

OPINION 6
INDIA'S FLAMING
FORESTS PLAY HAVOC

WORLD 8
MYANMAR COUP FOES TOUT
MINORITY-BACKED SHADOW GOVT

SPORT 12
STOKES OUT
FOR 12 WEEKS

RANCHI, SATURDAY APRIL 17, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



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Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

*Late City Vol. 14 Issue 103
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

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, or 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



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 weeks.

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.

CICSE defers Class X, XII Board exams

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) 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, CISCE'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.

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)

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.



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

Necessary awareness 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.

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 transmission.

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.

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 process to collect dues for pending challans in cash in view of a surge in Covid-19 cases here, officials said on Friday.

Covid situation in State: All party meeting today

CM TO CHAIR VIRTUAL MEETING

PNS ■ RANCHI

Chief Minister Hemant Soren has convened an all-party meeting at 6.30 pm on April 17 in view of the increasing case of corona infection in the State.

This meeting will take place through virtual medium. In this connection, the Chief Minister's office is informing the presidents of all the political parties of the state and they will be provided the link by tomorrow afternoon to participate in this virtual meeting.

The CM has convened an all-party meeting to discuss and take suggestions from all political parties on the fast growing corona infection in the State.

In this meeting, the Government will take any further decision based on the suggestions given by the political parties regarding the pre-



vention and rescue of corona.

It is to be known that the Chief Minister is constantly monitoring the corona infection in Jharkhand and is making constant efforts towards controlling it.

In this regard, the CM has already started to speed up the investigation of Covid-19 and to better treat the infected in hospitals. Many instructions have been given.

The CM has said that saving the lives of infected patients is the first priority and for this the government is taking all necessary steps. He has also said that due to Corona, many more

stringent steps will be taken to control the situation soon.

The CM on Thursday had directed the Health Department to buy two machines of Cobas Company to expedite the Covid-19 (RTPCR) tests. A unit of COBAS machine can test 1400 RTPCR samples every day. One machine will be installed in Ranchi and one machine in Dumka.

Also, the CM directed the departmental officials to establish 6 new RTPCR laboratories in the State.

These laboratories will be established in Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Bokaro, Chaibasa, Gumla and Sahebganj. It was also decided to setup 110 new ICU beds in RIMS Ranchi as well as reserve 750 Covid-19 dedicated beds in RIMS.

In view of the increasing pressure of corona infection in Ranchi, the Chief Minister directed to reserve 150 bedded hospital of CCL established in Ramgarh district for dedicated Covid-19 patients.



main vaccine manufacturers in India to get their inputs on how production can be ramped up. There have been extensive reviews and feasibility studies on the plans being discussed with vaccine manufacturers.

"As a part of this augmentation plan, capacities of Bharat Biotech Limited, Hyderabad as well as other public sector manufacturers are being upgraded with required infrastructure and technology. Financial support is being provided as a grant from the Government to the tune of appx ₹65 cr to Bharat Biotech's new Bangalore facility which is being repurposed to increase the capacity of vaccine production," the statement added.

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

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 —

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

prevalence of 10 per cent in India, a finding that some scientists here said is based on insufficient data and needs more research.

56 die, 3,843 new cases surface in J'khand

Active caseload over 23K in State

PNS ■ RANCHI

Covid-19 fresh cases and daily deaths touched a new high in State on Friday as 3,843 new Covid patients were found in Jharkhand in last 24 hours and minimum of 56 persons lost their lives battling the disease on Friday.

The Covid tally in Jharkhand crossed the 1.51 lakh mark, while the active caseload jumped above 23,000 on Thursday as the State reported close to 3,900 Covid cases in 24 hours, figures compiled by the National Health Mission (NHM) highlighted.

The 56 deaths reported on Friday tested swab samples of 33,062 Jharkhand residents and over 10 per cent of them were found infected.

while 16 deceased were from Ranchi. East Singhbhum reported 13 deaths on the day and Bokaro reported four.

Ranchi continued to report the highest share of Covid cases among the 24 districts on Friday as well. As per NHM data, as many as 1,372 fresh cases in the district took the active caseload here to 9,416. Ranchi accounts for around 40 per cent of the 23,045 active cases in the State.

Meanwhile, East Singhbhum also reported 709 cases against 171 recoveries on the day. The active caseload there reached 3,038 on the day.

The Government on Friday tested swab samples of 33,062 Jharkhand residents and over 10 per cent of them were found infected.

So far, as many as 1,55,115 people have been infected by the mysterious virus in Jharkhand and 85.47 per cent



of them have recovered, reveals Government data.

In the past couple of weeks, the growth rate of infection has seen a spike while the doubling rate has dropped in Jharkhand.

On Thursday, the growth rate of infection in Jharkhand was 1.78 per cent against the

national average of 0.96 per cent. The doubling rate in the state was 39.27 days against the national doubling rate of 72.17 days.

Meanwhile, the State on Friday administered the first dose of vaccine against Covid-19 to as many as 29,483 people,

A medic collects swab samples from a person for Covid-19 test at Sainik Market in Ranchi on Friday
Vinay Murmu / Pioneer

about 41 per cent of those registered. The second dose was administered to as many as 6,816 people, only 3 per cent of the over 2.93 lakh registered for the jab on the day.

Oraon rules out possibility of lockdown in State

Minister assures relief to people fighting infection

PNS ■ RANCHI/LOHARDAGA

State Finance and Food and Civic Supplies minister Rameshwar Oraon has ruled out the possibility of imposing lockdown in Jharkhand right now. Oraon said that in Jharkhand there is no such situation of putting a lockdown in right now. He said there is a need for increasing strictness regarding the conditions arising out of the infection. The Finance Minister was in his constituency Lohardaga on Friday.

The minister along with senior officials had a meeting reviewing the situation in the

district. Oraon emphasized on protecting life and livelihood, along with taking stock of situations arising out of Covid-19 infection in Lohardaga district. He said this year the Government has set up two Isolation ward at Referral Hospital, facilities for 18 ventilators, also a bed equipped with 80 oxygen facilities is provided to the district.

The minister also said that today a decision was taken to purchase 25 oxygen cylinders. The 100 bed isolation centre at Kasturba Gandhi Residential School and 40 bed Hospital at Chiri will be functional in a day or two. In the meeting the officials informed that in the district, there are currently 220 active cases. The minister also announced to provide Rs 5 lakh from his MLA fund, to deal with corona infection. By this



Finance Minister Rameshwar Oraon alongwith senior officials during a meeting in Lohardaga on Friday

fund, oxygen cylinders and additional beds will be provided.

Speaking to reporters after a high-level review meeting in Lohardaga, he said that there is not a situation like full lockdown right now; he said last year there was complete lockdown bringing all economic activities to standstill, which leads to unemployment and

loss of jobs. Oraon said that the Deputy Commissioner informed him that migrants from the big cities are returning, they need

to be monitored. Their corona test is to be done and if they are found infected then they have to be kept at isolation centres. He said that the health department is on alert mode and vigilant of the situation.

Regarding providing employment to people under rural jobs, the minister said that in this regard, he will talk to the Minister of Rural Development.

Regarding the Madhupur Assembly bye-election, the State Congress president said that voting is going to be held on Saturday, but the result is already out, in Madhupur. The victory of the coalition candidate is certain. It may be noted that Oraon along with his team had camped in Madhupur for a week campaigning for JMM candidate Hafizul Hassan Ansari.

INBRIEF

BALAMDINA EKKA PASSES AWAY

Balamdina Ekka, wife of Paramveer Albert Ekka, who gave supreme sacrifice for the country in the India-Pakistan war in 1971, took her last breath on Friday. Ekka was fighting ailments in a hospital for a few days. Chief Minister Hemant Soren expressed deep grief over the demise of Balmidina Ekka, the wife of Paramveer Albert Ekka. The Chief Minister has prayed to God to give peace to his soul and the bereaved family to the power to bear this hour of grief.



MUMBAI-SAMSTIPUR TARAIN 4 TIMES IN WEEK

Keeping in view the convenience of passengers, it has now been decided to operate 09049/09050 Mumbai Central-Samastipur-Mumbai Central Special Train between Mumbai Central and Samastipur for four days instead of one day a week. It may be noted that as per earlier decision, the operation of this special train was scheduled from Mumbai Central to Samastipur on 15, 22 and 29 April and from Samastipur to Mumbai on 17, 24 April and 01 May 2021. But considering the long waiting list, now this special train will be operated 04 days instead of 01 day in a week. All coaches in this train are of reserved category and passengers traveling in it will have to follow the standards of Covid-19.



Muslims offering first Jumma prayers in front of a mosque in Ranchi on Friday

Vinay Murmu | Pioneer

Bar Council decides to close down Bar buildings in State

PNS ■ RANCHI

With rise in Covid 19 cases in the State particularly in Ranchi in past few weeks, the Jharkhand State Bar Council has decided to close down all Bar buildings in the State. The Jharkhand State Bar Council decided to take action in this connection today.

The chairman, secretary of all the district and subdivision bar associations of the state has been informed of this decision.

The letter issued under the signature of Secretary of Bar Council, Rajesh Pandey states that the decision has been taken for the purpose of breaking the chain of corona infection. The letter says that no lawyer, his co-workers and any person will be allowed to enter the bar buildings. No one will be allowed to stand around the bar building.

Council has advised lawyers not to physically appear before any court for hearing. Advocates have been urged to cooperate in compliance with these

decisions.

The decision has been taken after the Ranchi District Bar Association building witnessed several corona cases in past few days. On Thursday senior advocate and octogenarian Banshi Prasad died due to corona infection. Banshi Prasad popularly known as Banshi Babu was admitted at Raj Hospital where he breathed his last.

Meanwhile, the lawyers have welcomed the decision of the State Bar Council to close down bar buildings. An advocate of Ranchi District Bar Association requesting anonymity said, "The Bar Bhawan is the place where large numbers of lawyers sit. The presence of a large number of lawyers is a great risk in spread of infection, the situation becomes more troublesome due to the presence of clients at Bar Bhawan. As clients reach Bar Bhawan across the state there are high chances of spread of infection."

Here, the hearing of flat registration and other promises before the



File photo of Bar Council building at Ranchi Civil Court

Municipal Commissioner, Additional Municipal Commissioner, Deputy Municipal Commissioner-1 and 2 in the Ranchi Municipal Corporation has been postponed till April 30. In the

order issued by the Municipal Commissioner, it has been said that this decision has been taken in view of the increasing cases of Corona.

Meanwhile, Jharkhand's Covid-19 death toll went up to 1,292 after a record number of 31 fresh fatalities were reported during the last 24 hours, the health department said in a bulletin on Thursday.

Altogether 3,198 new infections also pushed the caseload of the state to 1,47,792. Jharkhand currently has 18,524 active cases. Altogether 1,27,976 patients have recovered from the disease so far.

The Bar Council decision to close Bar Building assumes importance as in January this year, after nine months the Jharkhand High Court decided to allow the full capacity physical functioning of courts including the High Court and subordinate courts along with an option of virtual hearing while following the standard operating procedure (Covid 19 guidelines).

Doctors must help in war like situation: DC

DC holds meeting with doctors posted at Dist Covid Hospital



PNS ■ RANCHI

Ranchi DC Chhavi Ranjan holds a meeting senior Doctors in Ranchi on Friday

Ratan Lal | Pioneer

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 from all the doctors is required. There is an appeal to all doctors to try to give their best from their level, especially in Covid Hospital, deputized doctors should apply extra effort," he said while holding a meeting with deputized doctors at District Covid Hospital.

Deputy Development Commissioner Ranchi, Sub-Divisional Officer Ranchi Sadar, deputized 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 deputized in the district Covid Hospital Sadar are absent without official permission. A case will be registered for negligence in duty during the pandemic and the license of the concerned doctor can also be canceled. He said that the district administration should not be compelled to take action.

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 reached Jagannath Hospital on Friday. They took stock of the arrangement of beds etc for the treatment of corona infected patients. The DC also reviewed the emer-

gency, 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, temps and e-rickshaws with no Mask No Entry, no mask, no entry, no mask or no travel etc.

The DTO present on the spot instructed all the drivers to drive according to the Covid-19 protocol. He instructed not to drive without a mask and not to seat any passenger in his vehicle without a mask and asked the passengers to sit in the car in the fixed number.

Polling for Madhupur bypoll today

Six candidates in fray in the bye-election

PNS ■ RANCHI

The high-pitched election campaigns at Madhupur Assembly constituency for the April 17 bypoll ended on Thursday evening with both JMM and BJP remaining optimistic about their victory. As many as 3.22 lakh voters will exercise their franchise across 487 polling centres across the constituency on Saturday.

Though there are six candidates in fray, the main contest is between JMM candidate and minority affairs minister Hafizul Hassan and BJP's Ganga Narayan.

Meanwhile, the Deoghar district administration has made all elaborate arrangements for smooth conduct of poll. Deoghar Deputy Commissioner, Manjunath Bhanjantri said, "The Deoghar district administration has made all arrangements for smooth conduct of election. On Friday various polling parties were sent to their polling stations."

Bhanjantri also said, "As the election is held during corona protocol extra precautions have been made. The polling teams sent for conducting elections have been asked to maintain all corona protocols such as wearing masks, use of sanitizers, social distancing and other measures have been asked by the polling team to maintain."

Also, Deoghar Superintendent of Police (SP) Ashwini Kumar Sinha said, "The Deoghar district administration has made full proof arrangements for conducting elections. Apart from Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB), district police, home guard jawans and SAF will be deployed at all police stations." Sinha said that the security forces have been directed to ensure peaceful election.

The Madhupur bypoll has become a prestige issue for both JMM/Congress alliance government and opposition (BJP).



Deoghar DC Manjunath Bhanjantri and SP Ashwini Kumar Sinha hold a meeting ahead of the Madhupur bypoll in Deoghar on Friday

Pioneer photo

Chief Minister Hemant Soren who left for Ranchi on Thursday had camped in Madhupur for six days and had addressed five public meetings at different parts of constituency.

Apart from Soren, the JMM/Congress/RJD formed a committee comprising senior leaders from all three parties in the committee. State finance minister Rameshwar Oraon also camped in Madhupur along with his team.

Meanwhile, BJP's top guns, including its state president Deepak Prakash, BJP legislative party leader Babul Marandi, former chief minister Raghubar Das and others took the campaign of BJP candidate Ganga Narayan Singh.

The BJP leaders during the campaign criticized the state government failure in meeting poll promises. The BJP has also taken Chief Minister Soren giving extra time to Madhupur during the corona pandemic due to JMM/Congress government nervousness and fear of defeat in bypoll.

The Madhupur seat in Deoghar district of Santhal Pargana having sizeable Muslim population has been represented by both BJP and JMM on earlier occasions. In 2005, the seat was represented by Paliwar of BJP. However, in 2009 the seat went to JMM with Haji Hussain Ansari winning the seat. However, in 2014, the BJP once again won the seat, while in 2019 the seat was wrested by JMM Ansari.

State BJP to run relief work in pandemic

Central Govt is with the people of the State: Prakash

Ranchi: In view of the increasing cases of Covid-19, a virtual meeting of the state office bearers, district heads, MLAs and MPs of the Bharatiya Janata Party was conducted on Friday. Presiding over the meeting, state president cum MP Deepak Prakash said that due to the negligence and indifference of State government, the Corona infection is taking a frightening form. Instead of providing health facilities, the State government is hiding its failure. It is time to fight this battle together and conquer it, he said.

He said that in view of the situation in the State, he discussed with the ministers of Central Government, DV Sadanand Gowda, Union Minister (Chemicals and Fertilizers), Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. The Union Ministers assured that the Central Government stands with the people of Jharkhand. There will not be any lack of oxygen, medicine or vaccine here. Remdac is also ready to be replenished, for this the initiative is yet to be taken by the State government. Along with this, he told that he has also appealed to increase health facility by talking to CCL and BCCL.

Party officials, MLAs and MPs also gave their views on the meeting regarding the rising cases of Corona. Hearing the views of all, State President Deepak Prakash said that the party will conduct a special campaign as soon as possible. The party will expand in a big way to the basic mantra of Bharatiya Janata Party and Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, "Service is organization".

Legislature party leader Babul Marandi, who was present in the meeting, said that they are constantly talking to the Union Minister to the State officials about the condition of Jharkhand. He informed that the Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan has also promised to help a lot.

He said that many workers of the Bharatiya Janata Party have engaged in



State BJP President Deepak Prakash holds meeting with party MLAs online at BJP office in Ranchi on Friday

Ratan Lal | Pioneer

service work from their own level.

Also, Organization Secretary Dharampal Singh, present in the meeting, urged all the district presidents and divisional presidents, MLAs and MPs of the party to extend their helping hand in this transition period by exceeding their level.

The meeting was moderated by State Secretary Subodh Singh Guddu and State General Secretary Kajal Pradhan's vote of thanks. The meeting was mainly attended by state general secretaries Pradeep Verma, MP BD Ram, Vidyut Varan Mahato, Sudarshan Bhagat, PN Singh, MLA Manish Jaiswal, Samri Lal, Kedar Hazra, Jai Prakash Bhai Patel, Naveen Jaiswal, Bhanu Pratap Shahi, Kisun Das, Koache Munda, Raj Sinha, Raj Palivar, Prem Mittal, Anwar Hayat, Rajshri Jayanti, Kishalya Tiwari, Aarti Kujur, Suraj Chaurasia, Avinesh Kumar Singh, Shiv Shankar Oraon, Bharat Yadav, Anoop Adhikari, Surendra Mahato, Ram Daras Yadav, Vijay Nand Pathak, Om Prakash Keshari, Ashok Yadav, Nitesh Chandravanshi, Harikrishna Singh, Chandrashekhar Singh, Ashok Sharma, District President of all the districts, state officials, MLAs and MPs gave their views and participated in the meeting.

Ranchi MP to make available food for 'helpless' Covid patients

PNS ■ RANCHI

Amid ever increasing cases of Covid-19, Ranchi MP Sanjay Seth has taken a unique initiative for people infected with corona living in Ranchi city. Member of Parliament Seth has decided that he will try to provide free food to the corona infected people, who do not have anyone to help.

Giving information about this, Seth said that such residents of Ranchi, who are infected and have no one to help, whether elderly, working women and men, students; they have decided to take food to the needy persons' house from this Sunday. For this, complete information has to be given on WhatsApp number.

Seth said that the concerned per-



sons will have to provide their Covid

positive report, full address and mobile number. "Our co-workers will work to provide food to the needy persons for 14 days or till their reports are negative. One has to use only one number to send information for this," he said.

The Ranchi MP said that a large number of people in Ranchi are living as bachelors for jobs and work and are helpless. Such people have also been reported to be infected with corona. In addition, such elderly couples are also infected with Corona, who do not have anyone to take care of them in the house. The biggest crisis is the food crisis in front of such people.

"We have decided with our team to provide nutritious food to these people, including milk and fruits. They will be provided with two meals, which will be

delivered to their house before noon. For this, the concerned people will have to inform within the time limit," he said.

Seth urged everyone to be patient. Be restrained. "If there is a common symptom, quarantine yourself at home. Do not panic unnecessarily. It is true that Ranchi's situation has deteriorated slightly, but we all have to fight it out with patience. The plan to provide food will continue till the corona infection subsides or becomes normal. He also urged everyone that this number has been issued only for the purpose of providing food to the needy, so these numbers should be contacted for this purpose only. Needy people can whatsapp on these numbers from Sunday for food: 09431352397, 06203009003, 09835718119."



A health worker being administered the COVID-19 vaccine, in Ranchi on Friday

Ratan Lal | Pioneer

Former CBI chief Ranjit Sinha dies of Covid-19



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former CBI Director Ranjit Sinha died here on Friday morning reportedly due to Covid-19.

Sinha, 68, was confirmed positive for novel coronavirus infection on Thursday night and succumbed to the disease early on Friday, officials said.

An IPS officer of the 1974-batch (Bihar cadre), Sinha took over as the Director of CBI on December 3, 2012 and retired on December 2, 2014. He was the 26th Director of CBI after its formation in 1963.

Prior to joining as Director, CBI, Sinha was Director General of ITBP. He had earlier held several important positions in CBI including the post of Joint Director and DIG. Sinha served as Superintendent of Police of Madhubani, Saharsa and Railway (Patna). He had also served as DIG, Magadh Range, Gaya. He had served in CRPF as Inspector General (Operations) at Srinagar, IG (Personnel) at Directorate General and ADG in ITBP.

Sinha, a Post Graduate in Science from Patna University, had an M.Phil from IIPA, New Delhi and a Diploma in HR Management from Wollongong University, Australia. He was decorated with the Police Medal for Meritorious Service in 1991

Ensure smooth passage to vehicles carrying oxygen: Centre tells States

Centre takes stock of Covid status in UP, Chhattisgarh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Friday directed the States to ensure uninterrupted movement of medical oxygen carrying vehicles along their borders, and said they must not impose any curb on production and supply of the essential public health commodity anywhere. Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla's communication to chief secretaries of all States and Union Territories came in the wake of reports of shortage of the medical oxygen for Covid-19 patients in different parts of the country in the last few days.

The Home Secretary along with his Health counterpart Rajesh Bhushan chaired high-level meetings to review status of Covid-19 in Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh and the public health measures taken for containment and management of Covid-19 by the State health authorities. Dr V K Paul, Member (Health), NITI



Aayog, Dr. Balram Bhargava, DG ICMR, Dr (Prof) Sunil Kumar, DGHS were also present along with Chief Secretaries, DGs of State Police and Health Secretaries of both States.

"Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh along with Maharashtra are the only three States in the country which have more than one lakh active cases. Both Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh are reporting very high number of daily new Covid-19 cases and high deaths caused by Covid-19. Chhattisgarh has reported nearly 6.2% increase in weekly new Covid cases based on

7 day moving average. In last two weeks, the State has seen almost 131% increase in weekly new cases. 22 districts in Chhattisgarh have crossed their reported highest cases in the last 30 days; Raipur, Durg, Rajnandgaon and Bilaspur are the most affected districts. In contrast to the week 17th-23rd March 2021, in the week of 7th-13th April 2021, RT-PCR tests have decreased to 28% (from 34%) while the Antigen Tests have increased to 62% (from 53%).

"Uttar Pradesh has reported a growth rate of 19.25% in daily new cases. 46 districts in Uttar Pradesh have crossed their reported highest cases in

the last 30 days; Lucknow, Kanpur, Varanasi and Prayagraj are the most affected districts. In contrast to the week 17th-23rd March 2021, in the week of 7th-13th April 2021, RT-PCR tests have decreased to 46% (from 48%) while Antigen tests have increased to 53% (from 51%)," said the Home Ministry in a statement.

The Home Secretary emphasised that medical oxygen is an essential public health commodity and any impediment in its supply in the country may critically impact the management of patients suffering from COVID-19 disease in other parts of the country. "Therefore, you are requested to ensure that no such restriction is imposed on the movement of medical oxygen between the states and UTs, and transport authorities shall be instructed to accordingly allow free inter-state movement of oxygen carrying vehicles," the letter said.

Bhalla told the states that no curb shall be imposed on oxygen manufacturers and suppliers to limit the oxygen supplies only to the hospitals of the state in which they are located and there shall be free movement of oxygen carrying vehicles into the cities, without any restriction of timings, while also enabling inter-city supply without restriction.

India may witness 2,320 Covid deaths per day by June: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India may witness 1,750 coronavirus-related deaths per day, surging to around 2,320 daily by the first week of June while in financial terms, the country may need to expend over \$7.8 billion on testing and \$1.7 billion on healthcare usage because of infections by September 2021, according to a report of the Lancet Covid-19 Commission by India Task Force members.

The report, titled "Managing India's second COVID-19 wave: Urgent steps", underlines the key elements of the second COVID-19 wave. It also suggests measures like ramping up vaccine production, vaccination to the needy, quarantine and ban on assembly of groups of over 10 that should be taken to help mitigate the spread of infection.

As per the preliminary review of the report, "while the pandemic has spread, the geographic contours of the second wave closely mirror those of the first wave, though with a deeper penetration into tier-2 and tier-3 cities." The study also indicates that the second wave has been more geographically bundled so far.

The tally of districts constituting the top 50% of the cases has fallen from over 40



at the time of the first peak to less than 20 presently, it said pointing out that at the time of the first surge of the novel coronavirus cases during August-September 2020, the count of districts contributing to 75% of the total COVID-19 cases was 60-100, whereas it has been approx. 20-40 districts during the second wave. It took 40 days to go from 10K-80K in COVID-19 second wave

The second wave is unlike the first in two significant ways. Firstly, the rate of increase in fresh coronavirus cases is substantially higher. Secondly, more coronavirus cases are asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic, causing relatively low rates of hospitalisation and mortality.

The overall Case Fatality Ratio (CFR) since the outset of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 has been

reported to be around 1.3%. The CFR among Covid-19 patients who have contracted the infection since the beginning of 2021 is considerably less at 0.87%.

The report also recommended solutions such as vaccination including all adults, comprising those below 45, with severe comorbidities into the priority group, enhancing jab production, widening jab basket including Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Johnson and Johnson besides addressing vaccine hesitancy.

The report also doesn't propose a blanket national or state lockdown. Indicating that economic closures are most disruptive to the poorest sections of society, it proposes a middle-ground approach in India, comprising phased, localised closures or curbs.

Rahul takes potshots at Centre's 'Tughlaqi' 'ring-a-bell' strategy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the menace of Covid-19 getting scarier by the day, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi on Friday said the Centre's strategy to fight the pandemic consisted of imposing a 'Tughlaqi lockdown, ringing bells and singing praises to the Lord. Rahul said one year later, the country continues to suffer and infrastructure have crumbled while the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) continues to turn away from his responsibilities.

The Congress-led Opposition has been criticising the Government over its handling of the pandemic and the vaccination drive, while the Centre has maintained that its timely steps have been instrumental in fighting Covid-19. "The Central government's Covid-19 strategy — Stage 1- Impose a Tughlaqi lockdown, Stage 2- Ring bells, Stage 3- Sing praises to the Lord," Rahul tweeted.

Later, on Instagram, the Gandhi scion posted a video on his remarks to the media on this day last year when he had talked about lockdown



providing time for ramping up health infrastructure and contrasted it with a video report of how there is a massive shortage of resources to fight the pandemic currently.

"One year later, our people continue to suffer, our infrastructure continues to crumble and our Prime Minister continues to turn away from his responsibilities," he said in his post.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra appealed to the people to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour such as wearing masks and taking other precautions. "We have to win this battle together with caution and compassion," she said in a tweet in Hindi.

The grand old party in the past also has compared some of the government's decisions to those taken by Delhi Sultanate ruler Muhammad bin Tughlaq, to allege that they were arbitrary and not well thought out.

Amid Covid surge, security forces witness 5-fold jump in cases in last 10 days

AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

Paramilitary forces have almost witnessed five-fold increase in active Covid-19 cases in the last 10 days. On April 5, jawans who had tested positive for the virus in Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) were 522 while now the tally goes up to 2,915. Apart from this, the total infected jawans who were tested positive in last 24 hours have also increased more than five times.

Fifty seven jawans were tested positive on April 5, which now increased to 301 on the 10th day (Thursday). According to the data, Central Reserve Police Force and Border Security Force have seen the highest spike in number of COVID cases. The BSF, which had only 20 cases on April 5 has seen a massive spike and on April 15 it witnessed 117 cases in the last 24 hours. The total number of active cases in BSF stands at 1,850 which was 166 on 10 days back. Similarly, CRPF which were witnessing four to five cases per day in first week of April has seen massive spike.

On April 5, 97 jawans had been tested positive for the virus. The total active cases in CRPF has almost doubled.

ITBP spruces up its facilities to defend personnel against Covid

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) has "activated" all its hospitals and operationalised a Covid care centre in Delhi for serving and retired personnel of the force in view of the spurt in coronavirus infections across the country.

ITBP director general S S Deswal issued a message in this regard to around 90,000 personnel and an estimated 20,000 retired and dependents of the force that was raised in 1962 after the Chinese aggression. "All our hospitals have been activated to treat our 'Himveers' (braves of the mountains) and their families. Our doctors are highly motivated and committed to take care of you. A helpline is being started in this regard. A COVID care centre has been made functional at Chhawla (south-west Delhi) campus and it is fully equipped," a statement issued by the force quoting the DG said.

"We are always concerned and committed to take care of our veterans and their families. These facilities are available to our veterans also," it added.

Deswal said it was again "challenging times for the country in view of the second



The ITBP is primarily tasked to guard the 3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China apart from rendering a variety of duties in the internal security domain of the country

assault by COVID-19."

"Most of you have been vaccinated as per priority given to us by the government. We are warriors, and will fight it out by following the

COVID-19 safety protocols," the message said.

The ITBP chief asked the personnel not to take any chances.

"Himveers have to save other citizens also by rendering all help. Be a sincere follower of COVID-19 safety protocol. Protect yourself, families, and near and dear ones," the message said.

The ITBP is primarily tasked to guard the 3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China apart from rendering a variety of duties in the internal security domain of the country.

As per official data published on April 14, various central armed police forces (CAPFs) are also witnessing a jump in coronavirus infections as the country is witnessing a surge in recent times.

कार्यालय नगर पालिक निगम, भोपाल

विद्युत शाखा

क्र. 294/वि.शा./2021

भोपाल, दिनांक 16.04.2021

--- संसोधन पत्र ---

विद्युत शाखा द्वारा दिनांक 15.04.2021 के निविदा क्र. 293/विद्युत शाखा/2021 (नि.क्र. 44/021/022) से जारी निविदा भोपाल जिले में कोविड-19 को आपात परिस्थितियों के दृष्टिगत ऑक्सीजन सप्लाई निर्बाध रूप से बनाए रखने के लिए पं. खुशीलाल आयुर्वेदिक चिकित्सालय, भोपाल हेतु 1300 LPM के ऑक्सीजन प्लांट स्थापित एवं सप्लाई करने के लिए निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। इच्छुक निविदाकर्ता दिनांक 22.04.2021 को सायं 05.00 बजे तक अपनी निविदा/ऑफर इस कार्यालय की ई-मेल आई.डी. commoffice@bmcnline.gov.in पर प्रेषित कर सकते हैं। निविदा 22.04.2021 को सायंकाल 05.30 बजे आई.एस.बी.टी. स्थित निगम को विद्युत शाखा में खोली जायेगी। 20 दिन में प्लांट स्थापित न होने पर निविदा शून्यत्व मानी जावेगी। निविदा के विरुद्ध भुगतान प्लांट स्थापन करने के उपरति किया जावेगा।

को निम्नानुसार पढ़ा जावे।

Serial No.	Online Tender No.	Name of Work	Portable Amount (in Rs.)	EMD (in Rs.)	Tender Cost (in Rs.)	Completion Period (in months)
01.	2021 UAD _140005_1	Supply, Delivery, Installation, Testing & Commissioning with 5 year CMC of 1300 LPM PSA (PRESSURE SWING ADSORPTION) Oxygen Generator Plant at Pt. Khushilal Ayurvedic Hospital Bhopal	1,30,00,000/-	1,30,000/-	12,500/-	1 Month

नियम व शर्तें :-

- निविदा प्रपत्र को निर्धारित राशि एवं धरोहर राशि एवं अन्य आवश्यक दस्तावेज ऑनलाईन प्रस्तुत करने होंगे अन्य समस्त विस्तृत जानकारी www.mptenders.gov.in पर देखी जा सकती है।
- ऑनलाईन निविदा प्रपत्र जमा करने की समयवधि दिनांक 16.04.2021 सायं 6 बजे से 24.04.2021 सायं 05.30 बजे तक है। ऑनलाईन प्रक्रिया के माध्यम से दिनांक 26.04.2021 सायं 05.30 बजे अधोहस्ताक्षर कार्यालय में नियमानुसार निविदा खोली जावेगी।
- किसी भी निविदा को स्वीकार अथवा अस्वीकार करने का अधिकार विभाग के पास सुरक्षित होगा।

अधीक्षक यंत्री (वि.)
नगर निगम, भोपाल

SC's directive for speedy disposal of cheque bounce cases

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday came out with a slew of directions to ensure speedy disposal of cheque bounce cases and asked the Centre to amend laws to ensure clubbing of trials in cases which are lodged within one year against a person relating to the same transaction.

The apex court directed all the high courts across the country to issue guidelines for trial courts to deal with cheque bounce cases.

A five-judge bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde further said that the evidence in cheque dishonour cases can now be tendered by filing affidavits and there would be no need to examine witnesses physically.

The bench, also comprising Justices L Nageswara Rao,

B R Gavai, A S Bopanna and S Ravindra Bhat, asked the Centre to make "suitable amendments" in the Negotiable Instruments Act to ensure that trials in cheque bounce cases lodged in 12 months against a person can be clubbed together into one consolidated case.

It reiterated the earlier decision and held that trial courts have no "inherent power" to reconsider their decisions to summon persons to face trials in the cheque bounce cases.

The apex court said the issues which have not been dealt by it would be considered by a committee headed by Justice R C Chavan, former judge of the Bombay High Court.

On March 10, the top court had constituted the committee

to submit a report in three months specifying the steps to be taken for early disposal of cheque bounce cases across the country.

It said a three-judge bench would now take up the suo motu matter on ensuring early disposal of cheque bounce cases after eight weeks. It had earlier termed the pendency of over 35 lakhs cheque bounce cases as "grotesque" and suggested to the Centre to come up with a law to create additional courts for a particular period of time to deal with such cases.

On March 5 last year, the top court had registered a suo motu case and decided to evolve a "concerted" and "coordinated" mechanism for expeditious disposal of such cases. PNS

SC appoints special public prosecutors for multi-crore coal scam

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has appointed former Additional Solicitor General Maninder Singh and advocate Rajesh Batra as special public prosecutors (SPPs) for trial of multi-crore coal scam cases filed by the Enforcement Directorate.

Senior advocate R S Cheema, who was appointed SPP in 2014 by the top court, has sought permission to be relieved of the responsibility citing his age and shortage of law officers assisting him.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde said that though there was no consensus on the names of individuals, the counsel appearing on all sides unanimously agreed that the apex court should appoint

a seasoned trial court lawyer of impeccable integrity and a designated senior advocate to guide him and conduct the proceedings.

"Taking into account the above said criteria, we hereby appoint (i) Shri Maninder Singh, Senior Advocate and former Additional solicitor General of India; and (ii) Shri Rajesh Batra, Advocate as Special Public Prosecutors in the place of R S Cheema.

"R S Cheema, may get relieved upon the newly appointed Prosecutors taking charge. This Court records appreciation for the services rendered by R S Cheema," said the bench, also comprising Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian. PNS

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 timely 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 Malavya said.

Four persons were killed when the CPF 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, Malavya 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,” Malavya said adding how Banerjee had been trying to instigate people saying the BJP would invoke National Population Register to victimize its opponents 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,” Malavya 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 Tarakeshwar seat in Hooghly Swapan 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 discriminates those voting in the next phases 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 15,789 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 Sivadasan, 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 Muslim League has nominated NRI businessman P V Abdul Wahab as its candidate for the April 30 election.

The names of Brittas and Shivadasn were announced after

the State Committee of the party met on Friday at the imposing 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-10 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 bed room-Hall-Kitchen (BHK) flat at Dombivli in neighboring Thane district.

Announcing the busting of the cannabis growing gang that would purchase seeds from Netherland and sell the drugs in cash and crypto currencies like Bitcoins, NCB’s zonal director Sameer 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.

“During our raids, we found that Cannabis was being cultivated there through Hydroponic techniques. From the site we have recovered 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 Rehan Khan who is away in Saudi Arabia. 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 mediums size peddlers of Mumbai and Pune at the rate of 2,500 per gram for retail,” Wankhede said.

Aligarh cops start jail bharo movement

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH

Aligarh Police has started ‘Jail Bharo 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.

The ‘Jail Bharo 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.

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 lock down due to Covid-19 pandemic leaving nearly one thousand knitwear units in Tirupur gasping for breath.

Despite the Centre’s announcements about various financial packages as part of the Atmanirbhar 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, says the fortunes of the industry could be turned for the better by a few measures which could be ordered by Nirmala Sitaraman, 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 ever 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 spirits, 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 lock down 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 ROSCTL (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 63729 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 81.12 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 (84038), Nagpur (71539), Nashik (49,925), Aurangabad (13,630), Ahmednagar (18,049), Nanded (13,134), Bhandara (13987), Jalgaon (11,570), Latur (14033), Solapur (11051), Satara (10551), Parbhani (10,336), Beed (7922), Nandurbar (7330), Chandrapur (10,144) and Gondia (7336).

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 would 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 Wadettiwar 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. Wadettiwar 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 at 6 PM on Friday. The State also registered 21 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.

Situation is alarming in neighboring Tamil Nadu which diagnosed 8,449 new cases and recorded 33 deaths by Friday evening. The figures in both the States are likely to see a surge for the next few weeks, according to doctors in the Government doctors. V P Joy, chief secretary of Kerala, made it clear that the impact of the restrictions announced on Thursday would be known only after ten days.

Though the Kerala Government had declared that more than 2.5 lakh persons would be tested on Friday and Saturday, as part of its test, track and isolate mission, the State has tested only 67,000 persons till Friday 5 pm.

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 RT-PCR testing facilities and ensure the reduction of time to get the reports. It also ordered that accurate reporting of the RT-PCR results to be made public.

“The state should not feel shy of publishing the correct data.”

Regarding the public perception about remdesivir injections being a miracle drug and Trivedi’s explanation that the drug was over-prescribed, the court ordered that remdesivir’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 etc, 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

A CRPF CoBRA Commando Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, abducted and later released by the Maoists in Bijapur area 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 landed at Jammu airport 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

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 Ketti 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, Fathima Beevi, 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

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



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

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



FOREST FIRES ARE AS OLD AS FORESTS AND WILL CONTINUE TO OCCUR AS LONG AS FORESTS EXIST. ONE, HOWEVER, CAN LIMIT THEIR INCIDENCE AND ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES BY FIRMLY DEALING WITH THE TIMBER, BUILDER AND MINING MAFIA, AND THE POACHERS

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!

Pachu 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-smeared ascetics 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.

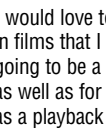


Goa Chief Minister — Pramod Sawant



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



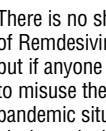
I would love to sing in films that I am going to be a part of, as well as for others, as a playback singer.

Actor — Adarsh Gourav



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 word 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



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 realty 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 arena 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-tapism. 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

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 come 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 of now. Though getting vaccinated is a personal choice, the most successful inoculation drives have been built on knowledge exchange, accessibility and successful stories of those getting vaccinated.

Sherita Hill Golden, vice-president, chief diversity officer and a Professor of Medicine at Johns Hopkins Medicine talks of 12 things you need to know in the wake of the current vaccine hesitancy. The facts and insights into making a personal choice to get inoculated include the following: Getting vaccinated can protect you from getting COVID as your body will be ready to fight the Coronavirus if you are exposed to it; the people of colour are especially vulnerable to severe COVID-19 and its risk factors; getting inoculated helps others in the community, more so when people have chronic medical conditions; more vaccinations mean a chance to return to normal after having to experience closures, cancellations and postponements; though the vaccine development was fast, no steps were skipped while testing for safety and efficacy; diversity in vaccine testing helped assess safety and effectiveness; side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are sparse and temporary, mainly limited to a sore arm, mild fever or body aches; it is possible to get the shot despite allergies except if you have severe allergic reactions to vaccines; the vaccine is safe for breastfeeding mothers, though pregnant women should discuss it with their doctors as the vaccine have 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.

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 Hsien 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, Haridwar 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 MNP 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 (NMCG) has been working tirelessly to prevent ecological damage and as a part of its efforts, the NMCG 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 Hledan 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

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

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 Myanmmar'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 as it held Kremlin accountable for interference 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 nongovernment organizations from interfering in Russia's politics.

He said the Kremlin suggested that U.S. Ambassador John Sullivan follow the example of his Russian counterpart and head home for consultations. Russia will also move to deny the U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 broader 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-i-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



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 to expel the French envoy from the country, in Lahore on Friday

that "complete access to social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube and Telegram) may be blocked".

The reason for the suspension of the services was not stated by the PTA but official sources said that it was feared that protesters could use social media to organise demonstrations.

Suspension of internet and mobile phone services is a common practice in Pakistan to forestall protests and acts of terrorism.

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 that challenge from an increasingly adversarial Chinese Communist Party from, for example, the challenge we faced 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 Friday that US policy toward China is "too negative" and that cooperation could be critically important as the Biden administration focuses on combating 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 organising 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 :- Pipe Line & All Other Work

Name of Scheme	Estimated cost	Period of completion of work:
1 Dhoomkhhera GOV W/S Scheme	Rs. 80.96 Lakh	06 months
2 Pipaliya GOV W/S Scheme	Rs. 86.82 Lakh	06 months
3 Kumrah 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 — 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 it faces. 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 defuse 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: **Siddiqua 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, Jagarpuri, Delhi-51 since 31.03.2021 at 04:15 PM. In this regard DD 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:-

Website: <http://cbl.nic.in>
E-mail: clc@cbl.gov.in
Tel. No.: 011-24368638/24368641
Fax No.: 011-24368639

PS Jagat Puri, Delhi
Ph. No.: 011-22420362, 22420364
Mob: 7065036023
DP/428/SHD/2021

Residential realty get \$234 mn PE investments in Jan-March

IAN S ■ MUMBAI

Amid revival in housing demand, the residential segment witnessed private equity (PE) investments worth \$234 million in Q1 2021 which was 64 per cent of that witnessed during the entire 2020, said a Knight Frank India report.

It noted that in terms of the number of deals, the investment activity touched 100 per cent of 2020 levels and 39 per cent of 2019 levels in the first three months of 2021.

The report titled ‘Investments in Real Estate - Trends in PE Investment (Q1 2021 update)’ said that Indian real estate attracted private equity (debt and equity) investments (\$3.24 billion) across 19 deals in Q1 2021 (January - March) period.

In the first quarter of 2021, the investment in the sector has grown by 16 times compared to \$199 million in Q1 2020.

The investments in Q1 2021 in value terms were 80 per

cent of that witnessed in full year 2020 and 48 per cent of full year 2019. The strong momentum in Q1 2021 was predominantly driven by two major factors, spillover of certain deals from 2020 and the rise in investor confidence due to the drop in Covid-19 infections during early parts of Q1 2021, which had created some ripples of positivity in the economy, it said.

The sustainability of this momentum in investors’ sentiments will therefore depend on how soon the second wave of infection subsidies and also the pace of vaccination, as per the Knight Frank India.

Out of the total PE investments in real estate, the office segment attracted 71 per cent share, followed by retail at 15 per cent, residential and warehousing with 7 per cent each respectively.

Shishir Bajjal, Chairman and Managing Director, Knight Frank India said: “The deal street market of Indian real estate witnessed an impressive

surge in both value and volume of private equity investments in the first quarter of 2021, when compared to the entire year of 2020.”

He said that office assets continue to be the preferred segment attracting over 70 per cent of PE investments Q1 2021 as the segment moves towards maturity which includes sustained demand, stability in rental income and change in ownership profile over long-term. Investors are expecting demand to recuperate faster as the pace of vaccination increases.

“While Q1 2021 has been an encouraging quarter for PE investments, however, the upward trajectory can be impacted by the rising second wave of Covid-19 infections in India which started in the month of April 2021. The sustainability of revival in investor sentiments will therefore depend on how soon the second wave of infection subsidies and the pace of vaccination,” Bajjal said.

Forex reserves surge by USD 4.34 bn to USD 581.21 bn

PTI ■ MUMBAI

After declining for two consecutive quarters, the country’s foreign exchange (forex) reserves surged by USD 4.34 billion to USD 581.21 billion in the week ended April 9, according to the latest RBI data.

In the previous week ended April 2, the reserves had dipped by USD 2.42 billion to USD 576.28 billion. It had dropped by USD 2.99 billion to USD 579.28 billion in the week ended March 26, 2021.

The reserves had touched a lifetime high of USD 590.18 billion in the week ended January 29, 2021.

In the reporting week ended April 9, 2021, the increase in forex reserves was on account of a rise in foreign currency assets (FCA), a major component of the overall reserves.

FCA rose USD 3.02 billion to USD 539.45 billion, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) weekly data showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like euro, pound and yen held in the forex reserves.

The gold reserves increased by USD 1.30 billion to USD 35.32 billion in the reporting week, the RBI data showed.

The special drawing rights (SDRs) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) rose USD 6 million to USD 1.49 billion in the reporting week.

The country’s reserve position with the IMF rose USD 24 million to USD 4.95 billion in the reporting week, the data showed.

Jet fuel price cut by 1 pc

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Jet fuel price on Friday was cut by 1 per cent, the second reduction in rates this month following softening international crude oil prices.

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was reduced by Rs 568.88 per kilolitre, or 0.9 per cent, to Rs 57,805.28 per kl in the national capital, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers. This is the second reduction in rates this month.

Earlier, prices were cut by 3 per cent on April 1.

These price cuts were the first in six months.

Meanwhile, petrol and diesel prices remained unchanged after the fourth reduction in three weeks on Thursday.

Petrol price on Thursday was cut by 16 paise per litre and diesel by 14 paise.

Petrol now costs Rs 90.40 per litre in Delhi, while a litre of diesel comes for Rs 80.73.

‘Govt should regulate cryptocurrencies, not ban them’

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

As government plans to come up with a Cryptocurrency Bill, sector stakeholders have said that the government should regulate the cryptocurrency ecosystem, rather than banning them.

Experts are of the view that India should formulate regulations in the lines of the development countries which regulate these currencies including the US, UK, Japan, Australia among others.

Nischal Shetty, Founder & CEO, WazirX said: “India’s crypto policy should be geared towards fostering innovation, and customer safety. We should be able to prevent bad activities but keep the door to innovation open by allowing everything else to be built.”

He said that so far there is no single regulator in a position to regulate the entire crypto sector.

“It’s like trying to regulate the Internet with one regulator. We can start breaking down crypto based on its classification as currency, asset, utility, security, and let regulators handle the respective crypto. Eventually, it will become necessary to have a dedicated crypto markets regulator,” Shetty said.

He also recommended that the government should ensure that all crypto businesses catering to Indian customers are registered in India and follow KYC and AML policies. “There should also be guidelines for crypto businesses to ensure safety of customer funds,” the WazirX CEO said.

Dev Sharma, Regional Manager (Central Asia) for Paxful also said that at a foundational level, India should regulate so that all companies have to implement KYC and AML processes to protect consumers.”There is nothing about cryptocurrencies that make them more appealing to ‘bad actors’ than fiat currencies. So, cryptocurrencies need to be regulated in similar ways,” he said.

In addition, it would be great to see India develop measures to promote innovation in the sector for example with incubators and start-up funds.

Benchmarks eke out slim gains; close lower for the week

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Sensex and Nifty ticked higher for the third session on the trot on Friday but could not wipe off weekly losses amid a resurgence in Covid-19 cases. A strong recovery in the rupee, which zoomed 58 paise, and a bullish trend in global equities supported the bourses on Friday, traders said.

After a choppy session, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed 28.35 points or 0.06 per cent higher at 48,832.03.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty rose 36.40 points or 0.25 per cent to 14,617.85.

Asian Paints was the top performer among the Sensex components, spurring 3.07 per cent, followed by UltraTech

Cement, ONGC, M&M, Sun Pharma, HCL Tech, Tech Mahindra and Nestle India. On the other hand, ICICI Bank, L&T, Bajaj Finance, TCS, SBI, Infosys and Reliance Industries were among the losers, declining up to 1.55 per cent.

During the holiday-truncated week, the Sensex sank 759.29 points or 1.53 per cent, while the Nifty tumbled 217 points or 1.46 per cent.

A continued surge in second wave of COVID-19 cases in the country, which already crossed 2 lakh daily cases, has certainly posed a risk to sustainability of rebound of earnings momentum, said Binod Modi, Head-Strategy at Reliance Securities.

Rupee spurts by 58 paise to over 1-week high on easing US yields

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee on Friday soared by 58 paise to end more than one-week high of 74.35 against the US dollar on easing US bond yields and positive domestic equities.

A weak dollar overseas and foreign fund inflows also supported the rupee. At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 74.76 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 74.28 and a low of 74.76. It finally ended at 74.35 against the American currency, registering its best single-day gain of 58 paise in more than a month. On Thursday, the rupee had settled at 74.93 against the American currency.

Coal India incorporates two wholly-owned arms

New Delhi:State-owned CIL on Friday announced incorporation of two wholly-owned arms. The two subsidiaries are CIL Solar PV Ltd and CIL Navikarniya Urja Ltd, Coal India Ltd (CIL) said in a filing to BSE. CIL Solar PV Limited has been incorporated for manufacturing in solar value chain (Ingot-wafer-Cell Module) and CIL Navikarniya Urja Limited for renewable energy, the filing said.

SII CEO urges US to lift raw material export ban to ramp up vaccine production

Mumbai:Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla on Friday said the US needs to lift its embargo on raw material exports to help ramp up vaccine production.

SII is currently manufacturing anti-coronavirus vaccine Covishield, developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University. The vaccine is not only being used in India, but exported to a number of countries. Poonawalla had earlier admitted that SII has been facing problems in sending out required number of batches of vaccines due to the bureaucratic and government-related hurdles.

NTPC to raise ₹3,996 cr via bonds next week

New Delhi:State-owned power giant NTPC will raise Rs 3,996 crore through issuance of non-convertible bonds on Tuesday.”NTPC has decided to issue unsecured non-convertible bonds in the nature of debentures of Rs 3,996 crore on 20 April, 2021, through private placement at a coupon of 6.87 per cent per annum with a door-to-door maturity of 15 years 1 day on 21 April, 2036,” a BSE filing said.

The proceeds will be utilized for funding capital expenditure, refinancing of existing loans and other general corporate purposes, it said. **PTI**

IndiGo waives change fees on domestic bookings

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

Airline major IndiGo waived-off change fees on new bookings made from April 17, 2021 till April 30, 2021.

Besides, the airline announced that passengers can now do unlimited changes for new bookings made till April 30, 2021 on regular fares under this offer.

“This offer is in line with our philosophy of providing our customers a hassle-free experience, and giving them much needed flexibility, especially in these times,” said



Sanjay Kumar, Chief Strategy & Revenue Officer, IndiGo.

Other airlines are expected to announce similar relief measures as the resurgence of Covid and imposition of local lockdowns has started to hamper air passenger traffic.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public is hereby informed that Smt. Sarfa Devi has claimed to be the owner of Plot no. K-100, Area Measuring 75 sq yd/sr. Mustil No. 88, Killa No. 4, Village Hastasi Delhi Abadi Uttam Nagar, New Delhi and has agreed to sell it to Sh. Manish Bansal and Smt Swati Jindal, who has approached the Magma Housing Finance Limited Ltd for loan against mortgage of above said property, if any person has any right, claim, title or interest in any manner over the said property then intimate within 7 days to Vikas Shokeen, Advocate, A8-18, Mianwali Nagar, Delhi - 110087. Thereafter any kind of claim will not be accepted.

WESTERN RAILWAY

CORRIGENDUM TO E-AUCTION SALE PROGRAM e-Auction Sale Notification No. S III/Auction Programme-1/April-2021 Dated 18/03/2021. “The entire E-Auction Sale Program scheduled to be held in the month of April- 2021 for all the Depots and Divisions is cancelled”. Please visit Western Railway Website of material Management Department i.e. www.wr.indianrailways.gov.in as well as on www.irps.gov.in e-auction portal for further information. (No. S III/Auction Programme-2/April-2021 Dated: 15/04/2021) 0027

Follow us on twitter.com/WesternRly

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Public at large is hereby informed that Late Sh. Sikandar Lal S/o Late Sh. Shiv Lal Singh R/o 93, Anand Lok, New Delhi-110049 was having residential property, in our project Seven Elements flat no 4BHK/5-013A-501, admeasuring 2505 sq.ft which his legal heirs Sh. Samrat Yadav and Smt. Shabeen Narang requested the company to be transfer to his son namely Sh. Samrat Yadav.

Any person having any objection on this please may contact the company officer details as under within 15 days after which No Claim would be accepted.

Valika Limited
A-002, Ground Floor,
Block A, Valika INXT City Centre,
Sector-83, Gurugram
Haryana, INDIA - 122012

UJVN Limited

H.O.: “UJJWAL”, Maharani Bagh, C.M.S. Road, Dehradun-248006
Telephones: 0135-2763808, Fax: 0135-2763580
CIN No.U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website:www.ujvnl.com

Tender Notice

Date: 16.04.2021

Letter No: 294

Office of the Executive Engineer (Generation), Khodri Power Station, Dakpathar (Dehradun), invites sealed tenders from interested parties. Brief summary of tender is given below:

Tender No: 01/EE(Gen)/Khodri/2021-22: Replacement/ Repairing of AC cooling Tower, pipeline, different gate valves with civil works.

Estimated cost : Rs. 910000/- GST extra

Date of availability of bid document on website: 16.04.2021, 17:00 hrs.

Last date for submission of tender : 06.05.2021 up to 16:00 hrs

For fuller & further details, kindly visit our website. The tender documents can be downloaded from the Nigam's website "www.ujvnl.com"

Executive Engineer (Generation)

"AVOID WASTEFUL USE OF ELECTRICITY"

MODIFICATION IN FORM G INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

(Published in accordance with Regulation 36A (1) of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy (Insolvency Resolution Process for Corporate Persons) Regulations, 2016.

In modification to the Form G published on March 31, 2021 in Indian Express (Mumbai, Ahmednagar, Shirdi and Nashik) and Pudhari (Mumbai Edition), Pudhari (Ahmednagar, Shirdi, Nashik, The Pioneer (English and Hindi) (Delhi NCR edition) w.r.t Kopargaon Ahmednagar Tollways (Phase 1) Private Limited, it shall be noted that the last date for submission of Expression of Interest has been extended from April 15, 2021 to April 22, 2021. The revised timelines are mentioned in the modified Form-G uploaded on the website of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India.

Notes:

- The dates mentioned above are subject to grant of extension/ exclusion off from the CIRP period by the Adjudicating Authority.
- The RP / COC shall have discretion to change the criteria for the EOI at any point of time.
- RP / COC reserves the right to cancel or modify the process / application without assigning any reason and without any liability whatsoever.
- Detailed invitation for expression of interest specifying criteria, ineligibility norms under section 29A of Code etc. can be requested through email on katpl@sumedhamanagement.com

Sd/-
Mr. Udayraj Patwardhan
Resolution Professional for Kopargaon Ahmednagar Tollways (Phase I) Private Limited
IP Registration No. : IBB/I/PA-001/IP-P00024/2016-2017/10057
Date: Friday, April 16, 2021, Place: Mumbai

Name, Address and e-mail of the resolution professional, as registered with the Board: Name: Mr. Udayraj Patwardhan Address: Sumedha Management Solutions Private Limited, C 703, Marathon Innova, Lower Parel West, Mumbai-400013. Email ID : udayraj_patwardhan@sumedhamanagement.com	Address and e-mail to be used for correspondence with the resolution professional: Address: Sumedha Management Solutions Private Limited, 809-810, 8th Floor, B Wing, Trade World, Kamala Mills Compound, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai-400013 Email id: katpl@sumedhamanagement.com
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PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(SEE SECTION 82 Cr.Pc.)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that the accused person (1) **Narendra Singh S/o Kripal Singh (2) Ritu Singh W/o Narendra Singh, Both R/o Baljeet Nagar, Patel Nagar, Delhi and (3) Kripal Singh S/o Ram Singh H.No. A-940, 4th Floor, Baba Farid Puri, West Patel Nagar, Delhi** have committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 543/14, u/s 498A/406/34 IPC, PS Krishna Nagar, Delhi** and it has been returned to warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said accused person (1) **Narendra Singh (2) Ritu Singh and (3) Kripal Singh** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused (1) **Narendra Singh (2) Ritu Singh and (3) Kripal Singh**, have absconded (or is concealing themselves to avoid the service of said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said (1) **Narendra Singh (2) Ritu Singh and (3) Kripal Singh** of case **FIR No. 543/14, u/s 498A/406/34 IPC, PS Krishna Nagar, Delhi** are required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before **10.06.2021**.

By order
Ms Shruti Chaudhary
MM, Mahila Court-1,
East District, Court No. 14
Karkardooma Court, Delhi

DP/431/SHD/2021

SEARCH FOR MISSING BOY

Gurdeep Singh

General public is hereby informed that one boy namely **Gurdeep Singh, S/o Gurcharn Singh, R/o B-3, Gurudwara, Raghubir Nagar, Delhi.** Height 5', Shallow Complexion, Round face, Normal Built wearing blue pant, chocklate Shirt and sport shoes in feet has been missing since **07.04.2021** from his house.

In this regard a case **DD No. 75-A Dt. 07.04.2021** has been lodged at **PS Khyala, New Delhi**. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing boy but no clue has come to light so far. Any person having any information or clue about this missing boy may kindly inform to the following.

E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in
Fax: 011-23011334
Ph.: 011-23014048
011-23015218

S.H.O., PS Khyala, New Delhi.
Ph.: 8700684171, 9582084096

DP/402/WD/2021

SALE NOTICE

The under mentioned Assets will be sold through auction on **“AS IS WHERE IS BASIS”** and **“AS IS WHAT IS BASIS”** for recovery of dues as per court orders, in the following cases:-

Case Details	Asset Details	Reserve Price	EMD
ICICI Bank Limited vs Shishir Dutt Sharma, Case No-Suit No. 1967/17	Vehicle No-DL8CAK6823, Make and Model- FORD FIGO 1.4 EXI, Manu Yr-2015	350000	35000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Sanjay Kumar Pandit, Case No-Suit No. 933/18	Vehicle No-DL12A7554, Make and Model- HYUNDAI XCENT BASE 1.2, Manu Yr-2016	180000	18000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Kulvinder Singh, Case No-FAO 213/2015	Vehicle No-Unregistered, Make and Model- MARUTI ERTIGA, Manu Yr-2013	100000	10000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Mehkar Singh, Case No-CM(M) 549/2020 & CM APPL. 27986/2020	Vehicle No-UP16DT4118, Make and Model- CHEVROLET ENJOY, Manu Yr- 2015	144000	14400
ICICI Bank Limited vs Subodh Kumar, Case No-CM(M) 602/2020 & CM APPL. 30659/2020	Vehicle No-UP14FT6208, Make and Model- RENAULT LODGY RXE, Manu Yr-2016	162000	16200
ICICI Bank Limited vs Jitendra Chaturvedi, Case No-CM (M) 22/2020	Vehicle No-UP14FT7814, Make and Model- CHEVROLET SAIL UVA LT, Manu Yr-2016	54000	5400
ICICI Bank Limited vs Mohd Asif, Case No-CM(M) 178/2021	Vehicle No-UP14DD5260, Make and Model- MARUTI WAGON R, Manu Yr-2017	81000	8100
ICICI Bank Limited vs Archana Raj, Case No-CM(M) 573/2020 & CM APPL.29273/2020	Vehicle No-UP14ET7203, Make and Model- CHEVROLET ENJOY LT, Manu Yr-2015	54000	5400
ICICI Bank Limited vs Mohammad Arif, Case No-CSSCJ-1871/19	Vehicle No-UP14DD2489, Make and Model- WAGON R LXI CNG, Manu Yr-2017	220000	22000
ICICI Bank Limited vs Vijay Gupta, Case No-Suit No. 1088/2018	Vehicle No-HR29AM0548, Make and Model- WAGON R LXI CNG, Manu Yr-2016	120000	12000

Auction Date and time : 01.05.2021; from 11 am to 2 pm.
Venue: Godara Yard, Khewat No:166/1, Near Atul Kataria Chock, Behind Gyan Devi School, Sec-17, Sukhrail, Gurugram– 122022.
Contact Person –Rajeev Ranjan (8584874809)/ Jitendra Kumar (7304914763)
EMD: DD/PO of EMD amount to be made in favour of ICICI Bank Limited, payable at Delhi.
And auction of following vehicles will be done at another yard i.e Shiram Automall, Vill-Mamurpur, Plo Maniyari Road Narela, New Delhi


Case Details	Asset Details	Reserve Price	EMD
ICICI Bank Limited vs Rahul Yadav, Case No-CM (M) 222/2020	Vehicle No-UP14ET0642, Make and Model- TATA ACE, Manu Yr-2014	70000	7000

Auction Date : 22.04.2021; from 11 am to 1 PM
Venue: AN Motors, Ranukta. Agra (UP)
Contact Person –Rajeev Ranjan (8584874809)/Jitendra Kumar (7304914763)
Terms of Sale


The particulars of the said asset specified herein above have been stated to the best of the information and knowledge of the undersigned, who shall however not be responsible for any error, misstatement or omission in the said particulars. The interested participant/s are therefore requested, in their own interest, to satisfy himself / themselves/ itself with regard to the said asset and other relevant details pertaining to it before submitting the bids. All bidders are required to come at site with original DD/PO of EMD amount along with original KYC proofs to participate in the auction.

Successfully approved bidder shall have to deposit sale amount (Excluding EMD amount) within 5 days from the auction date by the way of pay order/ demand draft/RTGS/NEFT. In case if you fail to make the remaining sale amount within 5 days, your EMD amount will be forfeited.


The intending bidders may visit at ICICI Bank Ltd, 1st Floor, SD Tower, Community Center, Plot no-7, Rohini Sector-8, New Delhi-110085, for details and inspection of the said hypothecated vehicle.




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.’



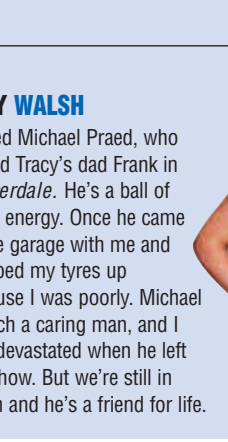
GUL PANAG
I think a lot of us are aware of what kind of an existential crisis the environment faces but we have other fires to fight. And even though we may be willing and maybe interested and wanting to do our best to contribute towards conserving the environment, other emergencies in life take over.



ARJUN BIJLANI
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 fair, 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.

Davide: 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 cultural 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, doubts and that 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 tentatives, absorbing things and getting back. 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 tempura 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

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 Danceworx Performing Arts Academy and the Navdhara India 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 your feet 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.”

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

Gil Green directs Divine’s *Rider*

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

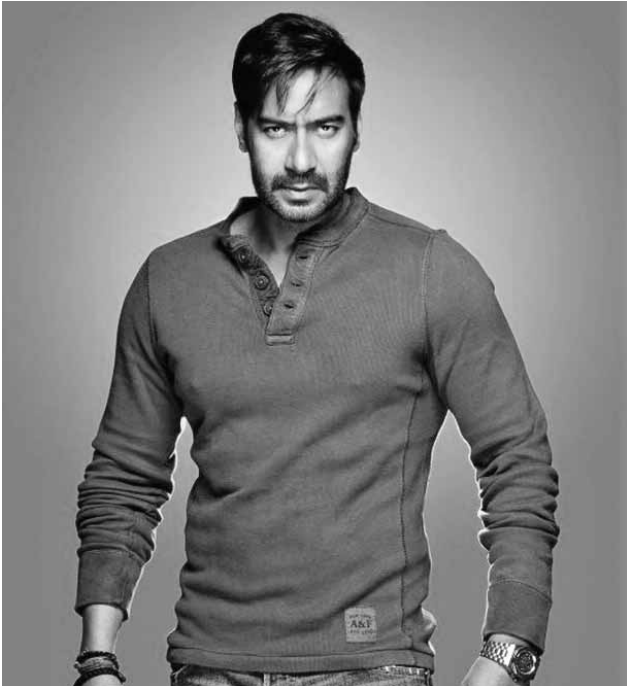
basis of the intelligence I think they possess. I, rather, treat them as my friends. I believe this has what resonated with them in a big way. I am confident that the same resonance will come back again be it with the kids or their parents after watching me on the episodes.

❖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 a way that will bring on many laughs, 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 Ffilms 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 superseded 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 Ffilms and Roy Kapur Films, the film will go on floors at the end of the year. The casting of the film is underway. —JANS

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 Ashmole 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 who hates witches. They realise that 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 goes pear 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 other worldliness 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 Ysabeau 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 hates witches. It's very bemusing 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 (Marten) 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 they 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.)



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