Put in to bat, RCB were off to a decent start with Kohli and opener Devdutt Padikkal (11) hitting a few boundaries.

However, Sunrisers didn't have to wait long for their first breakthrough as a back of the length delivery in the third over by Bhuvneshwar Kumar (1/30) spelled the end of Padikkal, who had returned after recovering from COVID-19.

Shahbaz Ahmed was the next to



Sunrisers Hyderabad all-rounder Jason Holder celebrates wicket of Glenn Maxwell

THE LAST TIME ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE SUCCESSFULLY DEFENDED A TARGET UNDER 155 WAS IN APRIL 2009 WHEN THEY DEFENDED 145 AGAINST KXIP IN DURBAN IN 2009

depart after playing a quick cameo, leaving RCB at 47 for two.

At the halfway mark, Maxwell raised the tempo as the big-hitting Australian smashed Shahbaz Nadeem (1/36) for two sixes and a four in the first three balls of the 11th over, with Kohli joining the party with a boundary.

"As a spinner, you'd love such tracks, it's slow and there's a bit of bounce, but you need to be accurate with the line and length. If you back up your strengths, you can perform on this surface"

—RASHID KHAN

The two stitched a 44-run partnership before Jason Holder got rid of the RCB skipper as wickets continued to fall at regular intervals.

With AB de Villiers in the middle, SRH captain David Warner introduced spin once again, bringing on versatile leg-spinner Rashid, and the move immediately paid dividends. The dangerous South African slapped the ball straight to Warner at covers with the slow mature of the Chepauk track coming to the fore once again.

The Afghan spinner struck once again, getting rid of Washington Sundar (8). With Dan Christian also gone, Maxwell smashed three fours and a maximum in the last three overs.

PLAYER	RUNS
1. Nitish Rana (KKR)	137
2. Sanju Samson (RR)	119
3. Glenn Maxwell (RCB)	98

PLAYER	WKTS
1. Andre Russell (KKR)	6
2. Harshal Patel (RCB)	5
3. Rashid Khan (SRH)	4

MOST SIXES	7
1. Sanju Samson (RR)	7
2. Deepak Hooda (PBKS)	6
3. Nitish Rana (KKR)	6

SUMMER SLAM MOTION PICTURE



Chennai Super Kings players Narayan Jagdeesan, R Sai Kishore, Suresh Raina and C Hari Nishaanth don traditional dress on occasion of Tamil New Year



Delhi Capitals pacer Kagiso Rabada bowls during training session after he completes six-day quarantine

©DelhiCapitals

KOHLI FLOATED IDEA OF MAXI JOINING RCB

All-rounder Glenn Maxwell said that RCB captain Virat Kohli had first floated the idea of him joining the franchise during the India's limited overs leg of Australia last year. "We chatted after the ODI and T20I series in Australia. He talked to me about potentially playing for RCB. If I got the opportunity, he said 'we would love to have you'. Maxwell said in a video tweeted by RCB. "He floated the idea back even then. There was a long process in work. Thankfully, I am playing for RCB now," he added.

PANT WILL DO A GOOD JOB: LARA

Brian Lara believes Rishabh Pant has improved a lot in the last few months and will do a good job in leading Delhi Capitals. "I think he has got a team that will support him which is most important. He has grown in the last 4 months and I think he will do a good job."

POINTS TABLE

	P	W	L	NRR	PTS
1 DC	1	1	0	+0.779	2
2 MI	2	1	0	+0.225	2
3 PBKS	1	1	0	-0.200	2
4 RCB	1	1	0	-0.050	2
5 KKR	2	1	1	+0.000	2
6 RR	1	0	1	-0.200	0
7 SRH	1	0	1	-0.500	0
8 CSK	1	0	1	-0.779	0

Injured Royals look to bounce back

KEY PLAYERS

PRITHVI SHAW
Shaw is in good form recently and his aggressive batting in the powerplay overs set the tone

JOS BUTTLER
In Jofra Archer and Ben Stokes' absence, Jos is now the most experienced player in the team

VENUE: WANKHEDE STADIUM, MUMBAI

HEAD TO HEAD

Matches	22
Rajasthan Royals	11
Delhi Capitals	11

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

Delhi Capitals beat Rajasthan Royals by 46 runs in Sharjah

Delhi Capitals defeated Rajasthan Royals by 13 runs in Dubai

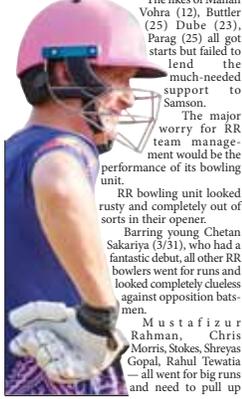
PTI ■ MUMBAI

Coming off a heart-breaking loss in the first match and hit by star all-rounder Ben Stokes' injury-forced ouster, a beleaguered Rajasthan Royals would hope for another inspirational knock from new skipper Sanju Samson when it faces a confident Delhi Capitals in an IPL match at Wankhede Stadium on Wednesday.

While DC made a superb start under new captain Rishabh Pant, clinching a seven-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings in their opening contest, RR suffered a four-run defeat against Punjab Kings in a high-scoring match on Monday night.

As if the loss was not enough, RR were dealt a severe blow on Tuesday when Stokes was ruled out of the remainder of the tournament with a broken finger. He sustained that injury during the agonising defeat.

In his absence, the pressure would be on the likes of Jos Buttler, Shivam Dube and Ryan Parag to deliver the goods and provide ample support to their young skipper, who has been sensational in the first match.



95

Sanju Samson who smashed 95 sixes in 76 innings of 80 matches, needs just five sixes to become the second Rajasthan Royals batsman after Shane Watson (109 sixes in 78 matches) to complete a century of sixes in Indian Premier League

68

Rishabh Pant led Delhi Capitals to a seven-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings on captaincy debut in IPL. He led Delhi Capitals for the first time after playing 68 matches

The likes of Manan Vohra (12), Buttler (25), Dube (23), Parag (25) all got starts but failed to lend the much-needed support to Samson.

The major worry for RR team management would be the performance of its bowling unit.

RR bowling unit looked rusty and completely out of sorts in their opener.

Barring young Chetan Sakaria (3/31), who had a fantastic debut, all other RR bowlers went for runs and looked completely clueless against opposition batsmen.

Mustafizur Rahman, Chris Morris, Stokes, Shreyas Gopal, Rahul Tewatia — all went for big runs and need to pull up their socks quickly.

Last edition's runner-up side DC, on the other hand, had a perfect start to their campaign as they defeated three-time champions CSK with consummate ease.

Opting to field, DC had allowed CSK to pile up a competitive 188 for 7 but Shikhar Dhawan and Prithvi Shaw made a short walk of the target with a 138-run opening partnership, that laid the foundation for the win.

On the bowling front, Chris Woakes (2/18) and Avesh Khan (2/23) had a good outing in the first game and would look to carry on their form but the likes of Ravichandran Ashwin, Tom Curran, Amit Mishra and Stoinis had a forgettable outing and would be desperate to make amends on Thursday.

The contest will also witness test of wits of two new captains in Pant and Samson.

Pant's way of thinking has shades of Kohli & Williamson: Ponting

Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting feels Rishabh Pant's thought process as captain is quite similar to Virat Kohli and Kane Williamson, as the former Australian captain describes the sprightly Indian wicketkeeper-batsman as a "winner".

Pant won his debut match as captain in the IPL against Chennai Super Kings and Ponting believes that his energy is simply hard to miss.

"Someone like him (Pant), you want him to get involved in the game as early as possible, and but for as long as possible," Ponting told cricket.com.au.

"The way he thinks, he is actually a bit like Virat or Kane. Now, if they are in at the end, you are going to win more often than not no matter how many runs are required," the legendary Australian said.

"He is energetic and you can hear that from behind the stumps, he loves being in the contest and



Rishabh Pant, DC coach who has all praise for his captain.

parisons are always going to be there for someone who bats like that," he responded to Pant's being compared with his former teammate Adam Gilchrist.

"Gilchrist's keeping is better than Rishabh's no doubt about that. The way I saw him keep on turning pitches in India (vs England), I thought he kept way better than I thought he could," said Ponting, known for his bluntness.

"If his keeping improves, with his batting, he could be India's keeper in Tests for next 10-12 years no doubt."

The coach had no hesitation in revealing that the last edition of the IPL wasn't Pant's finest.

"He was disappointing for us in the tournament last year. He had gone (to the UAE) with a lot of overweight."

"He turned up a bit underdone, did his hammy (hamstring) in the third or fourth game and missed a couple of games. And when he came back, he couldn't get back to the level we expected him to be," Ponting recollected.

Babar dethrones Kohli from top

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam on Wednesday ended Indian captain Virat Kohli's long reign at the top of the ICC rankings for batsmen to become only the fourth from his country to attain the pole position.

The 26-year-old right-hand batsman's 82-ball 94 in the third game ODI series against South Africa helped him gain 15 rating points to reach 865 points.

He now leads the Indian captain by eight points, the ICC said in a statement.

Babar had started the series at 837 rating points but moved up to 858 (ahead of Kohli) after his score of 103 in the first match.

He dropped to 852 by the time of the last weekly rankings update with a score of 32 in the second ODI.

In Tests, Babar has attained a best of fifth position and is currently ranked sixth while in T20Is he is third but has been number one in the past.

PSG knock holders Bayern Out

Parisians lose 1-0 but reach semis on away goals

AFP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain knocked holders Bayern Munich out of the Champions League on Tuesday despite Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting scoring against his old club as a 1-0 defeat in the second leg at the Parc des Princes could not prevent the French giants from winning a tremendous quarter-final tie on away goals.

Neymar twice hit the woodwork for PSG in the first half and Choupo-Moting then put Bayern in front five minutes before the break.

But the reigning European champions could not get the second goal they needed after losing 3-2 at home in the first leg last week.



Neymar celebrates with Leandro Paredes after PSG win

PSG have revenge following their 1-0 defeat in last season's final in Lisbon, and the dream of winning a first European Cup remains alive for the Qatar-owned club.

Mauricio Pochettino's team, who had already eliminated Barcelona in the last 16, can now look forward to a semi-final against Manchester City or Borussia Dortmund.

"I am delighted, despite the defeat. We were facing a great team, the European champions, but we are going back to the semi-finals," Neymar told broadcaster RMC Sport.

Chelsea reach first semis in seven years

AFP ■ SEVILLE

Chelsea reached the Champions League semi-finals for the first time since 2014 despite a 1-0 defeat against Porto in Tuesday's quarter-final second leg in

Seville. Thomas Tuchel's side will play Real Madrid or Liverpool for a place in the final after producing a masterclass in game management to win 2-1 on aggregate. Chelsea smothered Porto with an intelligent defensive approach

until Mehdi Taremi's stunning bicycle kick in the last minute of stoppage-time. But that sublime strike was out of character with the rest of Porto's display as they laboured to overturn the 2-0 first-leg deficit.