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INDIA'S FLAMING
FORESTS PLAY HAVOC

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MYANMAR COUP FOES TOUT
MINORITY-BACKED SHADOW GOVT

SPORT 12
STOKES OUT
FOR 12 WEEKS

RAIPUR, SATURDAY APRIL 17, 2021: PAGES 12 33

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The Daily Pioneer



4L daily Covid cases by Apr end likely

At current rate, deaths could go up to 200/day; Delhi sees record 20k cases in 24 hrs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the current rate of the daily surge, India's Covid-19 cases could reach anywhere between 3.5 and 4 lakh by the end of April. Going by the current death rate of around 0.5 per cent, India could see a daily fatality of around 175 to 200 per day by month-end. On Friday, India recorded over 2.08 lakh new cases and 1,124 deaths, compared to 2.17 lakh cases and 1,185 deaths the previous day.

The country's average daily Covid-19 growth during the last two weeks is around 5.2 to 6 per cent, to 12,000 to 15,000 a day. Even in the case of a highly optimistic scenario where the cases stabilise around an average of 10,000 per day, the country total should go easily past 3.5 lakh in the remaining two weeks of this month.

The most worrying part is the fact that the number of new cases is rising alarmingly in States other than Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh, which bore the brunt of the onset of the second wave of the Covid-19.

On Friday, Maharashtra recorded its single-day high of 63,729 cases and 398 deaths. Delhi also recorded its single

Haryana shuts schools till Apr 30

Chandigarh: The Haryana Government on Friday announced consolidated guidelines to contain the spread of Covid-19, ordering closure of schools, colleges and coaching institutes till April 30 and capping number of attendees at gatherings and passengers in vehicles.

CAPSULE

CBI EX-DIRECTOR RANJIT SINHA DIES FROM COVID

New Delhi: Former CBI director Ranjit Sinha died on Friday morning in what is believed to be a Covid-19 related death, senior officials said. He was 68.

"DIALOGUE CAN SOLVE INDIA-NEPAL ISSUES"

Kathmandu: There is no issue between Nepal and India that cannot be resolved through dialogue, Nepalese Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali said on Friday, underlining that the two countries are "friends and not competitors".

COLLECTION OF CHALLAN DUES IN CASH SUSPENDED

New Delhi: The Delhi Traffic Police has suspended the pending challans in cash in view of a surge in Covid-19 cases here, officials said on Friday.



Passengers stand in a queue outside Anand Vihar Railway Station as they arrive to board train for their native place amid rise in Covid cases in New Delhi on Friday. Ranjan Dimri / Pioneer

day of 19,486 cases and a record 141 deaths. Chhattisgarh has seen an alarming 131 per cent rise in the number of fresh cases during the last one week.

BSY +ve for 2nd time in 8 months; Javadekar too Covid positive

Bengaluru/New Delhi: Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa on Friday tested positive for Covid-19 for the second time in eight months, and has been shifted to a private hospital. Union Minister Prakash Javadekar too tested positive for coronavirus.

Covid-19 IN INDIA

| | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| TOTAL CASES: | 1,44,96,651 (+2,08,725) |
| DEATHS: | 1,75,459 (+1,124) |
| RECOVERED: | 1,26,50,298 (+1,06,248) |
| ACTIVE: | 16,63,789 |
| MAHARASHTRA: | 37,03,584 |
| KERALA: | 12,07,333 |
| KARNATAKA: | 11,24,509 |
| TAMIL NADU: | 9,71,384 |
| DELHI: | 8,03,623 (+19,486) |

CICSE defers Class X, XII Board exams

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CICSE) on Friday deferred the board exams for Classes 10 and 12 in view of a rise in Covid-19 cases across the country.

In light of the nationwide surge in coronavirus cases, the Class 10 and 12 exams which were to be held from May 4 have been deferred, CICSE's chief executive and secretary Gerry Arathoon said.

"We will closely monitor the situation and review it in the first week of June to take a final decision on conduct of examination," he said. "While Class 12 exams will be conducted at a later stage, Class 10 students will get an option to either appear in offline exams later or get evaluated on basis of fair and unbiased criteria to be developed by board," Arathoon added.

Earlier this week, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had cancelled its Class 10 board exams and deferred the Class 12 board exams. Several State boards have postponed or cancelled their exams too.

Covaxin production to double by June, 7 fold by July-Aug

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The current production capacity of Bharat Biotech ingeniously developed Covaxin vaccine will be doubled by May-June 2021 and then increased nearly 6-7 fold by July-August 2021, the Government said on Friday.

The Union Ministry of Science and Technology issued a statement in this regard, saying "the current production capacity of ingeniously developed Covaxin vaccine will be doubled by May-June 2021 and then increased nearly 6-7 fold by July-August 2021 — that is increasing the production from 1 crore vaccine doses in April 2021 to 6-7 crore vaccine doses by July-August. It is expected to reach nearly 10 crore doses per month by September this year."

It said the Government will provide financial support as a grant to vaccine manufacturing facilities for enhanced production capacities.

Recently, inter-ministerial teams visited the sites of two

Sunday curfew imposed on all UP dists till May 15

₹1,000 fine for no mask; markets to be sanitised on Sundays

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As corona surge continues, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has ordered "Sunday curfew" across the State and also ordered setting up of 1,000-bed Covid hospitals in Lucknow to meet the demand of shortage of beds.

The State Government also stated that ₹1,000 fine will be charged for not wearing masks and ₹10,000 fine for second time violation. The Sunday curfew will continue till May 15.

In the review meeting, the CM ordered closure of markets, offices and other business establishments on Sunday so as to allow sanitisation of the markets across the State. "There will be a weekly closure in all rural and urban areas of the State on Sunday. Only sanitisation and emergency services will operate during this period. Necessary aware-



A view of the iconic building of Lucknow, India, ASI protected monuments remained shut for visitors in view of the rising Covid-19 cases in the city, in Lucknow on Friday. PTI

ness works should also be done in this regard. He hinted that even public transport and commutation won't be allowed.

A 1,000-bed Covid hospital will be established in Lucknow. The venue of the Defence Expo in Vrindavan Colony has been chosen for setting up of this makeshift hospital, the Chief Minister said during a review meeting with divisional commissioners, district magistrates, Chief

Medical Officers and members of the Team-11 (a core team of 11 officers).

Yogi also ordered closure of OPDs in all Government hospitals in the State to control crowds. He also announced that it is compulsory for everyone to wear a mask. "A fine of ₹1,000 would be imposed for the first time caught without a mask. If caught without a mask a second time, a penalty of ₹10,000 would be imposed," he added.

Ensure sufficient oxygen for emergency care: PM Modi calls for increase in manufacturing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the second wave of Covid-19 variant has led to a rapid rise in positive cases across the country and brought health facilities under increasing pressure, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday undertook a "comprehensive" review to ensure adequate medical grade oxygen supply in the country and called for stepping up its production.

Oxygen supply has been under pressure with the multiplication of coronavirus cases after it had largely ebbed out by the start of this year.

According to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Modi took a comprehensive review to ensure adequate medical grade oxygen supply in the country. Inputs from Ministries like health, steel, road transport, and the Department for Promotion of Industry and



Internal Trade were also shared with the PM during the review, said the statement of the PMO. The PM stressed that it is important to ensure synergy across Ministries and State Governments, the PMO said.

He also took a detailed review of the current situation of oxygen supply and projected use in the coming 15 days across 12 high-burden States — Maharashtra, Madhya

Need more research to determine spread of 'double mutant' coronavirus: Scientists

New Delhi: A global mutation tracker on Friday suggested the "double mutant" coronavirus, first identified in Maharashtra, has a cumulative

Covid spreads mainly via air: Lancet study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19 is predominantly transmitted through air, according to a new assessment carried in the medical journal Lancet which said it found little to no evidence that the virus spreads easily via large droplets, which fall quickly through the air and contaminate surfaces.

The study added that public health measures that fail to treat the virus as predominantly airborne leave people unprotected and allow the virus to spread. The study observation is significant for India where mass gatherings and election rallies continue unabated even as overall Covid-19 cases are breaking records daily.

A multi-research team from the UK, the US and Canada warned that public health measures that fail to treat the virus as predominantly airborne leave people unprotected and allow the virus to spread.

Silent (asymptomatic or presymptomatic) transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from people who are not coughing or sneezing accounts for at least 40 per cent of all trans-



This silent transmission is a key way Covid-19 has spread around the world, 'supporting a predominantly airborne mode of transmission,' as per the assessment.

By contrast, the researchers found little to no evidence that the virus spreads easily via large droplets, which fall quickly through the air and contaminate surfaces.

"The evidence supporting airborne transmission is overwhelming, and evidence supporting large droplet transmission is almost non-existent," said Jose-Luis Jimenez, a chemist at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES) and the University of Colorado Boulder.

EC cuts Bengal campaign time by 3 hrs at night over Covid rise

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of rising Covid-19 cases and the heavy political rhetoric in poll-bound areas, the Election Commission (EC) on Friday extended the "silence" period from 48 hours to 72 hours in each of the remaining three of the eight phases of the West Bengal polls to be held on April 22, 26, and 29.

The commission has curtailed the timing of campaigning up to 7 pm from 10 pm. It has banned rallies, public meetings, nakkad sabha, and street play from 7 pm to 10 am beginning Friday.

"Commission curtails the timing of the campaign up to 7 pm. The silence period has been extended from 48 hours to 72 hours in each of the remaining three phases in West Bengal. These orders have come into effect immediately," the EC said in a letter to the president, general secretary and chairman of the national and state-level political parties.

Monsoon normal this year, predicts IMD

Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, eastern UP, Assam may not get sufficient rainfall

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Barring Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, north-Chhattisgarh, eastern UP, Pradesh, Meghalaya and Assam, India will probably experience normal monsoon rainfall this year as La Nina or El Nino weather conditions, which impact rain patterns, are likely to be absent.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Friday predicted overall "normal" monsoon rainfall at 98 per



monsoon being "normal" was 21% while there was 21% chance of it being "above normal".

While releasing the first Long Range Forecast for the four-month rainfall period from June to September, M Rajeevan, secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences, said, quantitatively, the monsoon seasonal rainfall is likely to be 98% of the LPA with a model error of +/- 5 per cent.

"It is really good news for the country and will help India have a good agriculture output," he said.

The news augurs well for an economy battered due to the coronavirus pandemic. Large parts of the country rely on the four-month rainfall season for agriculture and also for filling reservoirs.

UK Home Dept clears Nirav Modi's extradition to India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Home Department of the United Kingdom has cleared the extradition of fugitive diamondaire Nirav Modi, wanted in India connection with a case involving over ₹13,000-crore credit fraud involving Punjab National Bank (PNB).

However, Westminster's court has granted Nirav a window of appeal in the High Court and has up to 14 days to make that application after the Home Secretary cleared the extradition.

Nirav had allegedly perpetrated the fraud in the PNB in collusion with his uncle Mehul Choksi. On February 25, a Westminster Magistrates' Court allowed his extradition.



The findings of the court were sent to the UK Home Department headed by British Home Secretary Priti Patel which cleared the extradition, officials said, according to news agency PTI.

Dust storm, drizzle cool Delhi but pollute its air

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A strong dust storm barreled through the National capital on Friday, affecting visibility and air quality, while cloudy weather and light rain brought the mercury down slightly, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

"A dust storm hit Delhi around 4 pm under the influence of a Western Disturbance affecting the hills. The maximum wind speed was around 70 kilometres per hour," an IMD official said.

Visibility at Palam dropped from 3,000 metres to 500 metres due to the dust storm. At Safdarjung, it was reduced from 2,200 metres to 1,500 metres. Delhi's air quality index (AQI) also deteriorated to 252



A commuter rides a scooter during a dust storm in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

at 6 pm from 238 at 4 pm. An AQI between 201 and 300 is considered "poor". Very light rain has been recorded in some areas of the city, bringing down mercury.

On Thursday, the city had recorded a maximum temperature of 40.5 degrees Celsius, the highest so far this season. The mercury is predicted to remain below 40 degrees Celsius for the next five to six days, the IMD said.

Weekend lockdown announced in Chandigarh

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

With the number of Covid-19 cases showing a surge, the Chandigarh administration on Friday announced a weekend lockdown in the Union Territory till 5 am on Monday.

Announcing the fresh restriction in an official statement here, the administration urged residents to stay indoors. Essential activities and services and home delivery of food are exempted from the purview of the lockdown.

The decision was taken at a high-level meeting here chaired by Punjab Governor V P Singh Badnore, who is also the Administrator of the union territory. The administration also announced other restrictions, which will be in place till April 30.

While all gymsnasiums and spas in the union territory will remain closed, cinema halls can run with 50 per cent capacity, it said. All government offices will function with 50 per cent strength, and the general public will be allowed to meet officers only with prior appointment. The administration also banned on all social, cultural, political and religious events.

The existing limit on gatherings in permitted functions will be reduced to 100 for outdoor events and 50 for indoor ones. Buses will run but with 50 per cent capacity only. Museums, libraries, coaching institutions etc., will remain closed.

The statement clarified that candidates venturing out to sit in examinations and those deputed in exam duties will be allowed to travel on production of admit or identity cards. Visitors will be screened at the airport, railway station, ISBT etc., it said. Home delivery of food will be allowed.

All vaccination and testing centres, dispensaries and other medical facilities will remain open during the lockdown and people going there will not be stopped. Inter-state travellers will be allowed on all days, including the lockdown period, the administration said.

The high-level meeting was attended by Manoj Parida, Adviser to the Administrator, and Mandip Singh Brar, Deputy Commissioner, Chandigarh, and Director, PGIMER, among others.

Badnore expressed serious concerns about the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the city and also the high fatality

rate. The union territory reported 412 cases of the coronavirus on Thursday and a record.

Badnore directed all the three government medical institutes here to ramp up their facilities so as to accommodate the increasing number of coronavirus patients.

All COVID-19-related deaths must be specifically audited, he said, adding that the sector 48 hospital should be made fully operational, so that it can function as a dedicated COVID-19 hospital, he directed.

Badnore also directed all hospitals to store enough oxygen and vaccines. All COVID-19 patients currently under home-quarantine must be regularly contacted and provided necessary assistance, he said. The UT administrator said all shops must get their staff tested and display sign boards stating that their premises are coronavirus-free.

Action will be taken against shoppers going to the markets without masks and also against shopkeepers attending them, he said. Badnore also said that mobile teams should be sent to temples, gurdwaras, mosques and other crowded places during festivals so that visitors can

CATEGORIES EXEMPTED DURING WEEKEND LOCKDOWN

- People tasked with law and order/emergency and municipal services and duties, media persons with accreditation and government machinery tasked with Covid-19 related duties.
- Essential commodity shops and vendors dealing with food, groceries, fruits, vegetable, dairy and milk booths, medical equipment have been allowed to open for home delivery only.
- Manufacturing units of essential commodities shall be allowed to remain open.
- There shall be no curbs on inter-state and intra-state movement of essential and non-essential goods.
- All vehicles and persons in bonafide shall (inter-state, intra-state) transit (inter-state, intra-state) shall be allowed to pass, but only after due verification of point of origin and destination.
- Hospitals, chemist shops, and ATMs shall be allowed to remain open 24x7.
- Pregnant women and patients allowed for getting medical health services.
- During weekend lockdown, restaurants and hotels can remain open only for home delivery till 9.30 pm.
- All marriage functions which have been permitted shall be allowed subject to the limit of 100 people outdoor or 50 indoor or 50 percent of the total capacity whichever is less.

be screened and symptomatic cases tested.

481 COVID CASES IN CHANDIGARH, HIGHEST SINGLE DAY SURGE

The Union Territory Chandigarh on Friday reported 481 fresh COVID-19 cases, the highest single-day figure since global pandemic struck.

With this, the case count has reached 32,878, a medical bulletin said. Last year, on September 13, Chandigarh reported 448 cases. As many as 428 patients were discharged after they recovered from the infection, taking the number of cured persons to 29,047. So far, 355,840 samples have been taken for testing.

Capt Amarinder showcases Punjab as safest place to do business

NO LOCKOUTS AND STRIKES DURING LAST 30 YEARS

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Reiterating Punjab Government's firm commitment in facilitating investments from Japan through Invest Punjab, the Chief Minister Capt. Amarinder Singh on Friday highlighted his vision of having a 'Little Japan' in Punjab that builds upon the current thriving presence of more than 100 Japanese business establishments in the State. Capt. Amarinder, in his virtual address to the 'INDO-JAPAN Investment Symposium: Investment Opportunities in the State of Punjab' organized by the Japan Desk at Invest Punjab in coordination with the Embassy of India, Tokyo, pointed out that Punjab is the safest place to do business having witnessed no lockouts and strikes in last 30 years.

"Invest Punjab has been



rated as the 'top performing' State IPA by Government of India and a dedicated Japan Desk has been formed at Invest Punjab for facilitating Japanese investors willing to invest in the State and would be the 'match making' platform for Japanese and Punjab based companies", asserted Capt. Amarinder.

Inviting the Japanese Enterprises to Punjab, the Chief Minister highlighted the opportunities for investment or collaboration with Punjab based companies in multiple sectors such as agri and food processing, technical textiles, engineering, pharma and medical device development.

The Chief Minister also highlighted the availability of 1,000 acres of land near Rajpura for the development of dedicated Japanese Industrial Township in the State.

Punjab releases ₹151 cr pending to arhtiyas

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Finance Department on Friday released the pending arrears, amounting to ₹151.45 crore to the arhtiyas (commission agents). The amount, released on the directions of the CM Capt. Amarinder Singh — was paid out of the state exchequer as the Food Corporation of India (FCI) has withheld the amount.

"The FCI was supposed to pay the arrears to about 5,000 arhtiyas but due to delay on its part, the Punjab Government released the same from the state exchequer to ensure smooth and hassle free wheat procurement during ongoing Rabi Marketing Season", said a spokesperson of the Chief Minister Office.

It may be recalled that before the commencement of wheat procurement, the arhtiyas had requested the Chief Minister to settle their arrears immediately on which Capt. Amarinder had directed the Finance Department to release the due payment without waiting for the payment by FCI.

COVID SURGE

Haryana CM appeals to farmers to end agitation, announces mega vaccine drive

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A mid rapid spurt in the cases of Covid-19 across the country and state, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Friday once again urged the farmers to end their agitation against the three central farm laws during the ongoing crisis.

"It is everyone's democratic right to protest but it is also our collective responsibility to protect ourselves, family members and our near and dear ones from this global pandemic that has become a global threat to humanity. Therefore, farmers on moral and ethical grounds should end this agitation to prevent the spread of COVID-19," the Chief Minister said while giving his message during the 'Haryana Ki Baat' programme. His message came on the day when the state reported 20 fatalities and 6277 fresh cases, the highest single day spike ever since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

He said that wherever people gather in large numbers, there is a chance of spread of



the virus. So the farmers should end their protest and can again hold the agitation whenever the situation normalizes, he added. Khattar said last year, the highest 3104 cases were reported in a single day in the state but in the second wave, more than 5000 cases are now reported on a daily basis. Last year, the districts in NCR like Gurugram, Faridabad, Sonapat were badly affected, but now a sudden spike is also recorded in Panchkula, Ambala, Kurukshetra among other districts.

Some restrictions have been put on public gatherings and night curfew has been

imposed to contain the spread of the virus. A cabinet meeting has been convened on April 22 to review the situation and more decisions are likely to be taken to deal with the second wave of COVID-19, he said.

Khattar said that from April 20 onwards, another master vaccination campaign will begin in the state for people above 45 years of age.

On the arrangements made in hospitals to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, he said that adequate numbers of oxygen cylinders, ICU beds, ventilators, masks and PPE kits etc. are being made available in all the hospitals across the state.

Haryana deports 12 IAS officers to monitor Covid situation in 12 districts

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Government has deputed 12 IAS officers in various districts to review and monitor the Covid-19 preparedness in addition to their present duties with immediate effect.

Sanjeev Kaushal has been deputed in Faridabad, Alok Nigam in Panchkula district, Devesh Singh in Karnal, TC Gupta in Gurugram, Amit Isha in Sonapat, SN Roy in Ambala, Dr Mahavir Singh in Hissar, Vineet Garg in Sirsa, G Anupama in Kurukshetra, Apoorva Kumar Singh in Panipat and Rakesh Gupta has been deputed in Rohtak. These districts are witnessing a huge spike in COVID cases on a daily basis.

An official spokesman said that these officers will monitor and focus on active involvement in monitoring the situation and proper implementation of strict containment zones by district authorities. They will review the availability of adequate healthcare infrastructure to tackle COVID-19 situation, such as isolation beds, oxygen support, drugs, ICU beds, ventilators, masks, PPE kits, sanitizers, etc. oxygen reserve, etc. in both government as well as private health facilities in their respective districts, the spokesman said.

They will review arrangements for strict monitoring of COVID-19 patients under home isolation. They will also monitor enforcing COVID-19 and other measures such as social distancing, wearing face masks, hand hygiene, etc. at all public places and ensuring strict implementation of orders regarding restrictions on social gatherings, especially in banquets, during marriages or other family functions as well, he added.

wherever required, increase contact tracing of active positive cases (up to 30 contacts to be traced and tested within 72 hours viz-a-viz each COVID positive case), proper monitoring of strict containment zones by district authorities.

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Haryana closes all educational institutions till April 30

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Due to a surge in Covid-19 cases, Haryana Government on Friday ordered closure of all schools, colleges, coaching institutions, ITIs, libraries and training institutes whether government or private in the state till April 30.

The order was issued by the deputy commissioner of Additional Chief Secretary Revenue & Disaster Management Department, Haryana on Friday. Instructions were also issued to the Deputy Commissioners to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Earlier, the schools upto class VIII were closed in the state. As per directions issued by the Haryana Directorate of School Education, all the teachers will continue to report to the schools as before so that



the exam results can be prepared and released on April 30 and the new academic session 2021-22 can be started from May 1.

In its order to DCs, the State Government said, "All cases must be reported and encouraged through video conferencing with officers to discourage official visits in the offices of Secretariats at State and District level." The State Government has also directed deputed officers in District Administrations to effectively

take steps for establishment of micro containment zones. The State Government had imposed night curfew prohibiting movement of individuals for non-essential activities between 10 pm to 5 am in Haryana. MANDIS AND PROCUREMENT CENTRES CLOSED FOR 2 DAYS

Mandis and procurement centres in Haryana will remain closed on April 17 and April 18. An official spokesperson said that farmers are requested not to bring their produce to the mandis on both these days as wheat 'OI' not be procured in the state on April 17 and April 18. Only the work of lifting wheat procured in the past will be done in the mandis. From April 19 onwards, wheat procurement will continue normally in the state as before.

Mohali Admn asks seven pvt hosps to reserve 50% beds for Covid patients

PNS ■ MOHALI

Mohali District Administration on Friday ordered the seven private hospitals — including Max Super-specialty, Fortis Healthcare, SGHS Sohana, Ivy Hospital — to set aside at least 50 per cent of their total bed capacity as isolation beds and wards for Covid care.

The other hospitals include Indus Hospital, Grecian Super-specialty, and Mayo Super-specialty hospitals.

These private hospitals are already providing quality tertiary care (Level 2 and level 3) for Covid patients in the district.

"The district possesses minimal public health infrastructure, given that the district hospital is under re-construction as a medical college — which will take time. Most of the ICU beds or ventilators (L2/L3 — that is tertiary care) are in the private sector," said Mohali Deputy Commissioner Girish Dayalan in an order.

The hospitals have also been asked to put certain ambulances exclusively attending to COVID-19 patients or suspected cases.

Mohali Civil Surgeon shall decide on the exact number of beds and ambulances based on overall capacity of the hospital, read the order.

The Deputy Commissioner also made it clear that the private hospitals in the district shall not refuse admission or treatment to patients of COVID-19 referred by the Civil Surgeon, Mohali. The hospitals shall ensure that staff

— doctors, nurses, and paramedics — are all available on duty and no one shall refuse treatment.

At the same time, the Deputy Commissioner has reassured the public that there was no reason to panic as there are sufficient COVID care beds in Mohali.

"Formal orders have been issued so that as a caution and measure at least 50 per cent beds are reserved for COVID patients in private hospitals. Seven hospitals which have been assessed by experts to have provided quality COVID care in the past have been directed for compliance," he said, while making it clear that the Hospital management would be held personally responsible for compliance of these directions.

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Naviot Sidhu launches yet another attack on his own Govt

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Yet to be rehabilitated, the cricketer-turned-politician Naviot Singh Sidhu on Friday launched yet another scathing attack against his own party's government from the political pavilion here was relegated to opposition after Punjab Cabinet berth nearly two years back.

Sidhu, the former Minister, blamed the Congress-led Punjab Government for betraying the people who voted to power on the promises that he would punish those guilty of sacrilege and drug menace.

Mincing no words, Sidhu went on to question the constitution of the special investigation teams by the Government as none of them have yielded any result in the State. "In Punjab, the SIT means SIT-down. No SIT has yielded any result so far," he said, while addressing the media in his and the Chief Minister Capt. Amarinder Singh's home town, Patiala.

The assertions came two days after Sidhu had chosen the "sensitive" Bargari issue to hit at his own Government and its legal team by claiming that the case was not properly defended and "weak lawyers" were hired. In fact, Sidhu visited Kotkapura — the epicentre of the sacrilege incidents and subsequent protests — on Baisakhi following which he shared his views on Twitter.

Reiterating his demand, Sidhu on Friday demanded that the Punjab Police constituted a SIT probe into the 15



firings at people protesting in Kotkapura and Behlhal Kalan against sacrilegious incidents should be made public.

"The government was formed on the promise of punishing the guilty of sacrilege and those involved in the drug cases, but it failed on both fronts. The public feels cheated as the government didn't keep its promise," said Sidhu, who questioned why the action was not taken against the guilty.

That was not all. Sidhu went on to raise questions on the working of the Capt. Amarinder Singh Government, while blaming the "botched-up" investigations since 2015 for the delay in justice for the victims.

"Why has the government failed to name and nail the guilty? On whose directions did the policemen open fire on protesters? Why are their names not mentioned in the FIR? The report was sent to the Justice Ranjit Singh Commission report that the then Chief Minister had spoken to the then police chief at midnight, hours before the firing on protesting Sikhs was undertaken. The report was tabled in the House, debated and a resolution was passed to punish the guilty, but no concrete action has been taken.

Who is responsible?" he said, asking the government to make the report of the sacrilege probe public.

"Everyone knows who is guilty for the sacrilege and firing on Sikhs besides the drugs problem of Punjab, but why has the government failed to act? The public is angry with the government." He said that when the culprits are identified as per the report, and there is evidence that the "then state DGP was in touch with the Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal at 2.30 am then it's clear evidence that they were in cahoots."

Underlining that sacrilege was the "most important issue for me", Sidhu made it clear that he would not sit until the guilty are punished. Also, "the public is angry with the government," he said that when the culprits are identified as per the report, and there is evidence that the "then state DGP was in touch with the Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal at 2.30 am then it's clear evidence that they were in cahoots."

Underlining that sacrilege was the "most important issue for me", Sidhu made it clear that he would not sit until the guilty are punished. Also, "the public is angry with the government," he said that when the culprits are identified as per the report, and there is evidence that the "then state DGP was in touch with the Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal at 2.30 am then it's clear evidence that they were in cahoots."

Doctors must help in war-like situation: DC

PNS ■ RANCHI

Deputy Commissioner, Ranchi, Chhavi Ranjan today said that due to the rising infection of the corona, there is a war-like situation and this is not the time to run back but to fight back firmly. "In such a situation, cooperation without the doctor is required. There is an appeal to all doctors to try to give their best from their level, especially in Covid Hospital, deputed doctors should apply extra effort," he said while holding a meeting with deputed doctors at District Covid Hospital.

Deputy Development Commissioner Ranchi, Sub-Divisional Officer Ranchi Sadar, deputed doctors and other concerned officials were present in the meeting held at Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Auditorium in Morhabadi.

During the meeting, the DC said that action will be taken if the doctors deputed in the district Covid Hospital Sadar, cooperation without the doctor is required. There is an appeal to all doctors to try to give their best from their level, especially in Covid Hospital, deputed doctors should apply extra effort," he said while holding a meeting with deputed doctors at District Covid Hospital.

Arrangements made for the corona infected patients at Sadar Hospital Ranchi are constantly being monitored by the DC. Notices have been sent to several doctors who are absent on duty during the inspection. These will be dealt with under DDMA. Meanwhile, the DC and Deputy Development

Commissioner Ranchi Vishal Sagar meeting Jagadish Hospital on Friday. They took stock of the arrangement of beds etc for the treatment of corona infected patients. The DC also reviewed the emergency, general ward and other arrangements in the hospital.

The DC and DDC discussed with the hospital management and doctors to increase the beds in the hospital for the treatment of corona infected patients. After discussion, it was decided that the number of Covid beds in the hospital will be increased.

During the discussion, the district administration was made aware of the problems faced by the hospital management regarding the supply of oxygen cylinders. On which the DDC said that there will be no problem in oxygen supply, the facility will be provided by the district administration.

Sagar said that the number of Covid beds in the hospital will be increased in 1 to 2 days, currently 10 Covid patients are being treated in the hospital. After increasing the beds, more patients will be treated in the hospital. He said that the number of beds will be increased keeping in view the capacity of the hospital.

Meanwhile, audio messages of instructions to follow the Covid-19 protocol are being run continuously at the Khadgadha bus stand. Today, under the leadership of DTO Praveen Prakash, slogan stickers were installed in all buses, temples and e-rickshaws with no Mask No Entry, no mask, no entry, no mask or no travel etc.

MANOJ KUMAR ■ CHANDIGARH

PGIMER Director urges Punjab, Haryana, HP to increase beds, manpower

Anticipating a surge in the number of Covid-19 cases after confirmation of UK corona variant in Chandigarh, the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) Director Dr Jagat Ram on Friday urged the authorities concerned of neighbouring States- Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir to increase beds and manpower in their hospitals.

"There is a rapid surge of Covid-19 cases in the second wave of the pandemic. The peak of this virus is expected in mid May or early June," he told The Pioneer.

The director said that above 70 per cent of total covid beds in the Covid Block of PGIMER are full and about 69 per cent of these are occu-

pied by patients from Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. PGIMER has 300 Covid beds and 222 Covid patients have been admitted in Nehru Extension Block, out of which 82 belong to Punjab, 67 to Chandigarh, 41 to Haryana, 22 to Himachal Pradesh and 10 from other States. The director said that the health and medical staff in Chandigarh, Punjab and other neighbouring States, it has been anticipated a surge in the number of Covid-19 cases in the region.

Dr Jagat Ram said that the Covid-19 cases surging at a rate much faster in the second wave than the first wave in the region. At PGIMER 3,492 covid samples tested, out of which 552 were found positive. The positivity rate was 15.8 per cent. Only, patients having moderate and severe symptoms of Covid-19 are admitted at Covid hospital in PGIMER, he added.

Chhattisgarh launches virtual war on Covid-19

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh government is working on a war footing to check the further spread of Covid-19 and to identify and treat patients.

Currently, more than 47,000 people are being tested for corona daily. The number of tests per day was 30,000 in March. In January, the average daily testing was 22,761.

The state's daily tests per 10 lakh population are 1,620 while the national average is 1,018, an official communication said on Friday.

In Chhattisgarh, TrueNat testing facilities are available in



31 government and five private labs. RTPCR test is conducted in seven government and five private labs.

The rapid antigen test is

also available in primary health centers. According to information from the Health Department, the percentage of RTPCR investigation in total

Covid investigations has increased by 14 percent as compared to October 2020.

Four new government RTPCR labs are being set up. In each district, the testing capacity of TrueNat Lab is being increased by providing additional machines.

At present, there are 118,636 active cases of Covid in the state. Most patients are in Raipur, Durg, Rajnandgaon, Balodabazar, Bilaspur, Mahasamund, Korba and Bemetara districts.

So far, 486,244 cases of corona have been identified, out of which 362,301 patients are now healthy. The rest are under

treatment. Six dedicated Covid Hospitals and 137 Covid Care Centers have been set up in the state. Dedicated Covid Hospitals have come up in every district.

Considering the situation, continuous work is on to increase the number of beds with medical facility and oxygen. Fourteen new oxygen generation plants have been set up in the state.

Home isolation has been provided to more than 2.5 lakh people in the state, out of which 90 percent have become healthy. Currently, an average of 2.13 lakh men and women are being vaccinated every day.

Remdesivir not a remedy for Covid-19: Doctor

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

A leading doctor in Chhattisgarh on Friday urged people not to panic over the non-availability of Remdesivir injection, saying although a few have benefited there is no guarantee that it helps beat Covid-19.

In a statement, Dr O.P. Sundarani of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar Memorial Hospital here said not every Covid patient needed the injection.

It has been found that even after taking a shot, patients have died.

Although the injection was found effective to a few patients, it was not found effective in the case of many, the doctor said.

Meanwhile, the state's Covid caseload rose to



over 5 lakhs on Thursday. With 135 more deaths, the death toll mounted to 5,442. Chhattisgarh has witnessed over 10,000 daily cases in the last 10 days. The number of active cases crossed the

one lakh mark although around 4 lakh patients have recovered.

The worst-hit districts are Raipur and Durg. The total count of infection in Raipur has spiked the one lakh mark.

Now lockdown in Dantewada



STAFF REPORTER ■ DANTEWADA

Amid a sharp rise in corona cases and fatalities, a lockdown was declared on Friday in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district. It will begin at 6 am on April 18 and end at the midnight of April 27.

The district's boundary will be sealed and only essential services will be allowed during the lockdown, Collector Deepak Soni said in an order.

Medical shops and petrol pumps will function with condi-

tional restrictions and only movement of medical emergencies will be allowed.

Petrol pumps will be open only for ambulances, ATM vans, medical vehicles, media personnel and press related vehicles as well as vehicles from other states.

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

All shops, vegetable vendors, provision stores, liquor shops, commercial and departmental

zones, temples and tourism sites will be shut.

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

Dantewada is among 22 districts where lockdown has been imposed amid a surge in Covid-19 cases and fatalities in the state.

On Thursday, 15,256 people detected Corona positive in Chhattisgarh and 105 patients died.

Partial relief in lockdown in Korea

STAFF REPORTER ■ KOREA

The administration in Chhattisgarh's Korea district on Friday granted conditional permission for businesses and shops to reopen in a departure from the earlier strict lockdown announced to battle Covid-19.

Korea is among 21 districts in the state where lockdown has been imposed amid a surge in Corona cases and deaths.

The Korea lockdown was imposed from April

11 and will end on April 19.

Government fair price shops, vegetable vendors, fruit shops, grocers, ration shops, flour mills and milk parlors can now open from 6.00 am to 10.00 am, an official communication said.

Post offices and banks will open from 10.00 am to 2.00 pm but only four persons can enter at any given time.

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



Jai Stambh Chowk, Raipur's busiest road in normal days, wears a deserted look on Friday as the state government has imposed a 10-day lockdown to contain unprecedented surge in Covid cases.

Centre lauds C'garh students' innovative ideas

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Union Ministry of Science and Technology had lauded the efforts of Chhattisgarh students for sending 55,565 nominations for MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspirations and Knowledge) awards under the INSPIRE scheme.

Despite the Covid-19 crisis, Chhattisgarh ranked third in the country in the number of nominations. In an appreciation letter to the Principal Secretary (School Education), Dr Alok Shukla, the Secretary in the Ministry of Science and Technology, Ashutosh Sharma, said 3,391 nominations have been selected for MANAK awards of Rs 10,000 to each student. The 'Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (INSPIRE) scheme is one of the flagship programmes of the Department of Science & Technology (DST). The awards aim to motivate students in the age group of 10-15 and studying in Classes 6 to 10. The objective is to target one million original ideas and innovations rooted in science and societal applications to foster a culture of creativity and innovative thinking.



Spat between Baghel, Raman over pandemic

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Friday made a scathing attack on his predecessor Raman Singh and alleged that he and the BJP are spreading lies over the grim Covid-19 pandemic in the state.

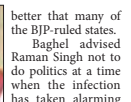
The war of words erupted between Baghel and Raman Singh after the latter accused the Chief Minister of failing to take steps to battle Covid and instead being bogged down by the Assam elections. Baghel has hosted Assam leaders



who were seen consuming alcohol in a government rest house in Bastar.

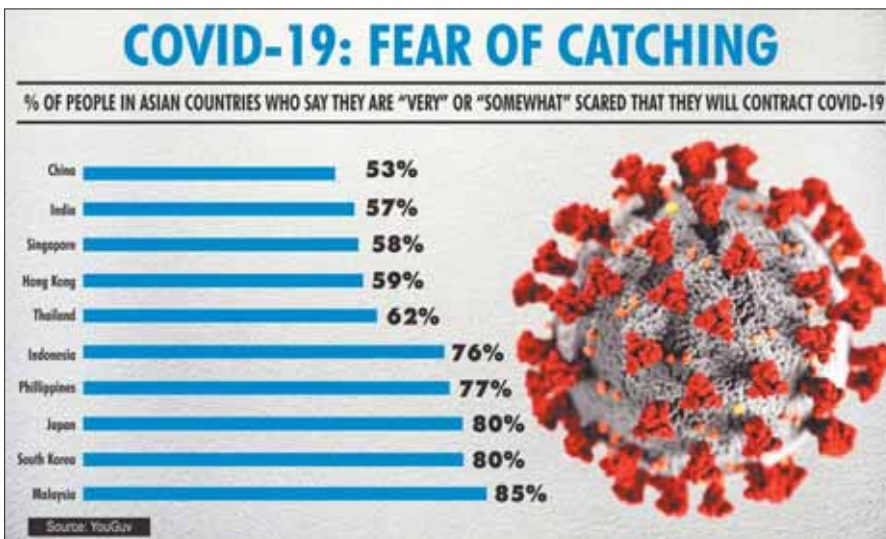
Countering it, Baghel said it was untrue that the condition of the pandemic was uncontrollable in the state.

"Raman must cite figures and then say anything about the condition of the pandemic in the state", he said, adding that the situation in Chhattisgarh was much



better than many of the BJP-ruled states. Baghel advised Raman Singh not to do politics at a time when the infection has taken alarming proportions.

He said all possible steps were taken to contain the virus. The state is far ahead in testing and the vaccination drive in the entire country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to observe a 'Tika Utsav' and said the people had stopped listening to Modi and the 'Utsav' was a complete failure.



No shortage of oxygen for patients: Govt

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh government said Friday that there is no shortage of oxygen to treat patients suffering from corona infection and other serious diseases and denied that this had led to deaths.

As on April 15, 386.92 tonnes of oxygen are being produced and only 110.30 tonnes of oxygen are needed per day for 5,898 patients on oxygen support, a press release said. Depending on the demand, oxygen is continuously supplied to government and private hospitals in the state. Covid-19 patients are dying due to severe infection, the release said, describing as 'absolutely misleading' reports in a section of the media that lack of oxygen was responsible for the fatalities. The Health Department said that oxygen consumption has increased in the state since March 14 due to a steady rise in the number of patients on oxygen support. As of March 14, only 197 patients on oxygen support required 3.68 tonnes of oxygen. This soared to 110.30 tonnes as on April 15.

Tamboli named nodal officer

The Chhattisgarh government on Friday appointed IAS officer Dr Tamboli Aayraj Fakir Bhai as the nodal officer to coordinate the supply of oxygen cylinders for Covid-19 patients. Dr Tamboli, apart from his present charge, will coordinate the supply of oxygen cylinders to smoothen their delivery to corona patients across the state, an official press release said. At present, he is the Commissioner in the Chhattisgarh Housing Board as well as CEO of the Raipur Development Authority and CEO of Atal Nagar Development Authority.

Govt seeks 285 ventilators

The Chhattisgarh government has told the Centre to provide 285 ventilators at the earliest in view of the Covid-19 pandemic in the state, it was announced on Friday.

On April 12, the Additional Chief Secretary (Health), Renu G. Pillay, wrote to the Secretary of the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare making the demand, a press release said. Pillay said Chhattisgarh got 230 ventilators from the Centre last year. The state is taking appropriate steps for the convenience of oxygen supported beds and Intensive Care Units in all districts.

BJP says Mamata planned riots over firing, releases audio tape

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Even as Mamata Banerjee continued to attack Prime Minister Narendra Modi for importing corona in Bengal in his bid to win elections, the BJP on Friday released an audio-tape showing a conversation between the State Chief Minister and Cooch Behar district Trinamool Congress president Pratha Pratim Roy where she was allegedly instructing him to make preparations for taking out a rally with the corpse of people killed in Sitalkuchi police firing last Saturday.

This, BJP leadership claimed was planned by the Chief Minister to stoke communal riots in order to polarise the Muslim voters. A time-by-banning of politicians — including the Chief Minister — by the Election Commission of India from entering Cooch Behar till last Tuesday however till foiled her "criminal designs to fan riots in order

to win elections." BJP leader Amit Malavika said.

Four persons were killed when the CPM opened fired after an alleged crowd of 300-350 men tried to attack the booth number 126 during the fourth phase of polling.

In the purported audio-tape featuring Banerjee and Roy who is also the TMC candidate from Sitalkuchi the Chief Minister also directed him to make arrangements for lodging an FIR against those who opened fire and implicating in that document the district SP and the local Circle Inspector, the BJP leader said adding Roy was asked get the FIR drawn by professional so as to frame not only the central forces but also the district SP and the local circle inspector.

At a time when she should have stood with the law-enforcing agencies the Chief Minister was seen standing by the law-breakers, Malavika said. "Imagine had this rally been allowed to take place

what would have been the situation of Bengal what kind of communal disturbance it would have ignited," he said.

"This betrays the criminal mindset of the Chief Minister who has no problem with playing politics with the death of people... she was trying to reap political dividends with dead bodies," Malavika said adding how Banerjee had been trying to instigate people saying the BJP would invoke National Population Register to victimise the Muslims in the name of pushing out alleged infiltrators.

"There is no plans of brining NPR now and neither there is any proposal of raising detention camps," Malavika said claiming how the Chief Minister has been spreading false stories in the election rallies to create a mass panic and reap political dividends. "This she is doing as a last resort because she knows that she is going out of power."

Clubbing last 3 phase polls into 1 against democratic spirits: BJP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Opposing Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's suggestions that the 8-phase elections be effectively reduced to six phases so to say, the BJP on Friday said it was against clubbing the last three phases of elections into a single-day polling saying the exercise would go against democratic spirit putting the voters and candidates into a position of disadvantage.

Bengal goes to the fifth phase of polling on April 17 that is Saturday. Senior BJP leader and its candidate from Rakeshwar seat in Houghly Swapna Dasgupta, said after emerging from the all-party meeting called by the Election Commission of India "we have said our party will abide by all protocols put in place by the Election Commission, and urged that no steps be taken that disallow the franchise holding in the next phase from those who have already exercised their franchise. We have not said anything about clubbing (of phases)... we feel that the elections will be held in eight phases."

Fifth phase of polling today

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Considering the firing deaths in the fourth phase of Assembly elections in Bengal last Saturday the Election Commission of India have made massive arrangements for the fifth phase which would be held on Saturday.

More than a crore voters of 45 Assembly constituencies would exercise their franchise deciding the fate of 342 candidates on when 45 seats would go to polls in the fifth phase.

According to sources the ECI would deploy about 853 companies of central forces to ensure free and fair voting. Voting will be held at 1,789 polling stations in 16 seats in North 24 Parganas, eight each in Bardhaman East and Nadia, seven in Jalpaiguri, five in Darjeeling and one in Kalimpong district.

Rajya Sabha election: CPM fields John Brittas

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

John Brittas, the ideological consultant to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, has been nominated as the CPI(M) representative to the Rajya Sabha from Kerala. Brittas, who is presently the managing director and chief executive officer of the CPI(M)-owned Kairali TV channel was one of the close advisors to Pinarayi Vijayan along with Raman Srivastava, the former director general of Kerala Police.

The CPI(M) has also nominated V Sivasankar, a former president of the party's student wing SFI as its second nominee. Based on the strength of the party in the current legislature, the CPI(M) can win two seats out of the three at stake. The CPI(M) has nominated P V Abdul Wahab as its candidate for the April 30 election.

The names of Brittas and Shivadas were announced after

the State Committee of the party met on Friday at the proposing AKG Centre at Thiruvananthapuram. A release issued by the party head quarters after the meeting claimed that the CPI(M)-led LDF would win 80 to 100 seats in the just concluded assembly election to Kerala. "Kerala will see for the first time the demolition of the anti-government feeling and the ruling party coming back to power with more seats," said the release.

The nomination of Brittas is being seen as the CPI(M)'s move to cobble up a grand alliance before the 2024 Lok Sabha election which the party hopes to win comfortably based on the recent farm agitation and other people movements headed by the party. "Brittas enjoys considerable clout with many opposition politicians in New Delhi, his second home turf from where he controlled Deshabhimani, the CPI(M)'s official mouth piece.

BMC to use 175 Jaslok Hospital beds for Covid patients, 52 for non-Covid critical patients

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Taking cognisance of the fact that as many as 30 critical patients were undergoing cancer treatment and another 22 critical patients were being treated for cardiac/nephro ailments, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Friday made some changes in its earlier decision to convert Mumbai's famed Jaslok Hospital in south Mumbai into a dedicated Covid-19 hospital.

A day after it announced its decision to convert Jaslok Hospital into a dedicated Covid-19 hospital, the BMC amended its earlier move and decided not to convert the private medical facility into a fully dedicated Covid-19 hospital, saying that it did "not want to risk the lives of these 52 critical non-Covid patients, presently admitted in Jaslok hospital."

In a revised order issued on Friday, the BMC said that it had conveyed its Thursday's decision to the Jaslok Hospital management. "However, it has been brought to the notice of MCGM by the said management that presently 30 critical patients undergoing cancer treatment and another 22 critical patients undergoing cardiac/nephro treatment are already admitted in the hospital and considering their medical condition, shifting them to other hospital at this juncture may prove fatal," Mumbai Municipal Commissioner I S Chahal said in his revised order.

"Hence, it is imperative on part of MCGM not to risk the lives of these 52 critical non-Covid patients, presently admitted in Jaslok hospital. Presently, 227 activated beds exist in Jaslok hospital," Chahal said.

Making amendments in his earlier order, Chahal said "Of the total 227 beds in Jaslok Hospital, 175 beds will function as COVID beds. Of these 175 COVID beds, 29 will be ICU beds."

Chahal said that the remaining 52 beds catering to above mentioned critical patients shall continue to be non-COVID beds. "Rest of the conditions in our earlier will remain unchanged," he said. In effect, the BMC will utilise 175 out of 227 beds to treat Covid-19 patients.

Meanwhile, the BMC has instructed the hospital management to discharge all the non-cancer and cardiac-nephro patients undergoing treatment in speciality wards, to shift all such patients requiring non-Covid tertiary care to nearby tertiary hospitals in 48 hours and to discharge all patients admitted for elective treatments by postponing their surgeries.

The BMC has also asked the Jaslok Hospital management to augment suspected/holding area for suspected Covid-19 cases, if required and follow all protocols and guidelines laid down for dedicated Covid hospitals as earlier.

NCB busts gang cultivating cannabis in Thane flat

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a major breakthrough in a sensational case involving international ramifications, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has smashed a gang engaged in the cultivation of cannabis inside a two bedroom Hall-Kitchen (BHK) flat at Dombivli in neighbouring Thane district.

Announcing the busting of the cannabis growing gang that would produce seeds from Netherlands and sell the drugs in cash and crypto currency like Bitcoins, NCB's zonal director Samer Wankhede said here on Friday: "This is indeed a big case. We are investigating the entire network that was involved in cultivation of Cannabis by hydroponic technique."

Hydroponics is an effective method for growing plants that places the plants in a water solution that's rich in nutrients. Instead of using soil to grow the plants, the roots of the plants come into direct contact with the nutrient-rich solution.

Acting on intelligence inputs, the NCB carried out the raids at a 2 BHK flat at Dombivli's Palava City, where the investigators found Cannabis being cultivated.

The NCB identified the two arrested persons as Javed Jahangir Sheikh and Arshad Khatri. "We are trying to find out their antecedents and links," Wankhede said. Along with this, two other special operations have also been conducted, in which more than one thousand criminals have been arrested within 15 days. On an average, 50 people are being interrogated every day.

The 'Jail Bhari Andolan' was started by the new SSP Kalanidhi Naithani. SSP took over the district on 27 March. Three days later, on March 30, Operation Awara started. It was a screw up on those who drink on the road. Under this, action has been taken against 987 people. After this, the operation, 'unarmed' in the district started on April 2. It tightened up those people who are illegally possessing weapons. So far, reports have been sent to the DM to suspend the actual license of 120 people in this operation. After this, Operation Prahar was started from 10 April. Under this, the wanted and the warrants were attacked. In five days, 177 miscreants have been arrested. In the 10 days before April 10, about a hundred criminals were caught.

"The two were procuring seeds from Amsterdam in the Netherlands through the dark web. The yield was sold to medium size peddlers of Mumbai and Pune at the rate of 2,500 per gram for retail," Wankhede said.

Aligarh cops start jail bhari movement

PRADIP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH

Aligarh Police has started 'Jail Bhari Andolan' with Operation Prahar to crack down on criminals. Along with this, two other special operations have also been conducted, in which more than one thousand criminals have been arrested within 15 days. On an average, 50 people are being interrogated every day.

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Tamil Nadu's knitwear sector hit hard amid Covid surge

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

When Europe gets cold Tamil Nadu sneezes. The adage has been proved again as countries like Germany, France and Britain announced lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic leaving nearly one thousand exporters in Tirupur gasping for breath.

Despite the Centre's announcements about various financial packages as part of the Aatmanirbhar schemes for the resuscitation of the gloomy industrial sector in the State, the knitwear exporters are yet to come out of the abyss to which they have fallen since the breaking out of the pandemic all over the world. The textile materials manufactured in Tirupur stand out in the global market because of quality and craftsmanship. But that has not been successful in reviving the cash liquidity faced by the European end users of Tirupur's knitwear products, according to Raja M Shanmugham, president, Tirupur Exporters' Association (TEA).

Shanmugham, a real Raja of the knitwear industry in Tirupur, said the industry could be turned for the better by a few measures which could be ordered by Nirmala Sitharaman, the country's finance minister. "The second lockdown promulgated in major countries like Germany, France and UK from November, has

lead us, mainly MSMEs into a liquidity crisis. In addition to this we are facing another shock in the form of increasing price of yarn, our important raw material due to business dynamics. These factors have eroded the competitiveness of the knitwear industry," Shanmugham, known for his fighting spirit, told The Pioneer with uncertainty written all over his face.

He said measures like Interest Equalisation Scheme which was announced for a brief period of three months, if extended to a period of two years would help in soothing the pain being suffered by the industry. "This will help us to tide over the financial crunch we are facing due to lockdown and high yarn prices and also in sustaining the global competitiveness of Brand Tirupur," said the TEA president.

The TEA in a memorandum to the minister has pointed out that the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products (RODTEP) announced in January 2021 to replace the ROSCTI (Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies) has not been operationalised which has put the exporters and MSMEs between deep sea and devil.

"The MSMEs are not receiving the reimbursement of the embedded taxes including electricity tax, Mandi tax, GST on petro-products. The non-disbursement of RODTEP is causing severe liquidity crisis," said the TEA plea.

Maha logs 63,729 new cases

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra breached another grim Covid-19 landmark on Friday, as it recorded a staggering 63,729 infections thus crossing a total of 37 lakh infections, even as alarming 398 more people succumbed to the pandemic in various parts of the state.

A day after the pandemic claimed 349 lives and left 61,695 more infected in the state, the daily tally of infections rose by 2034 while the daily Covid-19 went up 49.

With 63,729 fresh cases, the total infections climbed from 36,39,855 to 36,03,584. Similarly, with 398 new deaths, the total Covid-19 toll rose from 59,153 to 59,551.

As 45,335 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 39,04,391. The recovery rate in the state for the first time in several days dropped from 81.3 per cent to 81.2 per cent.

The number of 'active cases' total cases in the state rose from 6,20,060 to 6,38,034. The fatality rate in the state dropped from 1.63 per cent to 1.61 per cent.

With 53 fresh deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Mumbai rose from 12,197 to 12,250, while the infected cases went up by 8803 to trigger a jump in the infections from 5,53,404 to 5,62,207.

While Pune accounted for a maximum 1,16,665 'active cases' in the state, Mumbai stood second with 84,378 active cases, followed

by Thane (84,038), Nagpur (71,539), Nashik (49,925), Aurangabad (13,630), Ahmednagar (10,049), Nanded (13,134), Bhandara (13,987), Jalgaon (11,570), Latur (14,033), Solapur (11,051), Satara (10,551), Parbhani (10,336), Beed (7,922), Nandurbar (7,330), Chandrapur (10,144) and Gonda (7,336).

3 MVA Mins indicate fresh curbs

Mumbai: With the continued surge in the Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra, three Ministers in the MVA Government on Friday indicated that the State Government might enforce more stringent restrictions to break the chain of fast spreading infections.

Talking separately to media persons, State Home Minister Dilip Walse-Patil, public health and family welfare minister Rajesh Tope and relief and rehabilitation minister Vijay Wadetiwar said that the state government was looking at ways to make the Covid-19 protocols more stringent in view of the increasing number of infections and deaths across the state.

"If people do not cooperate with the government in implementing the Covid-19 norms, we may have to strengthen the restrictions," Walse-Patil said. Wadetiwar said that to save the lives of people the Government might have to announce new curbs. "The state may announce curbs on supply of fuel (petrol and diesel)... people are still using local trains even though they are not in essential services," he said.

10,031 new cases in Kerala, 8,449 in TN

KOCHI/CHENNAI: Kerala, once claimed as inaccessible to the pandemic by political masters, tested 10,031 new Covid-19 patients in the 12 hours that ended on Friday PM on Friday. The State also registered 8,449 deaths and a Test Positivity Ratio of 14.8 which has accorded the status of Covid-19 epicenter to Kerala, according to a Department of Health physician in Ernakulam.

During our raid on the Thane flat, we found a cannabis cultivation setup, PH regulators, plant nutrients, clay pebbles, water pumps, air circulation systems, CO2 gas cylinders, photosynthesis lighting systems," Wankhede said. The cannabis cultivation was being done clandestinely in the flat owned by one Rakesh Khan. Rakesh Khan is suspected to be financing the illegal cannabis cultivation. While Narshad is an expert in hydroponic cultivation, Javed used to manage distribution of harvest.

"The two were procuring seeds from Amsterdam in the Netherlands through the dark web. The yield was sold to medium size peddlers of Mumbai and Pune at the rate of 2,500 per gram for retail," Wankhede said.

Be transparent, honest on Covid situation: Guj HC to Govt

Gandhinagar: The Gujarat High Court, in its order on the suo moto PIL it filed regarding the current upsurge in the Covid situation, has asked the State Government to reach to the public in an honest and transparent manner so as to tackle the crisis the state is facing.

A division bench of Chief Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Bhargav D. Karia, which had held a hearing on the Covid situation with Advocate General Kamal Trivedi appearing on behalf of the state government, was dissatisfied with the 'rosy picture' painted by the government as the prevailing situation was opposite its claims.

The high court, in its order, ordered the state government to increase the existing RTI-PCR results to be made public. The court also ordered the state government to ensure the reduction of time to get the reports. It also ordered that accurate reporting of the RTI-PCR results to be made public.

"The state should not feel shy of publishing the correct data," the court said. Regarding the public perception about remedial injections being a miracle drug and Trivedi's explanation that the drug was over-prescribed, the court ordered that remedial's administration and its dependency should be explained and communicated to the public through various print, electronic and social media, so that the deficit and misuse by black marketers stop.

The court also ordered the state government control the online portal providing details of availability of beds and, that instead of the data being updated twice a day, the data and the display of availability of beds should be made real time. The government was also told to report to the court about the status of availability of oxygen in the state with regards to the demand.

The court order also advised the state government to make efforts to find out the actual number of Covid cases so as to remove the general perception in the public that state provided data was not accurate.

"Make necessary arrangements to be made by the responsible officer with regard to the number of positive patients, the number of deaths due to Covid, the number of deaths due to Covid with comorbidity, to restore faith and trust in the public," the court said.

"The state should come up publicly in a transparent and fair manner with regards to availability and modalities of the required amenities, medical and related infrastructure for treatment of the patients, who require facilities of Covid-19 hospitalisation, with oxygen, ventilators, medicines etc."

"In order to achieve the objectives of removing the public perception and restoring the faith, the state needs to have honest and transparent dialogue with the public which should be communicated with all, through print, electronic and social media," it added.

"The state has nothing to gain by hiding the real picture and hence, suppression and concealment of accurate data would generate more serious problems, including fear, loss of trust, panic in the public. Coming out in a transparent and honest manner will also create awareness about the grave situation prevailing in the current times, to persuade the public to strictly abide by the Standard Operating Protocol regarding Covid."

The court, noting the request from the Indian Medical Association's Gujarat branch wishing to participate, said that it was free to do so as it scheduled the next hearing for April 20.

IANS

Released by Maoists, CRPF commando gets heroic welcome on return

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

CRPF CoBRA Commando Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, abducted and later released by the Maoist in Bijapur of Chhattisgarh last week, received a hero's welcome on his arrival here in Jammu on Friday.

Accompanied by social workers who played a key role towards ensuring his safe release from the custody of Maoists on April 8, Manhas was welcomed here where his five year daughter received him along with her mother and cheerful relatives amid patriotic chants hailing 'Mother India'.

From the airport Manhas was escorted in a cavalcade to a famous resort where he was accorded a red carpet welcome too. He was warmly hugged by his family members and close friends at the main entrance of the resort. His mother and wife along with hundreds of close relatives and well



wishers garlanded him and performed special prayers before escorting him inside the hall.

"I am very happy today. I hugged my father and kissed him when he took me in his arms after landing at the Jammu airport," the five year old daughter told reporters wearing a big smile on her face.

Meenu Chib, wife of Rakeshwar Singh Manhas was jubilant after meeting her husband. "I am very happy. All our prayers were answered and every one in the government at all levels played their role at the centre and state level to ensure safe release

of my husband." "I also thank CRPF officials and the entire media fraternity for all their support and help" she added.

Rakeshwar Singh in his brief interaction told large gathering of reporters, "I am feeling happy in the company of my family." He said all the jawans who were part of the operation in Bijapur fought bravely before attaining martyrdom. He said, "when I was in their captivity I had no clue what was happening as I had no tools of communication available with me. He once again thanked all those social activists and local media persons from Chhattisgarh who ensured his safe return."

Uncle of Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, on behalf of the family made a brief statement thanking all those involved and responsible for ensuring safe return of the CRPF commando. The family also paid rich tributes in the memory of CRPF jawans martyred in the Maoist attack in Bijapur area of Chhattisgarh.



Visitors stand outside the closed gate of Victoria Memorial, amid rise in coronavirus cases across the country, in Kolkata on Friday

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Bumpy road ahead

To avoid having a comatose economy now, we must bear the cross of our earlier negligence

India is hunkering down again to battle the second and more virulent wave of the Coronavirus outbreak. It would have been much better for us had we sincerely stuck to the COVID-19 protocols when the numbers were down and, who knows, we might have been rid of this pesky virus by now! While the average citizen decided that it was "okay" to return to the crowded restaurants, malls, airports and bus and railway stations without masks or social distancing, our short-sighted politicians postponed the all-important Board exams but considered it imperative to hold political rallies and road shows brimming with nonchalant people ahead of the Assembly elections, because their future depended on it. The religious leaders found it exigent



for us to wash away our sins by bathing in the millions in the holy Ganga. Now, here's the result of our collective endeavours: The Coronavirus cases across the country hit a record 2,17,353 fresh infections in the last 24 hours, the eighth record daily increase in the last nine days. In the same period, 1,185 people lost their lives due to the viral disease. The numbers coming out of the Health Ministry say that India registered a steady increase in the number of active Corona cases for the 36th day in a row. Now, we are scrambling to control the damage. The Home Ministry has asked its officers up to the level of Under-Secretary to avail the WFH

option while the Deputy Secretary and above-ranking officials have been asked to attend office regularly with the option to stagger timings between 9 AM and 10 AM.

Various States, including the Capital, have also come up with local-level restrictions — ranging from shutting of malls, gyms, swimming pools and auditoriums, prohibiting dining at restaurants, besides imposing a weekend lockdown and night curfew. The Government has assured the citizenry that the "test, trace, treat" and vaccination drive will continue unabated and that the national drug controller will take just three days to process applications of the foreign-made vaccines once they've been approved for emergency use in India. One can only hope that this time around, the Government grits its teeth and stands by the Prime Minister's words that "we must learn to live with the virus". No matter how many restrictions are placed on recreation and how many weekends are spent imprisoned indoors, the nation's economy must not be shut down again. The first wave gave us many lessons on how to identify hotspots, impose local lockdowns and create containment zones in order to keep the wheels of the industry churning. We have to ensure that our march towards a self-reliant, New India continues; our ailing economy that was just beginning to revive cannot be delivered another body blow in the form of a hard lockdown. Else, we risk having a comatose economy in our hands. So, the nation would do well to gird up its loins and prepare for a bumpy road ahead, but the wheels of the economy cannot stop, no matter what.

PICTALK



Smoke billows from a forest fire at the Kelli area in Shimla

PTI

Good omen

It's time for the CJI's wish for a woman judge to head the nation's top court to come true

Chief Justice of India SA Bobde deserves nothing less than the nation's applause and compliments for recently stating unequivocally that the time has come when a woman should head the top court. Hinting that the apex court was already moving along the right path on the issue, he underscored that there was "no need for a change of attitude" of the Collegium to ensure greater representation of women in the judiciary.



Hearing a plea by a women lawyers' body seeking consideration of the "meritorious" lot among them for appointment as judges in the High Courts, a Bench comprising Chief Justice Bobde and Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Surya Kant said: "Why only higher judiciary? We think the time has come when a woman should be the Chief Justice of India." At this juncture, it would be pertinent to mention that currently there are only 81 female judges in the 25 High Courts across the country against 1,078 male judges. Among them, the Madras High Court tops the list with 13 female judges, followed by Punjab and Haryana with 11, and the Delhi and Bombay High Courts have eight women judges each.

Interestingly, while the Supreme Court's emphasis on gender issues is to be lauded, it would truly have credibility and value if its own actions were consistent on this subject. Consider this: There is only one female judge among the 34 positions that currently constitute the Supreme Court. With Justice Indu Malhotra's retirement last month, the Collegium is considering a few women judges for elevation. The nation's top court has had only eight women judges since it came into existence on January 26, 1950. The first one, Fatima Bevi, made it to the elite club only as late as in October 1989. Not a single woman judge has figured in the list of 48 CJIs since its inception. It would perhaps not be out of the context here to mention that the Supreme Court had recently pointed to the delay in giving women permanent commission in the military, blaming it on the "systemic bias" within the Ministry of Defence. While there certainly seems to be some truth in what it said, it is a complicated issue, especially the impact of women in combat roles. That said, in either case, there's no denying that women are up to performing any professional job with panache while balancing with finesse their roles as mother, daughter, sister, wife and homemaker.

India's flaming forests play havoc



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Natural causes and human intervention are to blame for the rising number of conflagrations not only in India, but the world over

The surge of forest fires in Uttarakhand once again underlines the growing incidence of the phenomenon in India. There has been a series of these this year in Himachal Pradesh, the Nagaland-Manipur border, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. According to the *India State of Forest Report 2019* (ISFR) — the latest in the line of such reports — released by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), Dehradun, over 30,000 forest fires were reported in the country in 2019. The report identified nearly 21.67 per cent (7,12,249 sq km) of the country's land area as forested. Another 2.89 per cent (95,027 sq km) was under tree cover.

The report identified 2,77,758 forest fire points across the country, and stated that about 21.40 per cent of India's forests are prone to fires. Of this, 3.89 per cent belonged to the category of extremely fire-prone, 6.01 per cent very highly fire-prone and 11.50 per cent highly fire-prone.

The forests in Assam, Mizoram and Tripura are "extremely prone" to conflagrations. According to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) annual report for 2020-21, the States with large forest areas and falling under the "very highly fire-prone" category — including Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Maharashtra, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh — were turning into "extremely fire-prone" hotspots; so were regions like western Maharashtra, southern Chhattisgarh and areas of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, along with central Odisha. Areas under the "highly prone" and "moderately prone" categories make up about 26.2 per cent of the total forest cover — a staggering 1,72,374 sq km.

A State prone to forest fires is Haryana which suffered at least 540 of these from 2016 to 2020. Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh are witness to the most frequent forest fires annually. According to the National Forest Inventory under the MoEFCC, the fires severely affect almost 10



per cent of the country's forest area while mildly affecting about 54 per cent, which makes about two-third of India's forests vulnerable to fires.

The question is: Why is it so? Lightning is the most important natural cause. Another is the spontaneous combustion of dried-up leaves and sticks. The one that has been an increasingly potent factor, and is set to become even more so, is global warming. It dries up the leaves and shrubbery on the ground, making them highly inflammable. It also dries up the soil. Thus, the lack of soil moisture as a result of rainfall deficiency during monsoons — less than 18 per cent and 20 per cent in 2019 and 2020, respectively — has been an important factor in this year's Uttarakhand fires. In fact, it has been a cause not only in many other parts of India but the entire world — the blazes bedevilling Australia, California in the US and the Amazon rainforests in Brazil are examples.

Human activity, however, is responsible for the overwhelming majority of forest fires the world over. In India, these blazes are mainly caused by the slash-and-burn method of shifting agriculture, known

as *jhum* in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Assam, where it is practised over about 15,000 sq km of forest land. The blazes are also set off to clear the ground for mining, timber felling and the construction of human settlements and industrial units, besides warding off the wild animals. People burn dry leaves and shrubbery on forest grounds, believing that it would lead to the sprouting of new and healthier grass. Poachers light fires on three sides to corner fleeing wild animals in one area as their concentrated presence helps killing. People visiting forests are often careless and leave behind lighted butts of cigarettes or *bidis*, besides inflammable material. Things are made worse by the fact that it is difficult to extinguish forest fires. The absence of roads prevents fire tenders from reaching the sites and high winds carry the sparks to new areas. Helicopters are pressed into service — as in Uttarakhand recently where two Indian Air Force helicopters, each with a 5,000-litre water tank, were deployed. There are, however, limits to the number of helicopters that can be used

and the availability of large lakes or rivers from which these can draw water.

Forest fires wreak havoc in India every year. They destroy forests, cause pollution, turn streams dry or adversely affect their water quality, damage soil nutrients and increase the risk of soil erosion. They kill wildlife and insects, including endangered species, and destroy their habitats, damage national parks and sanctuaries, driving the wild animals like tigers, leopards and elephants towards human settlements, thus aggravating the human-animal conflict. And, of course, they kill humans and destroy their property.

The question is: What is to be done? Forest fires are as old as forests and will continue to occur as long as forests exist. One, however, can limit their incidence by firmly dealing with the timber, builder and mining mafia, and the poachers, and simultaneously enlightening people not to carelessly leave incendiary material in forests. The Central and State Governments will have to launch sustained campaigns to this end. The consequences of not doing so will be severe.

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NEGLECTANCE RESPONSIBLE FOR SITUATION

Sir — Instead of getting stunned by the rising number of COVID cases in the country, we must admit the fact that we are not moving towards a second wave but are actually in its grip. As the demand for Remdesivir surges, the Centre has fast-tracked applications from companies to manufacture the critical anti-viral drug in order to ensure its smooth availability. Night curfews and partial lockdowns are being imposed in many parts of the country as a measure to control the deadly virus. Amid the rising cases, the Centre has announced the cancellation of the CBSE Board exams for Class 10 and has deferred Class 12 exams.

On the other hand, lakhs of devotees have been taking a holy dip in the Ganga on the occasion of the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar, flouting the COVID norms. It is however ironic that while the Government has no compunction about cancelling the Board examinations, elections in the country are continuing as if nothing has happened. These fears have been magnified all the more with the dismal disregard shown by various State Governments to clamping down on mass public events and gatherings. While a proactive approach to control and manage the crowds when it comes to stonewalling the widely contagious virus, is a remedy to the problem, the complete disregard shown towards the basic safety precautions is indeed perplexing!

Pach Menon | Goa

TROOP WITHDRAWAL WILL CREATE VACUUM

Sir — The US decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan is not good at the present moment as the situation on the ground is far from satisfactory. The Taliban is still controlling parts of Afghanistan and there is considerable influence of Pakistan and support from China, too. The chances of disintegration of Afghanistan are quite high. The withdrawal of the US troops might create a vacuum which, if acquired by the disruptive forces, will push the country into turmoil. President Joe Biden has said the US troops will be withdrawn from

Politicisation of vaccines



Politics over the anti-Coronavirus vaccine started the day Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced free jabs to the people of Bihar in the run-up to the Assembly elections in October-November last year. The vaccine policy suffered from the play of politics and one-upmanship. Besides, appalling naivety in assessing the demand during the second wave, differing norms for affording authorisation for use, inertia in augmenting in-house capacity, exports as a policy and imports in fetters together impacted the availability of vaccines in the country. After the

Afghanistan beginning May 1 and the process will be completed by September 11. For his part, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said he spoke to Biden and that his country respects the US decision.

Maybe the US troops might be shifted to some other regions of the world. The US is also facing domestic problems and is ravaged by the COVID pandemic. Washington needs a war to run its economy. The weapons industry needs insecurity among the countries to sell weapons and make profits. In my opinion, the US troops will be shifted to another war. Let's wait and watch till the withdrawal in September.

Sunil Pradhan | Odisha

BAN SUPER-SPREADER EVENTS

Sir — It refers to the editorial 'Matters of faith' (April 16). At a time when the Government has done away with bridging trials for foreign-made vaccines for

authorisation of the Oxford-assisted Covishield and the indigenously-developed Covaxin for emergency use, the authorities soft-pedalled on giving authorisation and import/production licence(s) to other popular vaccine candidates in the world. According to the *Lancet*, Russia's vaccine Sputnik V had the efficacy of 91.6 per cent. While the chronic shortage was being felt, the Government allowed the exports to showcase India as a powerhouse of vaccines. To draw an analogy, the US has accumulated stocks which could vaccinate its entire population.

In fact, the possibility of a furious second wave was overlooked. India's daily COVID count has crossed 2 lakh now. This surge must be viewed against the overloaded hospitals, shortage in oxygen supply, inadequacy in life-saving ventilators and shortfalls in vaccines and medicines. There is an urgent need to reassess the situation carefully and honestly to mount a multipronged action to crush the climbing curve and augment treatment facilities.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

COVID-19 to facilitate acceleration in vaccination, it should seriously think about banning religious events like the Kumbh Mela which has become a super-spreader. In just five days, 1,701 people have tested positive for COVID-19 in the Kumbh Mela area. The Uttarakhand Police was unable to impose the standard operating procedures (SOPs) on the seers of *akhadas* and the ash-smearers acetics crowding the Har Ki Pauri on the two *shahi snans* because of time constraints. Now Niranjani *Akhada*, one of the 13 *akhadas* of seers participating in the Kumbh, has decided to return from the event in the wake of the deteriorating COVID-19 situation. But it is too late as the damage has already been done.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

Being a tourist State, if we impose night curfew, it will create a spin-off effect. People should remain alert. We have issued an advisory. We are continuing to create awareness.

Goa Chief Minister
— Pramod Sawant

If we were to lift the border restrictions, you would see these cases increase and Australians would have to become used to dealing with 1,000 cases or more a week.

Australian Prime Minister
— Scott Morrison

I would love to sing in films but I am going to be a part of, as well as for others, as a playback singer.

Actor
— Adarsh Gaurav

He is not the MS Dhoni which he used to be probably four or five years back, where he could just come in and start taking on the bowlers from the world go.

Former cricketer
— Gautam Gambhir

There is no shortage of Remdesivir drug but if anyone is trying to misuse the pandemic situation by black-marketing, then all those will be punished severely.

Karnataka Home Minister
— Basavaraj Bommai



FIRST COLUMN

THE NEW REALTY FOR INDIANS

People are acquiring slices of rent-yielding properties in a way that is comparable to investing in a firm's stocks



SONAM CHANDWANI

The pall of gloom over the real estate industry on account of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light several unconventional methods being applied to keep the dreams of property buyers alive, while developers strive to stay afloat. A growing number of Indians are acquiring slices of rent-yielding residential and commercial properties in a way that is comparable to investing in the stocks of a company. Fractional real estate, as the concept is known, allows investors to buy, say, one per cent of a vacation home for a minimum amount and use it whenever they want, while earning rental income, too. While weekend properties are neither essential nor urgent, the outbreak has changed this perception. Such a reality ownership concept has arisen predominantly from the Work-From-Home (WFH) culture and the work-vacation culture, attracting NRIs and domestic buyers alike. Such a property acts like an asset, attracting a plethora of investors, in the end becoming a potential Special Purpose Vehicle-related investment. From the taxation standpoint, the fractional ownership of a property opens up such owners to a plethora of taxable liabilities, when comparing the yearly taxation related costs of such interests, prospective buyers or their counsel/advisors need to be sure of the usage arrangement, location, ownership size, basic amenities and other items.



A unicorn investment refers to a startup avenue/venture, occupying less than \$1 billion of the industry share. Considering the fact that this sort of timeshare arrangement is a novel area of investment for Indians, the value of such investment could possibly render the whole idea as a potential cash cow for real estate developers adapting to such forms of investment. With the pandemic having rendered the traditional and conventional real estate an under-yielding area of investment in the markets currently, fractional ownership might just pave way for a steady boom in the real estate sector. While fractional ownership may appear to be an inexpensive mode of investment to potential investors, it has its pros and cons. Procedures involving the investment in such ventures could involve detailed due diligences and legal red-tape. Not paying attention to such procedures could end up putting stressed properties in the hands of lesser advised investors.

Moreover, expenses considering maintenance and management of the property and any such costs could essentially tip the scales against the owners should they not be able to actually utilise the property within their arrangements. Having said that, the benefits accruing out of part ownership of vacation properties, while not accounting monumentally in financial terms, are manifold where it comes to utilisation. Such a property allows the investors to change their workspace surroundings and choose rather inexpensive modes of vacation and even earn some money out of renting it out to other vacationers. Though fractional ownership could lead to a real estate investment boom the sector so gravely yearns for, the legal procedures involved might turn off a certain class of investors. Moreover, a relatively new arena of investment always ends up taking a lot more time in yielding benefits, even if the time-value of money is rather unaccountable, since the property provides more leisurely than commercial benefits. Timeshare investments, while popular in the West, are considered to be a nascent area of investment, particularly while fractional ownership is considered. However, given the correct legal framework and taxation incentives, the current status of such investment could be elevated to providing the work-vacation culture the stability that the recent short-lived boom is testament to.

(The writer is Managing Partner KS Legal and Associates. The views expressed are personal.)

Time to turn Nocebo to Placebo in India

We must widely propagate the positives of getting inoculated, underplay the negatives and whole-heartedly support the Govt's initiatives towards massive vaccination drives



DEEPIKA BHASKAR

The pandemic and its prevalence have taught us many lessons in perseverance and patience. We have raced from one decision to the next, hoping that the latest one will make everything normal again. While the scientists have been working relentlessly to understand the virus and come up with increasingly promising vaccine candidates, the virus has been playing truant and evolving in new forms to ditch human efforts and survive as more robust variants. In the wake of the ever-changing variants, efficacy statistics and reported side effects, the so-called ultimate solution to end the pandemic, the anti-Corona vaccine, doesn't appear to be so attractive anymore. People are hesitant to take the shot, confirming the 'Nocebo Effect' to the perceived solution of the pandemic that doesn't seem to be getting anywhere close to its end. The hesitancy is spread across the globe. Some think they will never get the disease while others believe the virus is on its way out. Social media has been most instrumental in spreading the hesitancy due to varied opinions of people who have wide social media presence and have contributed to turning the solution from placebo to nocebo.

Understanding and addressing vaccine hesitancy has become very important in the drive towards normalising life, avoiding deaths and allowing the economy to run to its full capacity. These were the very reasons why a COVID-19 vaccine was needed in the first place. What made the long wait for a solution turn into vaccine hesitancy needs serious thought. As per the World Health Organisation (WHO), vaccine hesitancy is the delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite their availability. Medical practitioners and scientists have been making all out efforts to discuss and address the common causes of concern. Fear and hesitancy came from the unknown, hence the awareness needs to rise. This has led to a negative mindset against the vaccine. The hesitancy has also been triggered by the side effects reported in some cases as a result of administering the vaccine. The directions to continue with the safety measures and stay with COVID-appropriate behaviour along with reporting of positive cases in some vaccinated individuals have amplified the vaccine hesitancy.

With many cases of blood clotting reported as a side effect of the AstraZeneca jab and discontinuation of the vaccine thereafter in at least a dozen European countries before resuming them again, doubts have grown more than ever. The latest news that Denmark has totally stopped the use of the AstraZeneca jab in its inoculation drive is not helping the cause and instilling confidence in people.

While Governments across the globe have rolled out the vaccine and invited people to get vaccinated at the earliest, the vaccination centres report a different story. Dealing with vaccine hesitancy has become the next big challenge, even in a country like India, which is now the second-most badly hit nation in the world after the US.

In order to build trust and confidence in the jab, a multi-pronged strategy is required with transparent communication as the key. With the second wave already in full swing and numerous variants of the original virus here, the danger is far from over. Herd immunity, as it was being perceived, is nowhere in sight as there are people who have reported a second infection. The diversity of the disease is unfathomable.



WHILE THE RUSSIAN VACCINE SPUTNIK V HAS BEEN GIVEN THE GO AHEAD AND WILL HIT THE MARKET SOON AFTER SHORT TRIALS HERE, THE CENTRE IS ALSO LOOKING AT FAST APPROVALS FOR VACCINES FROM OTHER NATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN APPROVED BY THE WHO FOR EMERGENCY USE. IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME AND THE SHORTAGE WILL BE A THING OF THE PAST BUT THE BIG QUESTION IS WILL VACCINE HESITANCY, TOO, BE GONE SOON?

The writer is Registrar, IIT Delhi. The views expressed are personal.



Attitudes towards the COVID-19 vaccines have changed overtime and varied greatly. The theory of developing antibodies on being infected has also led to a decrease in the relevance of the vaccine. Infected individuals feel they have developed antibodies and are immunised against the disease, so they do not need a shot. However, the protective abilities of antibodies in sero-surveys is unknown and their effectiveness in preventing reinfection is still to be studied. The belief that the vaccine is rushed and has not been tested properly is another setback.

That some of the scientists have been supporting this belief has also given boost to hesitancy. It is also assumed that the efficacy of the vaccine is being underplayed so that people do not become lax in observing COVID-appropriate behaviour. Another view being expressed is that the immunity after vaccination lasts for only six months, which wrongly implies that the shot is not effective. People also think that if the survival and recovery rate is 99.6 per cent, why even bother getting a jab.

All these supposed opinions and views have stopped people from getting vaccinated. Giving compensation for getting vaccinated has always backfired as people think that they are being paid because there is something to hide. The only groups that have justifiable concerns are the elderly, people with co-morbidities, pregnant women and those with high allergic reactions to vaccines. Also,

there is no vaccine to protect our children as the vaccine has not been tested in pregnant women; the jab can give you extra protection, if you already had COVID-19; waiting too long allows the virus to spread in the community, hence, time is of the essence for the vaccine; the pandemic can only be shortened if the vaccine is well-received.

Hence, people have been advised to do their own research from reliable sources and take an informed decision regarding getting vaccinated. Where the issue of the shortage of the vaccine in the country is concerned, the Government is doing all it can to ensure that the needs of the people are met at the earliest. While the Russian vaccine Sputnik V has been given the go ahead and will hit the market soon after short trials here, the Centre is also looking at fast approvals for vaccines from other nations that have been approved by the WHO for emergency use. It is only a matter of time and the shortage will be a thing of the past. But the big question is will vaccine hesitancy, too, be gone soon?

It is time to put resolve into widely propagating the positives of getting vaccinated, underplaying the sparse negatives and whole-heartedly supporting the Government's initiatives towards massive vaccination drives so that the pandemic situation can be controlled, the economic downturn can be lifted and normalcy restored. Its time we turned this nocebo to a placebo and support humanity.

It is time to put resolve into widely propagating the positives of getting vaccinated, underplaying the sparse negatives and whole-heartedly supporting the Government's initiatives towards massive vaccination drives so that the pandemic situation can be controlled, the economic downturn can be lifted and normalcy restored. Its time we turned this nocebo to a placebo and support humanity.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

IF CENTRAL ARMED FORCES ARE ATTACKED THEN SHOTS SHOULD BE FIRED. IT DOES NOT MATTER WHO DIES OR LIVES. —BJP LEADER RAHUL SINHA



HE HAS UNMASKED THE TRUE FACE OF THE BJP. PEOPLE WILL GIVE THEM A BEFITTING REPLY. —TMC SPOKESPERSON KUNAL GHOSH



The Maha Kumbh of COVID and environmental risks

The Govt is not ignorant of the health costs of these events during the ongoing second wave of the outbreak but populist measures are the top priority during elections

The Kumbh Mela was first mentioned in the accounts of Huen Tsang, the famous Chinese traveller who visited India in the seventh century. The grand event, with a 2,000-year-old history, commenced this year in January and will continue till the end of April. Currently, at over two lakh new cases, India accounts for one in six of all new COVID infections globally. But these rather grim facts did not deter nearly 13.5 lakh devotees, including the members of the 13 Akharas from taking the holy dip or the *Shahi Snan* on April 13.

The consequences of the ongoing Maha Kumbh upon public health have been devastating, to say the least. In the last 24 hours, Haryana has reported over 1,000 fresh Corona positive cases. With the Indian Railways running



KOTA SRIRAJ

The writer is an environmental journalist. The views expressed are personal.

25 special trains to ferry the pilgrims across the country, the Maha Kumbh is all set to become a 'Maha COVID-19 super-spreader'. The situation looks hopeless unless either the event is immediately terminated or social distancing norms are strictly adhered to. But nothing significant seems to have been done by the Government regarding it.

Health risks aside, the Kumbh Mela is also not something that is known for environment friendliness. The Maha Kumbh is held at four locations — Nashik, Haridwar, Prayagraj and Ujjain — on a rotational basis after an interval of 12 years.

While the Kumbh, in general, is celebrated four times over the course of 12 years, with the site of the observance rotating between

four pilgrimage places on the four sacred rivers, namely, at Haridwar on the Ganga, at Ujjain on the Shipra, at Nashik on the Godavari and at Prayagraj at the confluence of the Ganga, the Jamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati.

The Nashik Kumbh Mela held in 2015 resulted in 25,000 tonnes of solid waste and faecal sludge that crept into the groundwater table from 33,000 hastily set-up mobile toilets without any effective waste disposal mechanism. It took an international outcry triggered by media coverage and the eventual intervention of the Bombay High Court to clean up the Nashik Kumbh Mela mess and rescue the environment. The event also caused a spike in river pollution making it unfit for bathing and other purposes. The



maximum permissible Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) for safe bathing is 3.0 milligrams (mg) per litre but it ranged between 3.4-8.5 mg per litre during the event. Meanwhile bacterial coliform ranged between 3,300 and 39,000 Most Probable Number (MPN) per 100 ml while the permissible limit is 500 MPN per 100 ml for human

bathing. The Maha Kumbh at Haridwar, too, is no different either in terms of the colossal health risk it poses or the ecological collateral damage it brings.

In the run-up to the Haridwar Maha Kumbh, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCNG) has been working tirelessly to prevent ecological damage and as a part of its efforts, the NMCNG has diverted one of the biggest local sewage drains — the Kassawan nullah — to a sewage treatment plant. But it should have been done a year ago. This nullah has emptied its effluents into the Ganga for years.

A recent study by the Doon University on the pollution levels in the Ganga establishes that in the stretch from Rishikesh to Haridwar the river was high on pollutants due to the pilgrim

bathing load and urban waste effluent flow.

The study also revealed that the overall concentration of Polypropylene Copolymer (PPCP), a form of plastic pollutant in the Ganga was found to be up to 1,104.84 nanograms per litre. Further, the presence of chemicals was also found to be high in the river water samples.

The election season, too, symbolised by huge political rallies, coupled with unrestrained religious gatherings are in total defiance of COVID-appropriate behaviour and protocol. Surely the Government is not ignorant of the health costs of these unabated events during the ongoing second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic, but populist measures and appeasement tactics are the top priorities during elections and they seem to score over

environmental and health concerns.

This is not surprising, but what is unfortunately startling is the inaction on the behalf of the judiciary which could have taken a *suo motu* initiative to shorten the duration of the Kumbh Mela, thereby, saving lives and the environment. In the absence of this, the Non-Government Organisations working in the field of environment protection and other individuals could have filed a Public Interest Litigation to this effect, but unfortunately, that also did not happen yet.

It is a classic case of who will bell the cat? Sadly, the reluctance of people to take on what is obviously a communally-sensitive issue will cost the environment and the health and economy of the country dearly. Where are the true nationalists now?

Myanmar coup foes tout minority-backed shadow Govt



Police security forces stand by inside a police vehicle and on the sidewalk of Hedan Road in Kamayut township in Yangon, Myanmar on Friday

AP ■ YANGON

Opponents of Myanmar's ruling junta went on the political offensive on Friday, declaring they have formed an interim national unity Government with members of Aung San Suu Kyi's ousted Cabinet and major ethnic minority groups.

The move comes on the eve of a diplomatic initiative to solve Myanmar's crisis by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which is expected to hold a summit next week.

A violent crackdown by the junta has failed to stem Opposition to the coup, and as the Army has spread the fight to ethnic minorities in border areas, some ASEAN members believe the crisis threatens regional stability.

Opponents of the coup have been seeking an alliance with ethnic minority groups as a way of strengthening their resistance. The minorities for decades have kept up on-again, off-again armed struggles for



A woman lights a candle while others flash the three-fingered sign of resistance during a candlelight vigil to remember those who died in the military junta's violent response to anti-coup demonstrations in Yangon, Myanmar on Friday

AP

greater autonomy in the borderlands.

While it was not clear if the minority political organisations had formally joined an alliance, the appointment of prominent personalities from their ranks showed a commitment to a joint struggle against the military, which is certain to boost morale to the anti-coup

cause.

Security forces have killed at least 726 protesters and bystanders since the Feb. 1 military takeover, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors casualties and arrests. The protests and the killings have been continuing on a daily basis.

The National Unity Government is nominally an upgrade from what had been called the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, which was formed shortly after the coup by elected lawmakers who were barred by the army from taking their seats.

The CRPH sought international recognition as Myanmar's sole legitimate government body, but won only popular support from those opposed to military rule.

The junta declared the CRPH an illegal organisation, and issued arrest warrants for its leading members.

A video posted Friday on social media showed veteran activist Min Ko Naing announcing the formation of the new body. He was a leader of the failed 1988 uprising against a previous military dictatorship and is one of the country's most respected political figures aside from Suu Kyi. He went quickly underground after the coup and

apparently has been active in political organizing against the junta since then.

"Please support the National Unity Government for the future of our citizens and our younger generation," he said. "The people are the decision makers and the people will fight the final battle. Victory is coming. We must win our revolution."

More details were provided in a statement on social media by Dr. Sasa, a physician and philanthropist who though in hiding has been the online public face of the CRPH.

"Today, at the end of Thingyan on the eve of Myanmar's new year, we are proud to announce the formation of a new National Unity Government and the dawn of a new era for the people of Myanmar," said Sasa.

"For the first time in our history, Myanmar has a unity government that will reflect one of our nation's greatest strengths — the diversity of our people."

AFTER SLAPPING SANCTIONS

Joe Biden proposes strategic stability dialogue with Russia

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Hours after expelling 10 Russian diplomats in connection with interference in last year's US presidential elections, President Joe Biden has proposed a strategic stability dialogue with Moscow, as officials of the two countries discussed the possibility of a summit meeting in Europe this summer.

The US on Thursday announced the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats and slapped sanctions on over 30 individuals and key financial institutions in last year's presidential election and the hacking of American federal agencies.

Hours after signing the executive order imposing sanctions on its erstwhile cold war rival, Biden told reporters at the White House that during a telephonic conversation with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, he had proposed that they meet in person this summer in Europe for a summit to address a range of issues facing both the countries.



"Our teams are discussing that possibility right now. And if that summit were to occur, and I believe it will, the United States and Russia could launch a strategic stability dialogue to pursue cooperation in arms control and security," Biden said.

"We can address critical global challenges that require Russia and the United States to work together, including reining in nuclear threats from Iran and North Korea, ending this pandemic globally, and meeting the existential crisis of climate change," he said.

During the phone call, Biden said he expressed concern on Russia's military build up on the Ukraine border and in Crimea.

Russia to expel 10 US diplomats in response to Washington

Moscow: Russia on Friday responded in kind to a barrage of new US sanctions, saying it would expel 10 US diplomats and take other retaliatory moves in a tense showdown with Washington.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also said Moscow will add eight US officials to its sanctions list and move to restrict and stop the activities of US nongovernmental organizations from interfering in Russia's politics.

He said the Kremlin suggested that US Ambassador John Sullivan follow the example of his Russian counterpart and head home for consultations. Russia will also move to deny the US Embassy the possibility to hire personnel from Russia and third countries as support staff.

The moves follow the sanctions on Russia announced this week by the Biden administration. While the US. Wields the power to cripple the Russian economy, Moscow lacks levers to respond in kind, although it potentially could hurt American interests in many other ways around the globe.

Lavrov noted that while Russia could take "painful measures" against American business

interests in Russia, it wouldn't immediately move to do that. Russia has denied interfering in the 2020 US Presidential election and involvement in the SolarWind hack of federal agencies — the activities punished by the latest US Sanctions. The Russian Foreign Ministry warned of an "inevitable" retaliation, charging that "Washington should realize that it will have to pay a price for the degradation of bilateral ties."

The US. On Thursday ordered 10 Russian diplomats expelled, targeted dozens of companies and people, and imposed new curbs on Russia's ability to borrow money. Pundits had predicted that while Moscow would respond in kind to the expulsions, it would refrain from any other significant moves to avoid a further escalation.

Russia's economic potential and its global reach are limited compared with the Soviet Union that competed with the US for international influence during the Cold War. Still, Russia's nuclear arsenal and its leverage in many parts of the world make it a power that Washington needs to reckon with.

US says Russia was given Trump campaign polling data in 2016

Washington: It was one of the more tantalizing, yet unresolved, questions of the investigation into possible connections between Russia and Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign: Why was a business associate of campaign chairman Paul Manafort given internal polling data — and what did he do with it?

A Treasury Department statement Thursday offered a potentially significant clue, asserting that Konstantin Kilimnik, a Russian and Ukrainian political consultant, had shared sensitive campaign and polling information with Russian intelligence services.

Kilimnik has long been alleged by U.S. officials to have ties to Russian intelligence. But the statement in a broad Treasury Department sanctions announcement was the first time the U.S. government had so directly drawn a connection from the Trump campaign to the Kremlin's intelligence services. The revelation was all the more startling because it went beyond any allegation made in either special counsel Robert Mueller's 2019 report or in an even more damning and detailed document released last year by the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Pak suspends services of social media platforms

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Friday temporarily suspended the services of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp to stop their use to organise demonstrations following violent protests by a radical religious group that has now been banned by the Government.

The Government banned Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) on Thursday following three days of violent protest by it to force the government to expel the French ambassador over a blasphemous caricature published in France last year.

The TLP had launched the country-wide protest on Monday after the arrest of its chief Saad Hussain Rizvi. The TLP supporters clashed with the law enforcement agencies in several towns and cities earlier this week, leaving seven persons dead and over 300 policemen injured.

To stop the protests after Friday prayers, the Interior Ministry directed the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to suspend social media services for four hours from 11 am to 3 pm.

The PTA said in a notification that "complete access to social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube and Telegram) may be blocked."



Supporters of Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan, a radical Islamist political party, chant slogans during a sit-in protest against the arrest of their party leader Saad Rizvi and demanding the French envoy from the country, in Lahore on Friday

But this time only social media has been particularly targeted as the TLP was reportedly using it effectively against the government action.

On Thursday, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed warned the TLP against using YouTube to upload propaganda videos. The TLP came to prominence in November 2017 when it staged a sit-in at the Faizabad interchange near Islamabad and cut off the capital from the old international airport.

US to continue to push Pak on backing diplomatic efforts to ensure peace in Af: Burns

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US will continue to push Pakistan hard on supporting the diplomatic efforts to ensure peace in Afghanistan as it has an interest over the longer term in avoiding insecurity and instability in the war-torn neighbouring country that can spill over and affect its own interest, CIA Director William Burns has said.

Burns was responding to a question from Congressman Adam Schiff, who is the Chairman of the powerful House Intelligence Committee.

"Our withdrawal from Afghanistan, what impact do you think that will have on the Pakistani relationship with the Taliban, the Pakistani intelligence, ISI

relationship with the Haqqani network or others? How do you see that changing without a US military presence there?" Schiff asked during the meeting on Thursday.

"Pakistan today is playing a constructive role in support of the diplomatic efforts, at least that the United States and other countries are making to try to bridge what is, at the moment, a pretty severe gap between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban," Burns responded.

The CIA Director told lawmakers that Pakistan has an interest over the longer term in avoiding the kind of insecurity and instability in Afghanistan that can spill over and affect its own interest.

China poses single biggest geopolitical test for US in 21st century: CIA Director

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

China poses the single biggest geopolitical test for the US in the 21st century, CIA Director William Burns has said, stressing that this threat is more serious than those from Russia during the Cold War.

Burns made the remarks to members of the House Select Committee on Intelligence during a Congressional hearing on worldwide threats on Thursday.

"I think China poses the single biggest geopolitical test for the United States as far out into the 21st century as I can see," Burns said.

"What distinguishes what challenge from an increasingly adversarial China Communist Party from, for example, the challenge we face with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, is that this challenge unfolds across a whole range of areas from military to ideological in terms of our values, economic and especially at its core competition and technology as well," Burns said.

The US and China are at odds over a range of issues from trade to human rights in Tibet, Hong Kong and China's western Xinjiang region, as well as over Taiwan, Beijing's assertiveness in the South China Sea and the coronavirus pandemic.

Beijing says US 'too negative' toward China

AP ■ BEIJING

A top Chinese diplomat said on Friday that US policy toward China is "too negative" and that cooperation could be critically important as the Biden administration focuses on combatting Covid-19 and promoting economic recovery.

The US appears to be highlighting confrontation and playing down cooperation, Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng said in a wide-ranging interview with The Associated Press.

Hong Kong democracy leaders given jail terms amid crackdown

AP ■ HONG KONG

A Hong Kong court on Friday sentenced five leading pro-democracy advocates including media tycoon Jimmy Lai, to up to 18 months in prison for organising and participating in a massive march during 2019 anti-government protests that triggered an overwhelming crackdown from Beijing.

A total of nine advocates were given jail terms, but four of them, including 82-year-old lawyer and former lawmaker Martin Lee, had their sentences suspended after their age and accomplishments were taken into consideration.

They were found guilty earlier this month of organiz-

ing and participating in a massive protest in August 2019, where an estimated 1.7 million people marched in opposition to a bill that would have allowed suspects to be extradited to mainland China. The march was not authorized by the police.

Their convictions and sentencing are another blow to the city's flagging democracy movement, which is facing an unprecedented crackdown by Beijing and Hong Kong authorities. The sentences were swiftly met with international criticism.

The court suspended the 11-month prison sentence of Lee, who is known for his advocacy for human rights and democracy, for two years because of his age.

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E-Tendering/Tender Notice

Letter No. 1197 / 613 / 88 Date: 15.04.2021

| Name of Work | Estimated cost | Period of completion of work |
|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| 1 Dhoomkhera GOV W/S Scheme | Rs. 80.96 Lakh | 06 months |
| 2 Pipalaya GOV W/S Scheme | Rs. 86.82 Lakh | 06 months |
| 3 Kurnah GOV W/S Scheme | Rs. 80.38 Lakh | 06 months |

Key Dates-

| | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 4 Date of Online Publication | 17.04.2021 at 17:00 hrs. |
| 5 Document Download : Start Date | 18.04.2021 at 10:00 hrs. |
| 6 Document download : End Date | 01.05.2021 at 17:00 hrs. |
| 7 Pre Bid Meeting | 22.04.2021 at 14:00 hrs. |
| 8 Bid Submission : Start Date | 18.04.2021 at 10:00 hrs. |
| 9 Bid Submission : End Date | 01.05.2021 at 17:00 hrs. |
| 10 Offline Submission of Document (Cost of bidding document, Bid Security, Original Affidavits & all the Supporting Documents in support of qualification) | 02.05.2021 upto 17:00 hrs. |
| 11 Date of Technical Bid Opening | 03.05.2021 at 11:00 hrs. |
| 12 Date of Financial Bid Opening | To be announced Later |
| 13 Details of tender, corrigendum or cancellation etc. may be obtained at web site: www.uktenders.gov.in | |

Superintending Engineer

Iran starts enriching uranium to 60%, its highest level ever

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran began enriching uranium Friday to its highest level ever, edging closer to weapons grade levels to pressure talks in Vienna aimed at restoring its nuclear deal with world powers after an attack on its main atomic site.

A top official said only a few grams an hour of uranium gas would be enriched up to 60 per cent purity — a triple the level it once did but at a rate far slower than what Tehran could produce. International inspectors already said Iran planned to do so above-ground at its Natanz nuclear site, not deep within its underground halls hardened to withstand airstrikes.

The move is likely to raise tensions even as Iran negotiates in Vienna over a way to allow the US



back into the agreement and lift the crushing economic sanctions. However, its scope also provides Iran with a way to quickly de-escalate if it chose.

The announcement also marks a significant escalation after the attack that damaged centrifuges at Natanz, an attack this past weekend suspected of having been carried out by Israel. While Israel has yet to claim it, it comes amid a long-running shadow war between the two

Mideast rivals.

Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, Iran's parliament speaker, announced the move in a Twitter post later acknowledged by Iranian state television.

"The young and God-believing Iranian scientists managed to achieve a 60 per cent enriched uranium product," Qalibaf said. "I congratulate the brave nation of Islamic Iran on this success. The Iranian nation's willpower is miraculous and can defend any conspiracy."

The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, the country's civilian nuclear arm, later acknowledged the move to 60 per cent, according to state TV. Ali Akbar Salehi said the centrifuges now produce 9 grams an hour, but that would drop to 5 grams an hour in the coming days.

SEARCH FOR MISSING

General public is here by informed that this girl (depicted in the photo) namely: Siddiga Parveen D/o Md. Istiyak R/o H.No. G-140, Tagore Gali, Jagatpuri, Delhi-51, has been missing/kidnapped from her shop at A-110/1, Gali No. 9, Jagatpuri, Delhi-51 since 31.03.2021 at 04.30 PM. In this regard DO No. 109A Dated 31.03.2021 has been registered at PS. Jagatpuri, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the girl but no clue has come to light so far.

Her physical description is as under:-
Sex: Female, Age: 20 years, Height: 5'1 Ft., Complexion: Wheatish, Face: Long, Injury Mark: An Old Burn Mark on Left Toe, Wearing: Black Colour Suit & Light Blue Jeans, Cream colour Juti in foot.

Any person is having information or clue about this missing/kidnapped girl may kindly inform to the following:-

SHO
Website: <http://cbl.nic.in> PS Jagat Puri, Delhi
E-mail: cic@cbl.gov.in Ph. No: 011-24240362, 24240364,
Tel. No: 011-24368638/24368641 Mob: 7065036023
Fax No: 011-24368639 DP/428/SHD/2021



SHORT CIRCUITS

SUNNY LEONE

"I don't always post workout videos but I thought this was fun. A technique used by fighters who are hit in the head and get dizzy. I'm no fighter but was fun to try this. Thanks Arif. Oh and by the way, it's more difficult to box with a mask on! But safety over comfort at this moment."



GUL PANAG

"I think a lot of us are aware of what kind of an existential crisis the environment faces but we have other fires to fight. And even though we may be willing and maybe interested and wanting to do our best to contribute towards conserving the environment, other emergencies in life take over."



ARJUN BULANI

"I don't want to use anything as an excuse to not follow my workout routine even when on a vacation. It is just a medium to rejuvenate myself. I am very particular about my schedule especially when I am in the middle of training for an intense reality show."



NATASHA RASTOGI

"Acting for me will always be a constant journey of learning. To talk about my recent projects, *Pagglait* gave me an opportunity to play a very nuanced character. But I tried to see it as a woman torn between her daughter's well-being and rigid societal norms that she must follow, given the situation."

AMY WALSH

"I loved Michael Praed, who played Tracy's dad Frank in *Emmerdale*. He's a ball of crazy energy. Once he came to the garage with me and pumped my tyres up because I was poorly. Michael is such a caring man, and I was devastated when he left the show. But we're still in touch and he's a friend for life."



ART & CULTURE

CONFLUENCE OF ART AND FILM

Art is inaccessible. It is high brow. It's for the classes. How often have we heard these words thrown around without giving a thought to everyday lived aesthetics? The film, *Contemporary Art within the Visual Cultures of Italy & India*, looks at chipping away many of these assertions by exploring contemporary art in both countries. The curators of the panoramic project, DAVIDE QUADRIO and MYNA MUKHERJEE, brought National Award-Winning filmmaker ONIR as the Director of Photography to ensure that it could take the viewers on a visual journey that is both layered and simplified. In a discussion with SAIMI SATTAR, the trio talk about the project, its reach and the conversations that it can ignite

How was the project conceptualised?

Myna: I had worked with Davide on an exchange programme of ideas and art between Italy and India at the India Art Fair two years back. We enjoyed this cross-cultural exchange tremendously where there were women artists, three each, from Italy and India. What was surprising was the resonance among them. It was a universal and hybrid moment. While the contours of work were specific to the location, there was a shared universality as women artists.

From there came the germ of an idea. As the resonance was big, we wanted to share it with a wider audience. Things quickly fell in place as Davide was invited as a curator to Aartissima, Italy's most pivotal art fairs, for India. As a larger narrative formed, we got more ambitious and wanted to communicate the idea behind the curation. We wanted to share this and a film, because of a wider and diverse audience as well as those who are new to art conversation or aren't art enthusiasts but have an inclination towards it, was considered the best way to do it.

For me, talking about India and its aesthetics can't be separated from the specificity of location. Instead of explaining this to the audience, they get to peek into the aesthetics philosophies, history and the contemporariness of everyday living, landscape, crafts, arts and political situation.

There is poetic resonance in both countries in terms of themes, materiality, form and more. There are several intersections in the intellectual thought process, the time, the duration and the way artists work and the way nature interacts.

David: We were at a stage where we could truly have an exchange. There were questions, about our roles as cultural mitiga-

tors and that of culture in the contemporary world, especially in the pandemic. Human beings aren't just consumers or survivors but are culture beings. This isn't just a journey but also critically thinking about the role of culture and art. There's a strong idea of presenting what it means to be in a cross-cultural environment and presenting your own culture through a contemporary spectacle. The idea isn't to simplify but to make it more layered.

How much does the ruling dispensation and their outlook affect arts?

Onir: For independent filmmakers, censorship has been there for years and we've negotiated different kinds of dos-don'ts. When OTT came, we thought it had more possibilities but now there are new laws. You're always being told to be sensitive about religion and more but somewhere the artiste has disappeared in the scheme of things. However, art is a compulsion that doesn't let you stay quiet as is evident from Iranian cinema. It's about finding a new narrative to tell a story.

D: I think, radicality is happening globally. This situation is conducive to art and culture not being secondary. There's a strong will to find solutions and ways to do things as well as support creativity in people.

M: One of the most interesting things about art, when you're looking at radicality, is the origin of the word. The etymology of radicality is roots. So you're essentially going back to the roots philosophically and symbolically.

I spent 20 years in New York and the burden of representation there was very frustrating. For example, if you were a dancer, suddenly everybody would say this is South Asian dance but we know that there are so many dances in India alone. This



means that if you're leading someone into an exposition of culture, its multiplicity is so enormous, that unless the viewer willingly embraces its complexity, nothing can be understood about culture.

Going from Kashmir to Gujarat, there were so many surprising stories and encounters that there's no fixed way to think about them. The documentary looks into the multiple truths at this particular moment in time. The wonderful thing is that it looks at both references as well as departures from these historical and material references. It hopes to glimpse at multiplicity in all its glory.

So, do you think these multiple locations add to the storytelling?

M: Yes, of course. There are similarities and differences between Gujarat's Maharaja Sayajirao University and Shanti Niketan,

Bengal — the two best-known academic institutions of art. Then there are many smaller ones besides folk and craft traditions, weaving traditions or patterns or references, philosophy, spirituality, there is so much. Even when you're referring to a simple landscape, it is varied across different parts of India.

D: The overlapping of feelings or relationships is communicated by putting together extreme things or differences. This explodes into an emotional reaction rather than a historical or intellectualised analysis. Onir is extremely important in this as the world he comes from and his way of thinking is very different. It's a journey through feelings, ideas, sketches of ideas, dots and mat is actually what will make the film very appealing as it's not about a linear idea but a complex journey through references and aesthetics of actual-

ly connecting or disconnecting India and Italy.

So you would say that multiple locations and multiple artists are adding to these voices of diversity?

M and D: Yes sure. D: This is of course a point of view and a rhetorical decision. It isn't always about absolute. It's about tentativeness, absorbing things and getting lost. The idea is to bring all those images and edit them to the minimum and maximum possible.

M: The reason for bringing Onir is that we wanted to bring in an outsider who would also see it from the audience's perspective with fresh eyes. So if it made sense to Onir, it would make sense to the audience. He's an outsider to the process while being a part of the

journey.

Is this an attempt to bridge the gap as art is considered high-brow and inaccessible?

O: When Myna approached me the idea to make it more "accessible" was exciting. This wasn't a technical documentary from the point of view of someone superior talking about things you don't understand but it was the journey of experiencing and understanding the long history of art and contemporary art in the context of nature, culture, tradition and everything else. For me, starting from Kashmir and going to Gujarat changed the way I started seeing form, design and will affect the way I shoot films. To make art accessible needs a small step. This journey helped me take that step and I hope that it does so for other people too.

What were the challenges in bringing everything — the journey from Kashmir to Gujarat and the Italian as well as Indian influences — to one platform?

O: For me, the beauty is in finding threads that are diverse while having a commonality because that is what humanity is all about. It is like poetry, where you are using different languages to convey the same emotion. You see nature, tradition, patterns, forms and colours of Kashmir resonate in Gujarat while being different.

Is the focus more on contemporary artists in the documentary?

O: It is contemporary but comes with thousands of years of history. What's beautiful is that we are talking about the works of contemporary artists and showing the milieu that brought about their art.

D: What's interesting isn't the conflict between past and present but how the present is coming

from history. When you're talking about how tradition is preserved, you also see professionals who build on that tradition. We're going to alphabets of creativity and showing that art is a discourse and a practise which isn't in conflict but a natural consequence even though it might go against tradition.

M: I don't think of history as a progression in a linear way but much more as a continuum. Everything in South Asia is elliptical. What's new today is old tomorrow and what's old tomorrow is also suddenly new. Whether it is the materials, colour, the way it is constructed and used by artists on temporary and frescoes. Similarly, while references to metaphor and myths happen in ancient cultures but are also made by very young contemporary artists today.

What is the audience you are targeting and what should they be looking at?

M: We hope that the film serves as an entry point for someone who is interested in art but never has had an exposure to different conversations or some of the different histories of art. At the same time we want artists to find a resonance with other artists either from their part of the world or other parts of the world. It isn't a historical text but more of symbols and signs that give an entry point into aesthetics. It's a plural history.

D: We want to have a film that goes beyond the intellectual language that contemporary art had in-built globally and to try to create a narrative that talks to people.

O: It provides an experience to someone navigating art but not so familiar with it but at the same time it has layers and subtexts woven in silently which will give a much more refined narrative to artists who are familiar with the discourse.

IMMERSIVE 30 MINUTES

'Dream hard, work harder' Gil Green directs Divine's *Rider*

Choreographer and educator ASHLEY LOBO says nothing can stop a dancer who is motivated, disciplined and hungry for success

A global pandemic and an impending lockdown may have yet again impacted the commercial and creative aspects of performing arts but Australian-Indian choreographer and educator Ashley Lobo believes an abiding passion for dance can open even invisible doors. The point is to persist, keep learning and find new ways to express oneself.

Drawing upon his expertise as a mentor at his dance institutions, the Dancers Performing Arts Academy and the Navdharma Indian Dance Theatre, and having spent over a year balancing the virtual stage and live dance training, Ashley offers tips to aspiring dancers as to how they can navigate this time yet again with hope, courage and even success.

INCULCATE PASSION

"If a dancer has passion, she/he will have the discipline to persevere regardless of the challenges ahead. A pandemic can be emotionally and physically draining on a dancer who is used to synergising and performing with other dancers on stage, in studios and also soaking in the live appreciation of the audience. But passion coupled with adaptability can propel a dancer forward, says he and adds, "The one thing I learnt during the lockdown last year was that we always have enough space and energy to do what we really want. I adapted my passion for dancing to a more constricted space and developed a daily routine that I stuck to. During my online classes, I asked my students to do the same. No matter how overwhelmed you may be feeling, as a dancer when you feel start moving, your mind also moves to happier places."



IDENTIFY A FAVOURITE DANCE STYLE

When a dancer is serious about pursuing his or her passion as a vocation and a lifelong career, it is important to identify the style they want to specialise in. Ashley cites the example of many young Indian dancers whose dedication to ballet has won

them scholarships and taken them abroad to master the form. He says, "When you clarify just what creative zone you want to specialise, work or teach in, it distills your choices to the essentials and you are able to find options that are suited to you."

GET THE FUNDAMENTALS OF

THEORY RIGHT

According to him, to revise, repeat and imbibe the basic theories of a chosen dance form is important. He suggests, "Learn online with a teacher, join an academy remotely if you cannot learn in person and tune your body and mind. Do your own research on how great dancers built their technique, watch acclaimed performances, check what international studios are working on. All this information is out there. Be hungry and relentless. Build your foundation and never stop working on yourself and your craft."

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVES

It is hard to find motivation in tough times but as Ashley says, "One of my favourite quotes that I use repeatedly to inspire myself and my students is, 'My next move must be motivated by dance itself.' This is what it is all about. When you let dance lead you to your next step, the future reveals itself and believe me, it will be beautiful. The world over, dance is getting the respect it deserves through performance-based shows and films. Dancers are beginning to represent India at the global level as performers, teachers and choreographers. And we are all set to make an even bigger splash in the years to come. So dream hard, work harder and you will go places."

Rapper Divine has teamed up with American music video and film director Gil Green for the music video of his new track *Rider*.

The story of the song is inspired by Divine's rags-to-riches tale. It is a love saga between a deprived dreamer, played by Divine, and an affluent boss woman, played by singer Lisa Mishra.

Green has directed over 200 music videos and has collaborated with the likes of Adam Levine, John Legend, Pitbull, Chris Brown, Akon, Lil Wayne, Kanye West, Nicki Minaj, Drake, DJ Khaled, Camila Cabello, Usher, P. Diddy, J Balvin, 50 Cent, Snoop Dogg and Sean Paul.

"I want to send a big shout out to Divine and the Gully Gang for collaborating with me on this video. Being a part of Divine's massive influence in India's hip hop movement is something special to me. The art form is truly universal, and Divine continues to push the hip hop boundaries with his music, lyrics, style and presence," says Green.

The video features Dubai's tourist attractions such as Dubai Opera, Burj Khalifa, Sheikh Zayed Road, Dubai World Trade Centre to City Walk, Burj al Arab, Madinat Jumeirah, Palm Jumeirah and features the iconic desert safari.

Divine adds, "*Rider* is a song that is very close to my heart and I feel blessed to have worked with



a legend like Gil and his entire team that fulfilled the vision I had for this music video. Lisa has been an amazing and a fun collaborator to work with, easy to see that her voice and personality together in the video shines right through."

Last summer, Divine made an Instagram post asking his fans who he should work with on his album. I thought I'd shoot my shot in the comments and see if I got lucky. And just like that, he messaged me that he had an idea and was going to send it over. When I got the scratch, his verse and the hook had been written and he left the second half empty for me. I loved the message of the song, about an independent woman who he's so comfortable with, it goes beyond just a relationship," says Lisa.

CONVERSATION

I CAN DO IT

Actor and host VISHAL MALHOTRA tells AYUSHI SHARMA that the Season 2 of *Imagine That* will educate children and their parents about the concept of upcycling and being friendly towards the environment along with a good dose of laughter

♦What made you say yes to *Imagine That* Season 2? What's different in this installment?

As you know, I started my relationship with Disney 25 years ago and ever since then, it has been a very fulfilling experience. We have been looking at ways to collaborate with each other for the longest time. So when the channel was kind enough to offer me this show, I grabbed the opportunity. From the time they have announced our collaboration, I have been overwhelmed with the response that I have been receiving from the audience. People are extremely nostalgic with my return and they cannot wait for the show. Besides this, the format of the show intrigued me the most. DIY (Do It Yourself) is an integral part of a lot of kids' lives. It is entertaining and encourages them to grow mentally. In this concept, I connect the audience to the show; I am the voice of the audience through which I aim to bring a lot of joy, laughter and fun and at the same time make sure that the simplest of DIYs to the biggest are amazing.

♦Now people are well-versed with the DIY culture due to easy access to the internet. What new is in it for kids?

For starters, when you normally watch a DIY, there are only said instructions on how to execute it. Whereas, in this show we have got an entire gameplay around it, which has been filled with fun, laughter, entertainment and of course, learning. Besides that, the kind of DIY we are choosing is focussed on the theme of 'upcycling'. We use old material from the previous DIY by upcycling them for the new ones and like that we make sure we do not waste anything. The show is centred on a lot of social relevance that will educate the children and their parents about the concept of upcycling and being friendly towards the environment along with enjoying a good dose of laughter.

♦Why do you think DIY is important? Can we merge the concept with sustainability?

DIYs are extremely important because it encourages a child to



think or motivates them to build new creative things. And this is always something that we should be looking for. This show offers encouragement to the parents and their kids to come together and challenge each other's mind and creativity to build something which is actually going to be useful and is not just a showpiece. Speaking of sustainability — yes! We can merge the concept with DIY. That is exactly what the show is about. The first step to sustainability is no wastage, which is what we absolutely endorse and encourage. We do not waste a single piece of paper, a straw or even a single string. We use every bit again and again and create amazing new things without compromising on the quality of what we are producing.

♦How challenging is it to capture the attention of the children while hosting such shows?

Any TV show to the audience is extremely difficult to captivate. It is not just with the kids. I have had the fortune of hosting shows for kids for the last 25 years and somehow, I have found a very favourable response from my audience. This is because I do not treat them as kids. I do know my audience but I do not treat them on the

basis of the intelligence I think they possess. I, rather, treat them as my friends. I believe this has what resonated with them in a big way. I am confident that the same resonance will come back again be it with the kids or their parents after watching me on the episodes.

♦Given that things are easily accessible today, how do you think the importance of DIY projects can be explained to kids?

Well, that is something we are striving to do but we should not undermine the intelligence of both parents and children. But yes, you are right — everything is easily available and we do bring that up in the show. Certain times on the show I just say, 'Hey, listen, we got to give somebody a gift. Why don't we just order it online?' However, we teach and encourage the audience to build a DIY. Punching in your card numbers to order a gift online is incomparable to the wholesome emotion. The gratitude and the sense of achievement you feel after creating something by spending those 15-20 minutes on it. That gift is far more truly yours than any purchased kind.

(The show will premiere on Disney Channel at 9:30 am on April 18.)

Ajay, Siddharth to produce *Gobar*



Actor-producer Ajay Devgn has announced his new production, a comic drama named *Gobar* along with Siddharth Roy Kapur. The film is to be directed by ad-filmmaker Sabal Shekhawat, who has also penned the script along with Sambhit Mishra. The film's story is about a veterinary doctor who discovers a tangled web of corruption in his state hospital.

Ajay feels that people will love the story. "The story of *Gobar* is at once unique, relatable and incredibly funny as well as gripping and entertaining to the point that I'm confident it will compel people to go to the theatres," he says.

"We are very clear about the impact we want to make. We want viewers to laugh, relax, perhaps think a little bit and be entertained. The standard that Siddharth observes in content creation and filmmaking makes this collaboration very exciting for us," the actor-filmmaker adds.

Kapur says that the film centres around the journey of a common man and comes with a simple message. "*Gobar* is a story that chronicles the seemingly pointless but ultimately heroic journey of a simple citizen who deals with corruption in many ways that will bring on a laugh, much adventure and ultimately a simple message about the power of the common

man," says Kapur.

He adds, "What makes the film entertaining and unique is that it is a situational comedy that sheds light on the inner workings of power. To be collaborating with Ajay, someone I have always respected for his creative choices, and his team at Ajay Devgn Films on bringing this film to life is very exciting."

Writer-director Shekhawat says that the film has been written keeping in mind true events.

"*Gobar* is a film that will take viewers back to the charming days of the nineties and the simple life of smalltown living. I wrote this story keeping in mind a few true events that unravelled a gamut of issues, the centre of which is a vet whose love for his cows and animals supersedes everything," says Shekhawat.

"I'm grateful and happy that two esteemed producers like Ajay and Sid showed faith in my vision and offered a sizable canvas to the storyline. Quality cinema has come from both production houses, and I'm sure that the treatment of my directorial will be no different. As a filmmaker, I'm absolutely thrilled!" he says.

Produced under the banners Ajay Devgn Films and Roy Kapur Films, the film will go on floors at the end of the year. The casting of the film is underway. —JNS

STUDIO CHAT

Into the world of magic

Actor MATTHEW GOODE shares that the second season of *A Discovery of Witches* is much darker, full of vampires, daemons, witches and forbidden love. By TEAM VIVA

A Discovery of Witches is a fantasy series based on the similarly-named novel of the 'All Souls' trilogy, written by Deborah Harkness. Teresa Palmer portrays Diana Bishop, a historian who discovers a bewitched manuscript in the Bodleian library. As she attempts to unravel the secrets this book holds about magical creatures, she is forced back into the world of magic, full of vampires, daemons, witches and forbidden love. Forming an unlikely alliance, geneticist and vampire Matthew Clairmont, portrayed by Matthew Goode, helps Diana to attempt to protect the book and solve the riddles within, while at the same time dodging threats from the magical creature world. Excerpts:

♦Can you give a quick recap of *A Discovery of Witches* season one?

It starts with Diana Bishop, a professor studying at Oxford, falling over. Her sheets of paper zoom back into her hands. So, as an audience, you know straight away there's some magic involved. She goes to the Bodleian Library and takes out a book, which turns out to be *Asmodeus* 782. Later in the series, we learn this to be 'The Book of Life'. Matthew, who I play, has overheard Diana has the book in her possession, but she doesn't have it as it's disappeared again. There is an attraction between them, but the congregation, made up of witches, vampires and daemons, has set rules that do not allow for species to mix. Matthew and Diana fall for each other and he takes her to his mother's house in order to escape the clutches of the congregation and figure out how much power Diana may or may not have, they must travel back in time — 1590. At that time, I was in the guise of another Matthew — Matthew Roydon — who was the



head of The School of Night with characters like Walter Raleigh and Kit Marlowe, both of whom are a big part of season two.

♦What is it like being back for season two?

The book is great. You pop the first one down and pick up another. Deb (Deborah) writes fantastically good stories. They are dense and there's a lot of material, so you want to mine that as much as possible. In season two, Matthew reassumes the identity of Matthew Roydon. He was Lord Burghley's right-hand and, basically, 007 for the Queen. It's a

much darker season and I think we start to see Diana's character become stronger, not only with magic, but in a society that's very patriarchal. It's great getting the old gang back together even though we didn't see a lot of them as they were filming the modern part of the story, James North has successfully knocked out a 1590s London town in a place called Plas Machen. Prior to arriving on set, I wondered how they were going to do it, and if it was just going to be a few pots, pans and beggars hanging around some cobbles.

♦What are the challenges that Matthew and Diana face in season

two and how their relationship develops?

In season one, Diana was a bit of a victim of circumstance. In season two, she's a lot smarter and as a historian, she thrives going back in time. Diana also steps up in the relationship, looking after Matthew mentally because he starts to lose himself. It becomes a proper marriage based on equality.

♦Can you explain how Diana is beginning to harness her magic in this season and what she has to go through?

Season two is a journey.

Through the tests they complete in season one, we realise that Diana has all the markers, which is very rare. Most of her magic has been quite fantastical, but she hasn't been able to control it. We eventually learn that this is because she's spellbound. Season two follows her schooling by great witches and realising that she is a weaver.

♦Who is Kit Marlowe and why is he important to Matthew?

Kit was a famous playwright in the real world and is still a famous one in the show. He was accused of being a spy and ends up getting stabbed. In the book, he also works for Lord Burghley and is part of a ring of undercover agents and The School of Night. He is Matthew's greatest and closest friend. It gives him shape because the Matthew of the past hated witches and so Kit, who is a daemon, is wary when he comes back and declares that he has married one. Because of the ups and downs of their relationship and trust issues, he's a great foil for season two. These themes are very apparent in Elizabethan society, a time of skulduggery, theft, murder and darkness.

♦What's it like working with Tom Hughes?

It's always been a pleasure. Tom and I have worked together quite a few times now. He's great and northern and looks at things differently. He gives Kit a real sense of otherworldliness that is difficult to put one's finger on, but it really is quite mesmerising.

♦Explain Philippe and Matthew's relationship?

The relationship between Philippe and Matthew is a tricky one. It was Ysaabeau who sired Matthew many moons ago, but Philippe fathered him in a very masculine way. There's a big secret for the audience in season two around what Matthew's history is with Philippe. To talk about their relationship without mentioning the secret is like a lot of father and son relationships nowadays. You hope there's love there but often that love is unclear. That's what parenting is like, but there is a massive love

between them and it's all very moving.

♦Philippe's acceptance of Matthew and Diana's relationship is important, what do you think?

Philippe's acceptance of Diana is huge as not only is he from 1590, he also takes a step back, he's a father figure for him. After a while, he does start to twig that this is not the time they're from as he does not recognise Matthew as the son he once knew. It's hugely important in the story that he takes to Diana.

♦What does the addition of historical characters bring to the show?

They add that extra layer of history, which is rather wonderful. It gives it great historical context. I think the way Barbara (Marlene) plays Elizabeth I in this is fantastic. She plays her without vanity and is slightly in love with Matthew. Probably my favourite portrayal of Elizabeth — up there with (Cate) Blanchett.

♦What's it been like having Teresa back?

The show doesn't work without her. Teresa is the shows beating heart. She's my best bud on this and we spend all our time together. If anything happened to her and you're said they're going to bring another actor in, it wouldn't work! It's one big travelling caravan of Australian/American love. She came back with the fire to push her character and it's made a big difference.

♦Season one is set in modern day and season two is largely a period piece, what's it like to take the show from one period to another?

Everything takes a fraction longer as inaccuracies are not as forgivable. Any period drama does, be it by the costume or the hair. Working on James North's sets transports you as an actor. If those elements weren't nailed, I wouldn't have been able to slip into character as easily. Apart from that, you're also just trying to get your lines and movement right.

(Season two is streaming on SonyLIV.)

Shahrukh steers PBKS to 106

Deepak Chahar's four-wicket spell dismantle Punjab, which couldn't recover from that

quoteunquote

I THINK IT WAS MORE SEAM THAN SWING AND WE BOWLED IN THE RIGHT AREAS. WE GOT SOME TIME TO PREPARE AND THINGS WENT OUR WAY AS WE EXECUTED WELL

Deepak Chahar, CSK pacer

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Deepak Chahar's superb opening spell stood out as Chennai Super Kings restricted Punjab Kings to a below-par 106 for eight here on Friday. Tamil Nadu's pace bowler M Shahrukh Khan was the only Punjab batsman to make an impression, with a 36-ball 47 (4x4s, 2x6s) before falling to Sam Curran in the final over as CSK was all over their opponent.

Sam Curran (1/12), Moeen Ali (1/17), Dwayne Bravo (1/10) were the other wicket-takers for CSK.

Aiming to bounce back after being outclassed by Delhi Capitals in their opening match, CSK bowlers justified skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni's decision to bowl first by reducing Punjab to 26 for four in the powerplay.

Chahar engineered the Punjab slide in the very first over by sending back Mayank Agarwal (0) with a beauty which nipped away from middle stump to hit the off stump. Chahar kept up the pressure and increased PBKS's woes with his consistency and conceded only two fours in his four-over spell.

In-form Punjab skipper K.L.Rahul (5) was run-out by a brilliant direct throw from Ravindra Jadeja fielding at short-cover as the batsman tried to scramble for a single.



Chennai Super Kings pacer Deepak Chahar celebrates with skipper MS Dhoni and teammate Suresh Raina after Punjab Kings captain KL Rahul's wicket

| SCOREBOARD | |
|---|----------|
| PUNJAB KINGS | |
| KL Rahul run out (Ravindra Jadeja) | 5 |
| Mayank Agarwal b D Chahar | 0 |
| Chris Gayle c R Jadeja b D Chahar | 10 |
| Deepak Hooda c du Plessis b D Chahar | 10 |
| Nicholas Pooran c Trekar b D Chahar | 0 |
| Shahrukh Khan c R Jadeja b Sam Curran | 47 |
| Ulyne Richardson b Moeen | 15 |
| Murugan Ashwin c du Plessis b D Bravo | 6 |
| Mohammed Shami not out | 9 |
| Riley Meredith not out | 0 |
| Extras (b 0, lb 0, w 4, nb 0, p 0) | 4 |
| Total (8 wickets, 20 Overs) | 106 |
| Did not bat: Arshdeep Singh | |
| Fall of Wickets: 1-1 (Mayank Agarwal, 0.4), 15-2 (KL Rahul, 2.5), 19-3 (Chris Gayle, 4.2), 19-4 (Nicholas Pooran, 4.4), 26-5 (Deepak Hooda, 6.2), 57-6 (Ulyne Richardson, 12.1), 67-7 (Murugan Ashwin, 16.5), 101-8 (Shahrukh Khan, 19.1) | |
| Bowling | |
| Deepak Chahar | 4-1-13-4 |
| Sam Curran | 3-0-12-1 |
| Shardul Thakur | 4-0-35-0 |
| Ravindra Jadeja | 4-0-19-0 |
| Moeen Ali | 3-0-17-1 |
| Dwayne Bravo | 2-0-10-1 |

Dhoni plays 200th match for Chennai

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chennai Super Kings skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni on Friday played his 200th match for the Men in Yellow when he took to the field against Punjab Kings at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. Dhoni has led the franchise in all but one game (2012 Champions League T20) when he has been part of the XI. Virat Kohli has played 209 T20 matches for RCB.

Dhoni has made 176 appearances for CSK in the IPL besides having 24 outings for the side in the Champions League T20 tournament in the past. The



CSK congratulate MS Dhoni on his 200th game

former India captain also represented Rising Pune Supergiant in 30 IPL matches in the 2016-17 seasons.

Dhoni, who has led the Super Kings to three IPL titles, is eighth on the all-time IPL batting charts with 4,632 runs (4,058 for CSK) at an average of 40.63 and a strike rate of 136.67.

In his 24 CL T20 appearances, Dhoni has amassed 449 runs with one fifty while leading CSK to two titles, in 2010 and 2014. The 39-year-old veteran also holds the record of most sixes among Indians in the IPL with 216, while being the most successful wicket-keeper with 148 dismissals.

SRH search right combo 'Rahul is MI's wicket-taking bowler'

KEY PLAYERS



SURYAKUMAR YADAV
SKY has performed well in the last three seasons for MI and he'll be eager to make a big time too



RASHID KHAN
He is arguably the best T20 bowler at present and his performance will be crucial for Sunrisers success

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Getting the combination right would be top-most on Sunrisers Hyderabad's to-do list when they take on a qualitatively superior Mumbai Indians in an IPL encounter at Chepauk on Saturday, trying to arrest an early slide after back-to-back defeats.

To make matters worse, the nature of the Chennai track is not great news for the David Warner-led Orange Army that failed to chase down a total which was less than 150.

Chasing has been Sunrisers' Achilles' heel during the first two matches, once again bringing under scanner their lack of depth in the playing XI and below-par Indian bench strength.

In these circumstances, facing a formidable team like Mumbai Indians, fresh from their Houdini Act against Kolkata Knight Riders, would be a difficult proposition.

For skipper Warner, there are some serious questions about the choice of the playing XI, which many believe hasn't been well thought out and the results also back that assessment.

Using two wicketkeepers — Jonny Bairstow and Wriddhiman Saha — in the same XI hasn't served any tangible purpose with the veteran Indian looking completely out of sorts as an opener.

With a seasoned man like Kedar Jadhav in the dug-out, along with two talented youngsters Priyam Gang and Abhishek Sharma, Saha is on borrowed time as far as his place in the side is concerned.

With only Warner and Rashid Khan being certainties among the overseas players, a fit Kane Williamson is a must for SRH, factoring in his prowess against spin bowling.

The manner in which the likes of Manish Pandey and Abdul Samad played cross-batted shots against RCB left-arm spinner Shahbaz Ahmed led Warner far from amused.

The other issue has been team's

VENUE: CHIDAMBARAM STADIUM, CHENNAI

HEAD TO HEAD

| Matches | 16 |
|---------------------|----|
| Mumbai Indians | 08 |
| Sunrisers Hyderabad | 08 |

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

Mumbai Indians beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by 34 runs in Sharjah

Sunrisers Hyderabad defeated Mumbai Indians by 10 wickets in Sharjah

48

Krunal Pandya who took 48 wickets at an average of 32.20 in 71 innings of 73 matches, needs two wickets to become the sixth bowler to complete a fifty of wickets for Mumbai Indians in IPL

196

David Warner who smashed 196 sixes in 144 innings of as many matches, needs four more sixes to become sixth batsman to complete a double century of sixes in IPL

Faizel Features

bowling with T Natarajan not in the kind of form he was last season and Bhuvneshwar Kumar also on the expensive side. It is unlikely that MI will tinker with their playing XI and more so after winning a thriller against KKR. However, they would like to put up a better account of their batting.

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Mumbai Indians bowling coach Shane Bond on Friday praised the team's leg-spinner Rahul Chahar, saying the 21-year-old is a wicket-taking bowler and his role never changes in the star-studded team.

Chahar, who has played 3 T20s for India, returned with match-winning figures of 4/27 in a low-scoring thriller against Kolkata on Tuesday.

"He is doing extremely well, if you look at Rahul (Chahar), he is still young, who has played a fair-bit of cricket and now some high-pressure cricket, and (in) finals and a key member of our team, so in terms of his development, I still think he is got a long way to go," Bond said ahead of the game against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

"He (Rahul) is a good listener and is keen to get out there and implement it in the game and hope that will continue over the next few years," said 42-year-old Bond, who played 18 Tests and 82 ODIs for New Zealand.

According to Bond, Chahar's role in the team never changes and the side wants him to bowl wicket-taking deliveries.

"We have got some outstanding strike bowlers to play in the power-play, Trent Boult, Boons (Jasprit Bumrah), and whoever compliments them, Krunal Pandya who is brilliant for us in the last game, probably so in terms of his defensive bowler."

► **shortpasses**
COLEMAN'S SUSPENSION CUT
GENEVA: World 100m champion Christian Coleman's two-year ban for missing three doping tests has been reduced by six months to 18 months, the Court of Arbitration for Sport said on Friday. But the American will still miss the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics this year as his ban runs until November 14.

► **TSITSIPAS IN MONTE CARLO SF**
MONACO: Stefanos Tsitsipas advanced to the semi-finals of the Monte Carlo Masters on Friday when his quarter-final opponent Alejandro Davidovich withdrew after losing the first set 7-5.

► **ARUNDHATI, CHANU IN QF**
NEW DELHI: Khelo India Games Gold-medallist Arundhati Choudhary (69kg) and Babyrojsana Chanu (51kg) advanced to the quarterfinals, while three others — Akshai Gorkha (60kg), Sumit (69kg) and Gitaika (48kg) also qualified up opening-round wins at the youth world championships for men and women in Kielce, Poland.

► **HARMAN RECOVERS FROM VIRUS**
NEW DELHI: Indian women's T20 captain Harmanpreet Kaur on Friday announced that she has recovered from Covid-19. She had tested positive and made it public on March 30. After more than two weeks, her RT-PCR report has come negative.



OTHER SPORT

Maiden Asian Gold for Vinesh & Anshu



PTI ■ ALMATY

Dominating the proceedings in a depleted field, Olympic wrestlers Vinesh Phogat and Pooja (76kg) settled for Bronze medals on Thursday.

Young Seema Bisla (50kg) unfortunately could not compete due to an injury. She had bagged Olympic quota along with Anshu recently.

Japanese rivals as she cruised to the title without losing a point in the 53kg category.

Vinesh has notched up seven podium finishes at the Asian meet over the years, including three Silver medals before this edition.

Also standing on top of the podium was Divya Kakran (72kg) while Sakshi Malik (65kg) settled for a Silver medal, a performance which should boost her confidence after enduring a long wretched run.

India has a rich haul of seven medals from the women's event as the country won four Gold, a Silver and two Bronze medals in this edition.

Sarita Mor (59kg) had won Gold while Seema Bisla (50kg) and Pooja (76kg) settled for Bronze medals on Thursday.

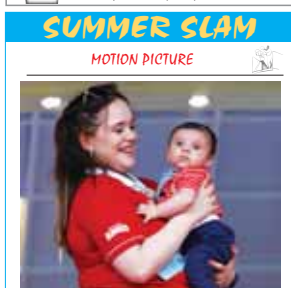
Young Seema Bisla (50kg) unfortunately could not compete due to an injury. She had bagged Olympic quota along with Anshu recently.

Pak win T20 series

AFP ■ CENTURION

Pakistan beat South Africa by three wickets in the fourth and final T20 on Friday to win four-match series 3-1. Chasing the target of 145, Mohammad Nawaz finished the game with a six on the penultimate ball of Lizaad Williams' final over of the match. He remained not out on 25 and took his side home which looked to have lost its way in the middle after Fakhar Zaman's (60) wicket in the 10th over of run chase. From 92-1 in 9.1 overs, the tourists were reduced to 129-7 in 18.2 overs, but ice cool Nawaz turned the tide in Sisanda Magala's 19th over to keep Pakistan in fray. Earlier, medium-pace bowler Faheem Ashraf sparked a South African collapse at SuperSport Park in Centurion. Faheem took three for 17 as South Africa, who were put into bat after losing the toss, were bowled out for 144 on what is usually a high-scoring ground. Rassie van der Dussen top-scored for South Africa with 52 off 36 balls.

| boundarymeter | |
|------------------------|-----|
| 4s | 230 |
| 6s | 89 |
| PLAYERS | |
| 1. Nitish Rana (KKR) | 137 |
| 2. Sanju Samson (RR) | 123 |
| 3. Manish Pandey (SRH) | 99 |
| PLAYERS | |
| 1. Harshal Patel (RCB) | 7 |
| 2. Andre Russell (KKR) | 6 |
| 3. Avesh Khan (DC) | 5 |
| MOST SIXES | |
| 1. Sanju Samson (RR) | 7 |
| 2. Nitish Rana (KKR) | 6 |
| 3. Deepak Hooda (PBKS) | 6 |



Punjab Kings batsman Mandeep Singh's wife Jagdeep Jaswal and child Rajveer Singh in stands during IPL game between Punjab Kings and Chennai Super Kings in Mumbai

NORTJE OUT OF QUARANTINE

DC pacer Anrich Nortje on Friday came out of his hard quarantine that was extended by a couple of days following a false Covid-19 positive report. The Proteas speedster had tested positive for Covid-19 while in quarantine but was retested and came out negative in three RT-PCR results. "It's nice to be out of the room and see everyone at breakfast. Excited to get to training today," Nortje said in a video posted by the franchise.

KANE HOPING TO BE FIT WITHIN A WEEK









Kiwi batsman Kane Williamson, who missed SRH's first two matches due to an elbow injury, is recovering well and is expected to attain full match-fitness "within a week". Kane suffered a small tear in his left elbow tendon and was ruled out of the home series against B'desh in March ahead of IPL. However, the NZ captain on Friday said his "recovery is going really well".

ISHANT SUFFERING FROM HEEL NIGGLE

DC head coach Ricky Ponting has revealed that experienced pacer Ishant Sharma, who missed his team's first two IPL matches, is suffering from a heel niggle. "Coming into the first game, Ishant Sharma obviously had a heel niggle that we have been trying to work through," Ponting said on Thursday night.

STOKES OUT FOR UP TO 12 WEEKS

England all-rounder Ben Stokes will be out of action for "up to 12 weeks" as his fractured left index finger will require surgery that will take place in Leeds on Monday. A repeat X-ray and CT scan revealed that the 29-year-old has a fracture in his left index finger. Stokes, who is currently in Mumbai will fly home on Saturday.

| POINTS TABLE | | | | | | |
|--------------|--|---|---|---|--------|-----|
| | | P | W | L | NRR | PTS |
| 1 |  RCB | 2 | 2 | 0 | +0.175 | 4 |
| 2 |  MI | 2 | 1 | 1 | +0.225 | 2 |
| 3 |  PBKS | 1 | 1 | 0 | +0.200 | 2 |
| 4 |  DC | 2 | 1 | 1 | +0.195 | 2 |
| 5 |  RR | 2 | 1 | 1 | +0.052 | 2 |
| 6 |  KKR | 2 | 1 | 1 | +0.000 | 0 |
| 7 |  SRH | 2 | 0 | 2 | -0.400 | 0 |
| 8 |  CSK | 1 | 0 | 1 | -0.779 | 0 |