



NORA CHALLENGES FANS

Actor Nora Fatehi scorches social media with her new Instagram post and challenges fans saying they “can’t take it”

LEISURE **P2**



US, IRAN N-DEAL

Iran Friday said it was ready to welcome the return of the United States to the nuclear deal

INTERNATIONAL **P10**



SACHIN HOSPITALISED

Sachin Tendulkar has been hospitalised as a precautionary measure, six days after he tested COVID-19 positive

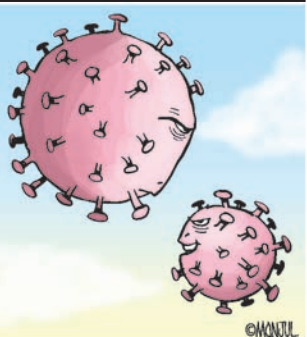
SPORTS **P12**

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IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Now I know how to grow exponentially. I was in Mr Vadra's body recently

SHORT TAKES

Vice President in state on 2-day visit



Bhubaneswar: Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu arrived in here Friday is on a two-day visit to the state. A special aircraft carrying the Vice-President reached the Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) at 11.00am. He was welcomed at the airport by Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and Governor Ganeshi Lal. The Vice-President proceeded to the Raj Bhawan from the airport. Naidu will inaugurate the 600th birth anniversary ceremony of Adi Kabi Sarala Das and attend 40th annual day of Sarala Sahitya Sansad at Sarala Bhawan in Cuttack. After attending the two events, Naidu will return to the capital and Saturday attend the convocation ceremony of Utkal University.

P3

3 terrorists killed in Pulwama encounter

Srinagar: Three unidentified terrorists were killed in an ongoing encounter between the terrorists and security forces at Kakpora in South Kashmir's Pulwama district on Friday morning, officials said. “Three unidentified terrorists killed in encounter at Pulwama. Incriminating materials, including arms and ammunition recovered. Search going on,” police said. Earlier the gunfight took place after a joint team of the police and the Army cordoned off the area and launched a search operation on the basis of a specific information about the presence of terrorists.

WEATHER		
	BHUB	CTK
TEMP		
MAX	38.2°C	37.4°C
MIN	25.5°C	25.2°C
Humidity	81%	80%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast	Partly cloudy sky	

Covid-19 second wave may peak by mid-April: Scientists

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 2: Scientists have predicted using a mathematical model that the ongoing second-wave of COVID-19 pandemic across the country could peak by mid-April, following which the infections may see a steep decline by the end of May.

During the first wave of COVID-19 infections across India, the mathematical approach, named SUTRA, predicted that the initial surge of infections in August would peak by September and lower in February 2021.

Scientists, including Manindra Agrawal from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur, applied the model to predict the trajectory of the current surge in infections and found that the number of daily new infections is likely to peak in mid-April for this ongoing pandemic wave.

“For the last several days, we have found that there is a reasonable chance that the cases in India could peak some-



A health worker collects a nasal sample from a passenger for COVID-19 test, amid coronavirus pandemic, in New Delhi, Friday

PTI PHOTO

■ During the first wave of COVID-19 infections across India, the mathematical approach, named SUTRA, predicted that the initial surge of infections in August would peak by September and lower in February 2021

■ Now, scientists have predicted, using a mathematical model, that the ongoing second wave of COVID-19 pandemic could peak by mid-April, following which the infections may see a steep decline by the end of May

time between 15-20 April. It is a sharp slope, but on the way down, it would likely be equally sharp, coming down very fast and by end of May may see a dramatic reduction.” Agrawal said.

“There is some uncertainty in predicting the peak value of daily new infections because of the sharp rise. Currently, it is coming to 1 lakh infections per day, but this can go up or down. But the timing remains the same between April 15-20,” he added.

The scientists predict that in the current wave, the first state to peak could be Punjab in a few days, followed

by Maharashtra. However, the IIT Kanpur professor added that the model's prediction of the new peak is sensitive to the daily new infections data.

“Even a little bit of change each day causes the peak numbers to change by several thousand numbers. But the location of the peak has remained on mid-April,” he added.

Independent calculations made by scientists, including Gautam Menon from Ashoka University in Haryana, have also predicted that the peak of the ongoing wave of infections could be between mid-April and mid-May.

COLLECTORS ASKED TO BOOST HOSPITAL INFRA

BHUBANESWAR: The state Health Department Friday asked all district Collectors and Commissioners of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to boost the infrastructure in government hospitals to cope with the threat increase in the number of COVID patients in the state. The instructions given by the department comes in the wake of consistent rise of COVID cases in the state. The department has asked the Collectors to put in place all the necessary infrastructure such as beds, oxygen cylinders and others, besides ensuring smooth supply of medicines to COVID patients. “Taking note of the rapid surge of COVID-19 cases in the country and the state, you are requested to take measures immediately to mitigate the pandemic,” the communique read.

However, Menon cautioned that such projections of COVID-19 cases should really be trusted only in the short term. “Any excessively precise prediction, of a peak within just a 5-day window, would ignore the many uncertainties associated with the inputs to any such calculation,” Menon, who was not involved in the SUTRA modelling, told this news agency. Agrawal noted that the model uses three main parameters to predict the course of the pandemic.

“The first is called Beta, or contact rate, which measures how many people an infected person infects per day. It is related to the R-naught value, which is the number of people an infected person spreads the virus to over the course of their infection,” Agrawal explained.

The other two parameters, he explained are ‘Reach’, which is a measure of exposure level of the population to the pandemic, and ‘Epsilon’ which is the ratio of detected and undetected cases.

Taiwan train mishap kills 50



AGENCIES

Hualien County (Taiwan), April 2: A train partially derailed in eastern Taiwan Friday after colliding with an unmanned vehicle that had rolled down a hill, killing 50 people. With the train still partly in a tunnel, survivors climbed out of windows and walked along the train's roof to reach safety after the country's deadliest railway disaster.

The crash occurred near the Taroko Gorge scenic area on the first day of a long holiday weekend when many people were hopping trains on Taiwan's extensive rail system. The train had been carrying more than 500 people.

The National Fire Service confirmed the death toll, which included the train's young, newly married driver, and said all aboard had now been accounted for. More

than 100 people were injured, it said. Railways news officer Weng Hui-ping called the crash Taiwan's deadliest rail disaster.

Weng said a construction truck operated by the railway administration slid onto the track from a work site on the hillside above. No one was in the truck at the time. He said the speed of the train was not known.

The train had only partially emerged from a tunnel and many escaping passengers were forced to scramble out of doors and windows and scale the sides of the train to walk along the roof to safety.

The stretch of track where the orange-striped train came to a halt hugs the coastline. Yellow and red police tape marked the area of the crash. Images from the scene showed part of the wall of one car had smashed into a seat.

Assam poll team carries EVM in BJP candidate's vehicle

AGENCIES

Guwahati, April 2: The Election Commission Friday ordered fresh voting in one polling station of Assam's Ratabari seat following a controversy over officials inexplicably transporting an electronic voting machine (EVM) in a BJP candidate's car Thursday. The officials involved have been suspended, sources have said. The incident had led to violence in Karimganj district where the seat is located. The car belonged to the wife of Krishnendu Paul, a BJP contestant in nearby Patharkandi. Top Opposition leaders Friday cited this to allege malpractices by the ruling BJP.

The incident in Karimganj widely shared on social media. It followed the break-down of the Election

Commission-assigned vehicle of polling team posted Ratabari. It was on its way back to the strong room after voting, official sources said. The presiding officer contacted the sector officer for a replacement vehicle and was assured of one.

The polling staff, however, inexplicably took a lift in the private car. Krishnendu Paul's electoral affidavit confirms that his wife, Madhumita Paul, owned the vehicle.

As the car approached the locality where the strong room is situated, supporters of the Opposition identified the vehicle and mobbed it, along with the driver. The district administration had to resort to police action to disperse the crowd and secure the vehicle, the EVM, and the polling personnel, officials said.

AWARENESS ON AUTISM



A motorbike rally was organised by Zain Foundation from Sandy Tower to Baramunda in Bhubaneswar to spread awareness on the occasion of the World Autism Day, Friday

OP PHOTO

New helpline number issued to check wildlife crime

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 2: The alarming rise in crime related to wildlife in the state has become a major cause of concern for both the state police and Forest department officials. To rein in the growing menace, the Special Task Force (STF) of state Crime Branch Friday released a mobile phone number (9439263646) urging the citizens to share information related to any crime against wildlife in their locality with the police. The STF has assured financial rewards to the informants and promised not to disclose their names.

“In case of seizure or arrest based on the specific and pinpointed information, the concerned informer would be suitably rewarded,” the STF announced in a press note.

Earlier, the STF sleuths succeeded in arresting two wildlife smugglers and seized a leopard skin from their possession in Bolagarh area of Khurda district in intervening night of Thursday and Friday. The accused persons identified as Sudhira Behera and Subhash Chandra Behera are the residents of Nayagarh district.

A case (11/2) has been registered at the STF police station here under various Sections of IPC and Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. The skin seized from accused has been sent to the Wild Life Institute of India at Dehradun for chemical examination.

STF, the specialised wing of state police dealing with organised crime, has seized 12 leopard skins, six elephant tusks and two deer hide during the last one year.

A first kiss, a battle with addiction: Floyd's girlfriend testifies

IN HER TESTIMONY, ROSS SPOKE ABOUT ADDICTION: AS WITH MILLIONS OF OTHER AMERICANS, FLOYD AND SHE STRUGGLED TO QUIT OPIOIDS

REUTERS

Minneapolis, April 2: George Floyd's girlfriend took the witness stand Thursday and described their relationship, from a first kiss to date nights at restaurants, but also spoke about how an addiction to painkillers took hold of their life together.

Courtney Ross, 45, was the first witness who personally knew Floyd to testify at the trial of Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis policeman charged with murdering the man she loved by kneeling on his neck during an arrest last May.

In her testimony, Ross described how her romance with Floyd began in 2017 when he offered to pray with her. She also spoke about addiction: As with millions of other

Americans, Floyd and Ross struggled to quit opioids.

“It's a classic story of how many people get addicted to opioids,” Ross said. “We both suffered from chronic pain: mine was in my neck, his was in his back.”

CHAUVIN MURDER TRIAL

The death of Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, set off protests across the United States and around the world over racial injustice and police brutality against Black people.

Prosecutors wanted the jury to hear Ross' frank account of opioid use to undermine a central plank of Chauvin's defense in a trial seen as a litmus test of accountability in US policing.

Chauvin's lawyers argue that



Floyd's death, which the county medical examiner ruled a homicide at the hands of police, was really an overdose from the fentanyl found in his blood at an autopsy.

Prosecutors have said Eric Nelson, Chauvin's lead attorney, has sought

to raise the drug use in an effort to muddy Floyd's character and that the theory would be contradicted by medical evidence.

Nelson seemed to acknowledge the sensitivity when he stood up to cross-examine Ross: “I'm sorry to

hear about your struggles with opioid addiction,” he began. “Thank you for sharing that with the jury.”

Before that, Ross, who had pinned a heart-shaped brooch to her black jacket for the occasion, smiled fondly at the memory when asked by prosecutors in the fourth day of witness testimony how she first met Floyd. “It's one of my favorite stories to tell,” she said.

“SIS”? YOU OK?”

Ross, 45, said she first met Floyd in August 2017 at a Salvation Army homeless shelter, where he worked as a security guard. She was waiting in the lobby to visit the father of her son after closing up the coffee shop where she worked. Floyd approached her.

“Floyd has this great, deep, south-

ern voice, raspy,” she said, “and he was, like, ‘Sis? You OK, sis?’”

He sensed she felt sad and alone and offered to pray with her.

“It was so sweet,” Ross said, dabbing a tissue to her eyes. “At the time I had lost a lot of faith in God.”

They had their first kiss in the lobby that night and except an occasional break were together until his death, she said.

In his cellphone, Floyd listed Ross, a mother of two, as ‘Mama.’

They took walks in the parks and around the lakes of Ross's native Minneapolis, which was still new to the Texas-raised Floyd, and dined out often: “He was a big man,” she said, describing his daily weightlifting, “and it took a lot of energy to keep him going.”

FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshaSpeaks.com

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES

Career decisions and money matters will keep you busy today. And after all the work, you will want to spend some leisure time and take it easy. A leisure trip may materialise, which will put you in high spirits.

TAURUS

You will win the heart of your family members today, forecasts Ganesha. Try and delay auction bids or sealed tenders. Job aspirants may look forward to belated success in interviews. Ganesha advises you to take abundant precautions in all critical matters.

GEMINI

Your business rivals may compete with you in sales and deals today, warns Ganesha. Care and concern must be the two watchwords in all your dealings. Hostility may come in the way of love. Those spurned in previous romantic liaisons may get a chance to pen a new love story, says Ganesha.

CANCER

Today, you may have to do a lot of multi-tasking at work, predicts Ganesha. And you are likely to do it with the dexterity of a juggler. You will finish your pending tasks with ease.

LEO

You will exercise your will today and will be in the mood to soar like a free bird today. You will not be in the mood to listen to anyone. Work related travel will be beneficial. Guard against ego clashes in personal relationships, says Ganesha.

VIRGO

Today you need to carry on with your success without resting on your past laurels. You will also need to stay focused and organised to continue with the same success level that you enjoyed in the past.

LIBRA

If there's a knock on your door today, there's a very strong possibility it might be a marriage proposal. Don't get startled, and grab opportunities that come knocking (literally!). The stars send you a partner who shall be your match in every way.

SCORPIO

It seems, the book, 'How to win friends and influence people' has left a great impact on your mind, bringing about a lot of change in your practical life too. As you switch to a new business venture, your efforts will be appreciated. In short, you are a personality that every one would take a note of.

SAGITTARIUS

Running helter-skelter and muddling of affairs is on the menu. Expect not to find even a moment's peace. But take a break, says Ganesha. And dive right back in the chaos and make the most of it.

CAPRICORN

Impulsiveness, which is not really your trait, will be very evident in whatever work you do today, says Ganesha. Money matters will keep you preoccupied for major part of the day, but ironically, your otherwise methodical approach to everything will go for a toss.

AQUARIUS

Lady Luck gazes lovingly upon you today! Bosses are pleased, colleagues are happy, and this makes work seem like leisure. You may want to get in touch with old friends who have moved far away. What are you waiting for, asks Ganesha, in this age of communication?

PISCES

You will have frequent mood swings today but you will still manage to fix a work-related goal. Your mood will be better if you focus on work. You might feel stressed about some personal matter, but Ganesha says it is not a matter to worry. You will receive some good news by the end of the day.



JAMES ALMOST FIRED 'AVATAR' SEQUEL WRITERS

Filmmaker James Cameron has shared that the pre-production of his upcoming *Avatar* sequels was not as smooth as it seemed. The director told author Marianne Williamson that he almost fired his *Avatar* sequel writers' room, which is pitching new ideas for the upcoming movies.

HAILEY BIEBER SAYS TROLLS 'MESS' WITH HER MIND

American model Hailey Bieber, who is married to pop star Justin Bieber, says she has limited the use of Instagram owing to heavy trolling. Hailey was speaking to psychologist Jessica Clemons in a new vlog when she made the revelation.



Nora challenges fans

Mumbai: Actress and dancer Nora Fatehi scorches social media with her new Instagram post Friday, and challenges fans saying she doesn't think they "can take it".

"Wet hair, bronzed skin... see I don't think that u can take it," she wrote as the caption with a set of photos where she strikes a pose or two in a metallic silver fringed dress, doing the half split.

Nora is all geared up for her next film *Bhuj: The Pride Of India*, which revolves around the Indian Air Force pilot Vijay Karnik.

The film stars Ajay Devgn with Sonakshi Sinha. The period drama looks back at the story of 300 women of Madhapar village in Gujarat's Kutch district, who played a pivotal role during the 1971 Indo-Pak war.

IAN S

Alia tests positive for Covid

Mumbai: Alia Bhatt has tested positive for Covid-19. The actress took to Instagram to share with fans that she has isolated herself and is in quarantine at home.

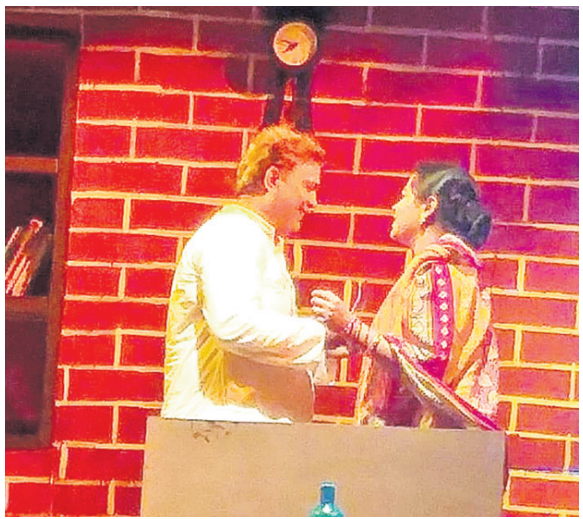
"Hello all, I have tested positive for Covid-19. I have immediately isolated myself and will be under home quarantine. I am following all safety protocols under the advice of my doctors. Grateful for all your love and support. Please stay safe and take care," Alia posted on Instagram Thursday night.

Alia's rumored boyfriend, actor Ranbir Kapoor, had got infected with Covid a few weeks back. However, he has now recovered.

Alia has multiple films lined up. She will be seen in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Gangubai Kathiawadi*. The film is slated to hit screens July 30. She is also part of Ayan Mukerji's *Brahmastra*, which also stars Ranbir.

Alia will also be seen in SS Rajamouli's *RRR*, Karan Johar's *Takht* and Jasmeet K. Reen's *Darlings*, which she has co-produced with Shah Rukh Khan.

IAN S



A scene from play *Shesha Sanlapa* staged at Bhanja Kala Mandap

Holy City troupe presents *Shesha Sanlapa*

Bhubaneswar: Ramchandi Socio Welfare Cultural Organisation of Puri staged the play *Sesha Sanlapa* (*Last Dialogue*) Friday on the second day of monthly drama festival Natyadhara, here at Bhanja Kala Mandap.

Natyadhara is organised by Department of Odia Language, Literature and Culture, Govt. of Odisha in collaboration with Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi and Odisha Natya Sangh, on first three days and on the second Sunday of every month. The drama staged Friday was written by Ganeswar Mohapatra and directed by Pradyumna Mohanty.

Play's plot revolves around Gautam Das, a clerk in a government office who also writes

street plays to criticise the wrongdoings of the establishment. Expectedly, due to his fearlessness he gets suspended from his job. Though he takes a vow not to bow before anyone, ultimately he is

forced by a local legislator to compromise with his values. Against his will, Gautam and Culture, Govt. of Odisha in collaboration with Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi and Odisha Natya Sangh, on first three days and on the second Sunday of every month. The drama staged Friday was written by Ganeswar Mohapatra and directed by Pradyumna Mohanty.

Play's plot revolves around Gautam Das, a clerk in a government office who also writes

Superbikers' rally marks World Autism Awareness Day in City



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar: Zain Foundation Trust, Bhubaneswar Friday organised a superbikers' rally here to observe the World Autism Awareness Day.

Several members of Bhubaneswar Super Bikers' Club participated in the event to support the initiative.

The bike ride was flagged off by Prabodh Mohanty, the Managing Director of SN Mohanty Group.

While a similar rally was organised Friday in Pune, the Trust will hold more rallies in Chennai, Bangalore and Indore in coming days to sensitise people about autism, said Gargi Bhattacharya, a trustee



member of the Foundation Trust.

The rally that kicked off from the premises of Sandy's Tower, passed through im-

portant intersections such as Jayadev Vihar, Nayapalli, CRPF Square and culminated near Trust's office at Baramunda. A number of kids with autism presented gifts to the superbikers.

Mothers of a few children with special needs were also felicitated on the occasion.

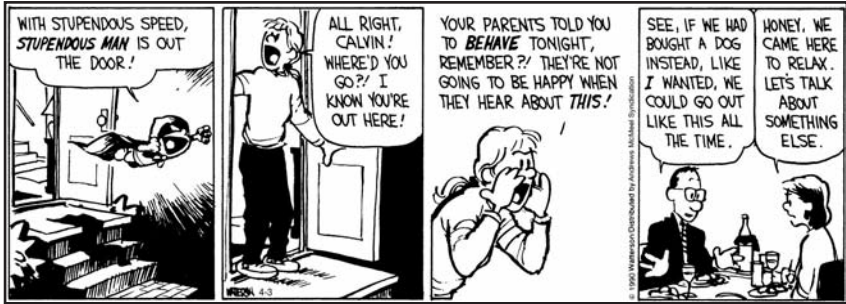
After the grand success of this superbikers' rally, the Trust has some other programmes in store.

"We have also planned a series of advocacy exercises in Bhubaneswar as well as other cities. Besides, we will organise a special fair April 4 where our children will showcase their craftsmanship," said Bhattacharya.

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

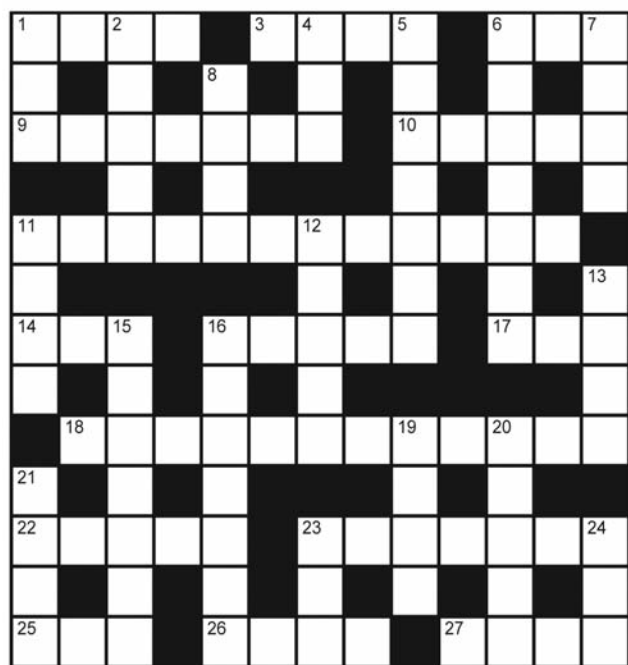


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



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Across

- 1 Scarf material
- 3 Farm unit
- 6 Slow-witted
- 9 Japanese dish
- 10 Tussocks
- 11 Kind of runner (4-8)
- 14 Ground cover
- 16 Social affair
- 17 Male cat
- 18 Tattler

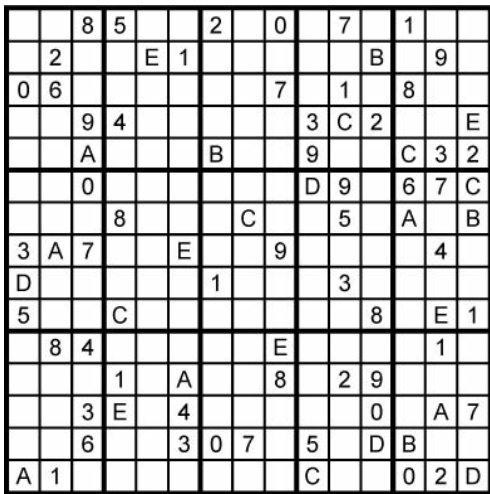
Down

- 22 Bedouin's mount
- 23 Helping
- 25 Harem room
- 26 Blubbers
- 27 Wildcat
- 1 Parked oneself
- 2 Zest producer
- 4 Chinese tea
- 5 Little sound
- 6 Shortfall

- 7 Kind of ox
- 8 Finance
- 11 Mascara site
- 12 Mall binge
- 13 Nanking nanny
- 15 Catch-22
- 16 Little rocks
- 19 Foal's mother
- 20 Bring together
- 21 Canyon sound
- 23 Suds source
- 24 Rule out

SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, each row, column and box must contain the numbers 0 to 9 and the letters A to E.



SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

SUDOKU



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

Phulbani med college likely in 30 months

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 2: If things go as per plan, a new medical college and hospital in Kandhamal would be completed within 30 months. This was revealed at a review meeting of a high-level team of state government officials at Phulbani.

On the direction of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, senior officers comprising Chief Secretary SC Mahapatra, 5T Secretary VK Pandian and Works Secretary Krishan Kumar visited Kandhamal Friday to review the progress of construction of the new medical college and hospital in Phulbani. The state Cabinet, in December 2020, had decided to set up a medical college in Phulbani. The medical college will have 100 seats and the hospital will have 500 beds. The project has been taken up at a cost of Rs 450 crore and is expected to be completed within 30 months. During the visit, Mahapatra directed the district administration to provide all support especially the availability of construction material for timely completion of the



Chief Secretary Suresh Mahapatra, 5T Secretary VK Pandian and Works department secretary Krishan Kumar during their visit to Kandhamal OP PHOTO

project. He appreciated the beautiful location for the project and suggested that plantation to be taken up in the adjacent hills and the Water Resources department would plan for the drainage systems and water conservation structures. The 5T Secretary suggested provision of facilities for attendants like accommodation and food facilities. He further suggested that doctors and staff staying in the campus should have proper ecosystem for working and residential facilities for the families including recreational and sports activities.

The traffic flows should be planned properly including the auto and taxi stands and alternative alignment for NH in front of the site to avoid accidents, he said. The campus will have facilities for 300 seated boys' hostel, 150 seated girls' hostel, 650 capacity auditorium, 100 seated resident doctors' hostel and quarter for doctors & staff. The high-level team, thereafter, visited the AJO government high school and government girls' high school in Phulbani. Both the schools have been selected under the high school transformative initiative as

BOOST TO HEALTH INFRA

The medical college & hospital will have 100 seats and 500 beds

The project has been taken up at a cost of Rs 450 crore and is expected to be completed within 30 months

Chief Secy appreciated the beautiful location for the project and suggested that plantation to be taken up in the adjacent hills and the Water Resources department would plan for the drainage systems and water conservation structures

part of 'Mo School' campaign. The Chief Secretary and 5T Secretary interacted with the teachers, alumni, school management committee and students. Based on their feedback, it was decided to take up various school development activities like smart classroom, library, infrastructure development, sports facilities etc. Kandhamal collector and SP briefed about various issues of the district. In view of the Covid situation, the district administration was directed to be alert and enforce strictly the Covid precautions protocol.

ECOR SETS NAT'L RECORD IN FREIGHT LOADING

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 2: The East Coast Railway (ECOR) has created a record in India for surpassing all previous records in freight loading in financial year 2020-21.

The zonal railway achieved 205 million tonne of freight loading during the period. Last year too, the ECoR had created a record of 202.56 MT loading. But this year it moved ahead and broke its own record. "By this, ECoR became the first zone to cross the milestone of 200 million tonne of loading for two times in a row. It also broke its own record of 200.95 MT of freight loading achieved last financial year 2019-20. The target set by the Board for the financial year for ECoR was actually 203.02 MT, which the zone has clearly surpassed," a statement from the ECoR said.

The department also said that all the three divisions-Khurda Road Division, Sambalpur Division, Waltair Division and improved



The zonal railway achieved 205 million tonne of freight loading during the period

Last year too, the ECoR had created a record of 202.56 MT loading. But this year it moved ahead and broke its own record

their earlier records. The department said that to achieve this loading figure, East Coast Railway utilised 8,447 wagons per day - about 154.8 rakes/trains per day. The ECoR said that works were done despite the challenges of lockdowns and Covid-19. "This remarkable loading has been achieved despite lockdown and closure and less workforce in industries and in mineral units under East Coast Railway jurisdiction. To achieve this remarkable performance, ECoR utilised its manpower and rolling stock items in best possible way and with proper planning and co-

ordination with government sectors and industries," the statement from ECoR said. With this achievement, ECoR became the most profit making zone in India amid all railway zones. "With an operating ratio of 47.71 per cent, the zone easily becomes the most profitable zone of Indian Railways. Operating ratio is the term used to determine the profitability. For every rupee earned by the zone, it has to spend 0.47 paisa. Different sectors across the spectrum have shown tremendous increase over last year," the ECoR said.

Utkal all set for 50th Convocation

Bhubaneswar: Utkal University is all set to organise its 50th Convocation Saturday. Vice President of India M Venkaiah Naidu will grace the occasion as the chief guest by delivering the convocation address. Higher Education Minister Arun Sahoo and Governor Ganeshi Lal will also be present at the ceremony. Altogether 41 PhD degrees, 90 gold medals will be given away to the scholars. Similarly, five doctor honoris causa will be conferred on five eminent odias who have excelled in different fields in the country.

MAN DUPED OF ₹72L IN CITY

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 2: A man has allegedly lost around Rs 72 lakh to fraudsters who promised him to sell a property and help him get Rs 1.20Crore loan from a nationalized bank in the city. The victim has lodged a complaint with Khandagiri police in this regard. According to the complaint, the accused persons including a former employee of Bank of India (BoI) met the victim at his rented house at Khanduala Nagar in Dumduma area July 3, 2020. They offered him to purchase a suitable plot or flat in the city and assured him to facilitate a loan from Kharavela Nagar branch of BoI. They sent some photos of a landed plot measuring 2,400 sqft at Panchasakha Nagar in Dumduma area under Khandagiri police limits. Subsequently, the victim paid Rs 5 lakh in cash and Rs 67 lakh in cheque for the purpose in July 2020. However, they also allegedly made him sign various forged documents in order to hand over the land and for the loan. The accused neither gave him the land nor returned the money taken from him. They allegedly threatened of dire consequences if asked for his money.

7 arrested for bomb hurling at Sundarpada

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 2: The Commissionerate Police Friday arrested seven persons on charges of hurling bomb at the members of a rival group over past enmity at Azad Nagar in Sundarpada area under Airfield police limits. The accused were identified as Sk Sarafat Ali, 36, alias Papu, Abu Talim Khan, 24, alias Bunt, Sk Ahmad Ali, 45, Sk Saikat Ali, 43, babul Basar Khan, 32, Sk Sayad Ali, 50 and Md Asfar Iqbal, 36. All the accused belong to Azad Nagar. According sources, the accused and the complainants have been at loggerheads for the past few months over the village committee president election. On Thursday evening, when a meeting was underway at the village, the seven accused came to spot and hurled a

The accused and the complainants have been at loggerheads for the past few months over the village committee president election

bomb at some villagers including the complainant standing nearby. Later, they also started attacking the victims with sword, iron rod and wooden sticks. A youth sustained severe injuries while another escaped with minor bruises. Airfield police arrested seven persons by registering a case under various sections of the IPC. The accused were sent to judicial custody by the court Friday.



MP Bhartuhari Mahtab, MLAs Muhammad Moquim and Souvic Biswal and CMC Commissioner Ananya Das launch a mechanised sweeping vehicle at Jobra in Cuttack, Friday

OP PHOTO

State records 461 fresh nCoV cases

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 2: State's Covid-19 tally surged to 3, 41, 772 Friday as 461 more people tested positive for the infection, a Health department official said. Meanwhile, 218 persons who had earlier tested positive for the viral infection recovered Friday, added the official. Of the new cases registered in 24 of the state's 30 districts, 272 were reported in quarantine centres, while the remaining infections were detected during contact tracing. Nuapada district registered the highest number of new cases at 86, followed by Khurda (69), Sundargarh (62) and Kalahandi (36), the official said. The state's coronavirus death



toll remained unchanged at 1, 921 as no fresh fatality was reported since March 30. For the first time this year, the number of active cases crossed the 2,500-mark, Friday. The state has thus far tested over 91.03 lakh samples for Covid-19, including 30, 716 Thursday. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik urged people to strictly adhere to the Covid-19 guidelines and get vaccinated when their turn comes.

BMC caps marriage gatherings at 100

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 2: In the wake of a steep rise in Covid-19 cases in the state capital, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), Friday, reduced the number of people to be allowed at marriage-related functions from 200 to 100. Issuing an order, the BMC stated that only 100 people will be allowed to participate in marriage functions and 50 for funeral ceremonies. The civic authority also has prohibited any other gatherings, promotional activities, conferences, annual functions and other kind of jubilee celebrations by institutions and individuals.

"We have been observing rise in Covid cases for the last 7-8 days and thus we have decided to put further restrictions on social gatherings. We are also planning to increase testing. Enforcement activities will be stricter in coming days. Meanwhile, we are targeting vaccination of up to 7,000 to 10,000 per day," said BMC Commissioner, Prem Chandra Chaudhary. Furthermore, the order also mentioned that any other kind of social gathering will require specific permission from the BMC. It can be mentioned that the civic authority here in January had also allowed a maximum of 200 persons for marriage-related functions and 100 for funeral gatherings.

Underpass near Khurda DM's office irks locals



Activists of Khurda Nagarik Manch holding a demo

POST NEWS NETWORK

Khurda, April 2: Activists of Khurda Nagarik Manch have opposed the construction of an underpass on National Highway-16 near the district Collector's office here.

The activists have urged the district administration to take necessary steps for construction of a flyover near the Collector's office. Members of the outfit Friday prevented the employees of a private firm from carrying out the construction work. "Several outfits have pleaded for the construction of a flyover at the spot near Khurda Collector's office. But, the administration has done precious little. Some leaders of the ruling party are tacitly supporting the underpass construction," said a few members of the Manch. It is worth mentioning here that the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) is now widening the NH-16 at Khurda. The NHAI has de-

The activists have urged the administration to take necessary steps for construction of a flyover at the spot

cided to construct underpasses at Palla and Tapang squares and near the Collector's office. Members of the Nagarik Manch have claimed that construction of an underpass near the Collector's office will create inconveniences for the locals. Besides, the underpass may cause road mishaps in the locality. "Hundreds of people usually visit the Collector's office every day. Besides, the locality is witnessing frequent traffic snarls. Construction of an underpass near the Collector's office will not improve the situation. The authorities concerned should build a flyover in the locality," said the Manch activists.

WASSUP TODAY

BHUBANESWAR

- Social service award by Youth for Voluntary Work, Buddha Mandir, Unit-9, 5.30 pm
- Third evening of Shrestha Odiani Competition by Sambhabana Trust, Unit-2 Primary School, 6 pm

PURI

- Badadanda Seva, 6.30 am

BALANGA

- Dola Festival of Paschimashambhu Dev, Balanga, 6 am

Programmes/announcements for **wassup** today may be sent to opwassup@gmail.com for record, it must also carry the sender's mobile number for our verification, but not for publication.

Boudh sizzles at 43 degrees C

MET PREDICTS THUNDERSTORMS WITH LIGHTNING AT SOME PLACES IN STATE

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 2: Heatwave continued to grip many places of the state Friday when Boudh recorded the highest temperature of 43 degrees Celsius. Ten other places in the state also recorded a maximum temperature of 40 degrees or above. As per evening bulletin of Bhubaneswar Met Centre, Bolangir recorded a day temperature of 42.2 degrees Celsius, followed by Malkangiri (42), Sambalpur (41.6), Talcher (41.5), Titlagarh (41.2), Sundargarh & Jharsuguda (41 each), Bhawanipatna & Hirakud (40.5 each) and Baripada (40).



Twin city of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack recorded a maximum day temperature of 38.2 and 37.4 degrees Celsius respectively. The weatherman informed that not a single place of the state has received rainfall between 8:30am and 5:30pm Friday. The maximum temperature is very likely to fall by 2-4 degrees Celsius at many places over the state during next two days and no

large change thereafter, it said. Meanwhile, the IMD has forecast light to moderate rain or thunder-shower at many places over the state during next three days. It also said thunderstorms with lightning and gusty surface wind speed reaching 40-50 kmph is very likely to prevail at one or two places in Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Balasore, Mayurbhanj, Ganjam, Nayagarh, Khurda and Jagatsinghpur districts, Saturday. Similar weather condition would prevail at some places of Rayagada, Gajapati, Ganjam, Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Jajpur, Bhadrak and Kendrapara on the next day (April 4).

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Refugee influx from Myanmar into Kendrapara may happen



Many people are already fleeing the Myanmar fearing persecution in the hands of the armed forces and arriving in neighbouring countries like India and Bangladesh. As a result, a fear of refugee infiltration into Kendrapara through the water routes of the Bay of Bengal haunts people

Some locals say that the district administration should issue a high alert in the territorial waters bordering the district to prevent influx of Myanmar's refugees into the coastal pockets. The refugees in the guise of fishermen might come in small boats, they noted

tially came to the district as fishermen. So the arrival of Myanmar refugees cannot be ruled out, they observed. They also pointed out that both the forest department and the district administration have been slow in tackling the infiltrators. So refugees fleeing Myanmar can take advantage of this fact. Several problems like lack of staff, shortage of arms and ammunition at Jambu and Tantiapal marine police stations and non-availability of patrol boats have made this coastal region very vulnerable.

People said a large number of Bangladeshi refugees have already made Kendrapara their home building colonies indiscriminately. So the influx of Myanmar refugees cannot be ruled out.

Locals alleged hundreds of trawlers illegally sail into the prohibited area of Gahirmatha. However, the district administration has done nothing to prevent such illegal activities. They said the localities of Hukitola, Lunchogola, Shola Muhana, Madali and Nasi jungles are very vulnerable areas.

"The administration should be proactive and prevent the influx of Myanmar refugees," local people observed.

When contacted, Kendrapara SP Sandeep Sampat Madkar said they do not have any information regarding Myanmar refugees. "We are keeping a tab on this sensitive issue and the department will act promptly if the situation so demands," said Madkar.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Mahakalpara, April 2: The unrest in Myanmar has increased the possibility of refugees entering into Kendrapara district through various sea routes. This can happen as the district lacks a proper security system.

The unrest is the outcome of the recent ouster of the Myanmar's democratically elected government by the armed forces of the country and subsequent crackdown on the residents. Many people are already fleeing the country fearing persecution in the hands of the armed forces and arriving in neighbouring countries like India and Bangladesh. As a result, a fear of infiltration by the Myanmar refugees

into Kendrapara district through the water routes of the Bay of Bengal cannot be ruled out due to lack of coastal security measures in place.

Some locals have opined that the district administration should issue a high alert in the territorial waters bordering the district to prevent influx of Myanmar's refugees into the area. It is apprehended that the refugees in the guise of fishermen might come in small boats and infiltrate into the district. Later, the refugees after their arrival might erect shanties in the jungles near the sea and set up their base there.

Some local residents alleged that illegal colonies have cropped up along the beach in the district. They said these colonies have been set up mostly by Bangladeshis, who ini-



A tribal couple collecting *mahula* flowers from forest floor in Koksara area of Kalahandi district, Friday

OP PHOTO

Fires still raging at 51 places in Similipal National Park

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, April 2: Forest fires have been spreading in the Similipal National Park in Mayurbhanj district with the forest department failing to contain it. The park recorded fires at 51 places Friday while it was at 41 places March 31.

According to reports, forest officials, ODRAF teams and locals have been trying to douse the fires at these places. It is said that the fire-fighting teams were exhausted as fires break out at new places.

The forest department has intensified the awareness drive in the region, but hunters are said to be behind such fires.

"Fires were reported from 38 places in south division of the sanctuary while the north division reported fires at 13 places Friday," said M Jagajayananda, the field director of the STR.

The heat generated by the forest fires and the heat condition have made life miserable for wild animals and humans in the area.

The fires have damaged vast areas in the national park. This has affected several endangered plants and animals in the park.



Awareness campaign by locals

The fires have damaged vast areas in the national park. This has affected several endangered plants and animals in the park

Fires were spotted inJenabila, Dukura Naana South, Naana North, Uparabarakhamuda, Kendumundi, Pithabata and Chahala

Six ODRAF teams along with 50 firefighters and 600 forest officials have been deployed in these areas to douse the fire. The exact cause behind the forest fire has not been ascertained yet

Fires were spotted inJenabila, Dukura Naana South, Naana North, Uparabarakhamuda, Kendumundi, Pithabata and Chahala.

Six ODRAF teams along with 50 firefighters and 600 forest officials have been deployed in these areas to douse the fire. The exact cause

behind the forest fire has not been ascertained yet.

Notably, the chief of the task force on wildfire Sandeep Tripathy said March 13 that the proactive steps taken by the state government to curb the spread of forest fire in Odisha has led to the total control of the situation.

NTPC celebrates Utkal Diwas

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sundargarh, April 2: The National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) celebrated the 86th Utkal Diwas at Dulanga Coal Mining Project in Sundergarh in compliance with Covid guidelines.

The celebration was marked by cake cutting and playing of the state anthem. Project head of Dulanga CMP, CR Barik, senior officials and team members deliberated on the contributions of many erstwhile legendary leaders to the formation of the sepa-



rate Odisha province. Odisha is the first state to be formed on the basis of its language.

The project head and the GGM detailed out the coal production target for the current fiscal and the production data of the previous year.



With a spurt in Covid infections, police have intensified checking on border areas of Malkangiri, Friday

OP PHOTO

Hydropower project hangs fire

CHHELIGADA PROJECT IN GAJAPATI HAS BEEN HIT BY A TRADY PACE OF CONSTRUCTION

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, April 2: The work of Chheligada hydropower project in tribal-dominated R Udaygiri block of Gajapati district has hit a tardy pace, causing widespread resentment among locals. The project assumes importance as this is in a backward region and it will help in electrification of many remote villages, a report said.

According to the report, the work of the main dam has not yet started. It was in 1985 when then Congress government proposed the project and had taken up its survey work. 20 years after this (in 2005), its outlay was pegged at Rs 97 crore. But as the project work gets delayed, its cost has escalated to Rs 706 crore.

The delay is likely to lead to further cost overrun while the time line for completion of the project is uncertain. But the executive engineer of the project has hinted that the project may be completed by 2024.

After completion of the project, 3600 hectares of farmland will get irrigation coverage in Mohana and R Udaygiri blocks in Gajapati district, Digapahandi and Sanakhemundi blocks of Ganjam district. Moreover, it will generate



about 30 megawatt of electricity every day. This hydropower project is expected to alleviate the power crisis in the region.

Besides, the project will help in removing the drinking water woes in the region. Over 500 families will face displacement at Chheligada, Bidyadharpur, Taligaon, Kajili and Subiga. It is said that displacement issues have hindered the work.

The administration has been trying to clear the bottlenecks. The

fourth meeting of the rehabilitation and peripheral development advisory committee was held August 13, 2019. It was attended by the then southern range RDC, MP Chandrasekhar Sahu, Gajapati Collector, chief engineer and other engineers of the Berhampur water resources division, Mohana MLA and other people's representatives and the displaced people.

It was learnt that Rs 29 crore has been paid as compensation to the

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displaced family. A colony has been set up at Samantrapur near Digapahandi where all facilities have been put up for the displaced families.

According to the executive engineer of the project, the blueprint of the dam entails damming up the water of a hill stream from Ramgiri hill. A tender for the dam construction will be floated in April. Meanwhile, construction of a canal and a tunnel in the hill has started.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nayagarh, April 2: A row has broken out over a road project proposed to come up in Gudupangi forest under Nuagaon block of Nayagarh district with members of 12 Jungle Surakhya Samitis strongly opposing it, a report said.

According to the report, the road is being laid through this forest under MGNREGS. Earlier, the people of Gudupangi used to protest, but now people of 11 other villages have come out against it.

Villagers of Gudupangi agree to allow a foot track inside the forest, but opposed a permanent road. Because, they have been nurturing the forest since 1982.

They argue that if a 2-km road inside the forest is allowed, it will damage the flora and fauna, besides paving way for timber mafia and country liquor makers to plunder the forest.

Members of the Jungle Surakhya Samitis from Dhenkena, Malisahi, Khandugaon, Kridaspur, Balugaon, Saradhapur, Champatipur, Natugaon, Laxmiprasad, Sinduria, Bhattasahi and Ghaduala have taken up the issue with the ad-

Villagers argue that if a 2-km road inside the forest is allowed, it will damage the flora and fauna, besides paving way for timber mafia and country liquor makers to plunder the forest



ministration. They have apprised the MLAs of Nayagarh and Dasapalla, the forest and environment minister, the Chief Secretary, the sub-collector, the SP and the Nayagarh DFO about their resistance to the road project inside the forest.

Notably, in February this year, when the road project was started, people of Malisahi, Dhenkena and Khandugaon strongly opposed it February 5. However, people of 17 other neighbouring villages supported the project. The conflict ended up in an armed confrontation between the project supporters and opponents. But the administration intervened in time and settles the issue at a meeting February 6.

As road work resumed again,

the opposition has started.

On the other hand, people of 17 villages, who have been facing commuting problem, have been repeatedly urging the Collector to carry forward the road project.

Arjun Nayak, a village head of Gudupangi, said villagers allow a foot track inside the forest, but opposed a permanent road. "The reason for the opposition is, we have been protecting and nurturing the Dadhinauti forest since 1982. New trees are growing up. It is vibrant with wildlife. A 2-km road inside the forest will damage the flora and fauna. The permanent road will pave the way for timber mafia and country liquor makers to plunder the forest," he pointed out.

Medicinal plants vanishing from Nayagarh forests

POST NEWS NETWORK

Khandapada, April 2: Timber mafia has been plundering valuable trees and plants, especially those containing medicinal qualities in various forests of Nayagarh district. Now, Adhunga plants are in their target.

Adhunga plants are fast vanishing from forests in the district as mafia from outside are cutting these trees with the help of locals. Environmentalists have expressed concern over it, a report said.

The forested landscape was once rich with Adhunga plants. Now, they are found rarely in some areas.

Reports said, these trees have much demand in preparation of some Ayurvedic medicines and some traders from outside have set their sights on these plants. Leaves and branches of Adhunga plants are used for bouquets while its fruits act as a repellent for bugs in houses.

Locals said some Ayurvedic practitioners from outside have engaged middlemen to collect Adhunga plants from forests. With the help of local people, these middlemen have been collecting these trees.

People came to know of the value of these plants in 2008 when Antaryami Sahu, a retired teacher

ON RADARS OF MAFIA



of Kantilo area, had opposed cutting of these plants. He visited villages, sensitising people and their rep-

resentatives about protection of these plants. Thereafter, felling of Adhunga plants had been stopped as the forest department took immediate action to prevent cutting.

After a long gap, plundering of the Adhunga plants has started in some pockets.

Antaryami Sahu came to know about the development and visited Kaliapalli village recently. He saw some people cutting down Adhunga plants. On enquiry, it was learnt that a man from outside the state asked the locals to cut down these trees. The middleman has even paid some advance to buy its seeds and bottom

parts. "A kg of raw seeds is sold for Rs 20 while a kg of dry seeds is Rs 35," they added.

Some medicines are prepared from its seeds. When contacted, Khandapada ranger Sridhar Panda said some unscrupulous people cut down these trees and eke out their living by selling it.

"The forest department is aware of the development. About a month ago, forest officials had seized logs of Adhunga trees, which were being shifted in a bus from Gania area. But the persons who were taking the logs could not be caught," he added.



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Sd./- Principal
T.S.D. College, B.D.Pur (Gm)

of the day quote

It's a matter of concern since the COVID-19 cases are rising exponentially. But there is no need to panic. The government is monitoring the situation and taking all necessary steps

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | DELHI CHIEF MINISTER

The total revenue collection by the Excise and Taxation Department in Himachal Pradesh in FY 2020-21 has surpassed the previous financial year's figures by 3 per cent despite the Covid-19 pandemic

JAI RAM THAKUR | HIMACHAL PRADESH CM

Raiding the opposition is the BJP's coping mechanism when facing electoral defeat

RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

SHORT TAKES

Robert Vadra tests covid+ve

New Delhi: Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has cancelled her campaign schedule of Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala after her husband Robert Vadra tested Covid-19 positive. However, she has tested negative. She has released a video message apologising to the people, saying that doctors have advised her to be in self-isolation, so she is following the guideline.

Four killed in road accident

Jaipur: Four people, including a couple, were killed Friday when a truck carrying marble stone overturned on a car passing by it in Rajasthan's Pali district, police said. All four killed in the accident were in the car on which the truck overturned on NH-62 near Balrai village of the district, Endla police station's SHO Bihari Lal Sharma said. The killed people were identified as Ashwani Sharma, his wife Rashmi, relative Manoj Sharma and driver Buddha Ram, the SHO said.

Woman found dead

New Delhi: A 26-year-old woman was found dead Friday inside her rented accommodation in northwest Delhi's Mangolpuri area, police said. The deceased has been identified as Jyoti, they said. On Friday at 10.52 am, police got information that a woman's body was lying on the fourth floor of a house in Mangolpuri area, a senior police officer said. Police reached the spot where the deceased was found lying with injury marks on her head and right side of the face, the officer said.

India pitches for early disengagement



Indian, Chinese troops and tanks disengage from the banks of Pangong lake area in Eastern Ladakh

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 2: India Friday hoped that China will work with it to ensure disengagement of troops in remaining areas of eastern Ladakh at the earliest, and asserted that de-escalation of tension alone will lead to restoration of peace and tranquility in border areas and provide conditions for progress of bilateral ties.

At a media briefing, Spokesperson in the Ministry of External Affairs Arindam Bagchi said the two sides continue to remain in touch through military and diplomatic channels on the issue. He also referred to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's comments that a prolongation of the situation is in neither side's interest.

"We, therefore, hope that the Chinese side will work with us to ensure that disengagement in the remaining areas is completed at the earliest," he added.

This, he said, would allow both sides to consider de-escalation of forces in eastern Ladakh as that

alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility and provide conditions for progress of the bilateral relationship. Bagchi also said that there was a consensus that the two sides should now quickly resolve the remaining issues in the region.

"The disengagement in Pangong Lake area was a significant step forward and it has provided a good basis for resolution of other remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control in western sector," he said. Bagchi said the two sides had detailed exchange of views on the remaining issues both at the senior commanders' meeting and the discussions held under the framework of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on border affairs.

Following the disengagement in the Pangong lake area, India and China held the 10th round of military talks, the WMCC meeting besides a telephonic conversation between the foreign ministers of the two countries.

The border standoff between the Indian and Chinese militaries erupted on May 5 last year following a violent clash in the Pangong lake areas and both sides gradually enhanced their deployment by rushing in tens of thousands of soldiers as well as heavy weaponry.

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, the two sides completed withdrawal of troops and weapons from the North and South banks of Pangong lake in February in line with an agreement on disengagement.

In the subsequent military talks on February 20, India insisted on resolution of outstanding issues including in Depsang, Hot Springs and Gogra. India has been insisting that peace and tranquility along the border is essential for overall ties between the two countries.

Last week, Army Chief Gen MM Naravane said that the threat to India has only "abated" following the disengagement in Pangong lake areas but it has not gone away altogether.

Ambani security scare probe: NIA questions club owner

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 2: The National Investigation Agency which is probing the case related to a bomb scare near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence here on Friday recorded the statement of the owner of a club, said an official.

The agency had conducted searches at the 'social club' located inside a hotel in south Mumbai Friday. The NIA is probing alleged links of its owner with cricket bookie Naresh Gor and suspended police constable Vinayak Shinde, the official said. The club owner was seen arriving at the NIA office around 11 am and left around 4.50 pm.



Devotees offer prayers outside Sacred Heart Cathedral Church, in New Delhi. Entry was restricted with prior registration on the occasion of Good Friday

FALL IN ANIMAL DEATHS

The Delhi zoo recorded 125 animal deaths in 2020-21, the lowest in the last three years, officials said. The zoo reopened to the public Thursday after remaining shut for more than a year due to the coronavirus pandemic and bird flu



The infection is caused by the varicella-zoster virus
Chickenpox spreading rapidly in Gaya

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Patna, April 2: There is a chickenpox breakout reported in Bihar's Gaya district. Hundreds of patients from all age groups have been affected, according to village officials.

Banshraj Bigha and Boknari villages under the Paraiya Khurd block have reported many cases. Villagers from Paraiya Khurd are blaming the district administration for not visiting the affected areas even once.

The chickenpox infection is caused by the varicella-zoster virus. It causes itchy rash with small, fluid-filled blisters. It is highly contagious to people who haven't had the disease or been vaccinated against it.

Villages like Vanshraj Bigha



and Boknari are said to be the hotspots with more than 100 patients in the age group of two to 80 being affected.

Mathura Prasad Vidyarthi, resident of Boknari village and father of Uri-attack 'martyr' Sunil Kumar Vidyarthi, told the media that the state government has completely failed in rising to the occasion.

"Health officials of Gaya have never visited our village since the

chicken pox break out began," Vidyarthi said.

"When my son died in the Uri attack, the state government had announced to open a primary health center in our village. It has not happened yet," Vidyarthi said.

Rahul Kumar, a resident of Boknari village said: "My 5-year-old son got chicken pox. For a week he was sick. We did not have any medicines for the disease. We just prayed to the goddess (Mata Rani) and kept the patient indoors."

Sumaina, another villager, told the media that over 100 people are affected with the chicken pox breakout. "Our village head (Mukhiya) and Sarpanch informed health officials about the contagious viral breakout but no one has come here for inspection."

Maha faces acute shortage of blood

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, April 2: As the Covid-19 pandemic hits Maharashtra again, a massive shortage of blood, like in the middle of 2020, looms ahead, sending panic signals afresh among the health authorities.

The State Blood Transfusion Council (STBC) has alerted the state government after which the situation is being monitored on a daily basis, it was announced on Friday.

Food and Drugs Administration Minister Dr Rajendra Shingane revealed that the average availability of blood stocks is barely sufficient to last a week in the state, putting a question mark on routine or emergency surgeries and other blood requirements by hospitals.

"There is a huge shortage of blood in major cities like Mumbai, Thane, Pune... the availability is for 6-7 days, in some other districts it may be around 10-11 days. Collections need to be ramped up drastically," he urged.

Housing Minister Dr Jitendra Awhad urged the youth to organise blood donation camps or come forward vol-



untarily and donate blood while adhering to all Covid protocols.

Mumbai social worker Rakesh Upadhyay said that though there is not much requirement for blood among Covid-19 patients, the blood collection cycle has virtually stopped since the past 12 months owing to the pandemic and lockdown.

"The blood banks in Maharashtra face an acute shortage of blood... It is the dire need of the hour and people should step forward to donate blood, voluntarily and selflessly, as it's a noble and humanitarian case," Awhad appealed.

The state government has also called upon political parties, NGOs, social organisations and the corporates to undertake blood donation camps and encourage the youngsters to donate blood.

No ban on export of Covid vax: MEA

India is one of the world's biggest drugmakers, an increasing number of countries have already approached it for procuring anti-coronavirus vaccines

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 2: Asserting that India has not imposed any export ban on anti-coronavirus vaccines, the Ministry of External Affairs on Friday said the country has taken the lead in sending vaccines abroad with over 640 lakh doses supplied to more than 80 countries till now.

Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi also said the ministry's 'Vaccine Maitree' initiative to supply vaccines abroad has been "very successful and very well liked" by our partners across the world.

"As on date, under the 'Vaccine Maitree' initiative, we have supplied a total of about 644 lakh doses to the global community and of these, 104 lakh doses have been supplied as a grant, 357 lakh doses on a commercial basis and 182 lakh doses through the COVAX initiative," Bagchi said at an online media briefing. With regard to the demand for made-in-India vaccines, many countries across the world have been requesting for their supply, he said. "I don't have an exact number for what is the demand

(for the vaccines) because it is a request based on the requirement of countries," Bagchi said. The 'Vaccine Maitree' initiative has been extremely successful and very well liked by our partners across the world and "we are continuing to try to supply to the extent possible given our domestic requirements", Bagchi said.

Asked about reports that Nepal has approached India to procure 5 million more vaccine doses but has not got any response, he said India has taken the lead on sending vaccines abroad.

"No country has shared with the world the number of vaccines that India has while vaccinating its own population. Till now, we have supplied vaccines to more than 80 countries across in the world and we have already stated that our external supplies would be done keeping in mind our domestic requirements," the MEA spokesperson said.

"At this time, I hope our partners understand that vaccines are primarily purposed for domestic consumption. I want to emphasise that we have not imposed any export ban on vaccines," Bagchi asserted.



Representative image

DNA test gives clean chit to rape accused

THIS YOUNG MAN WAS FALSELY BOOKED FOR RAPE AND SPENT 26 MONTHS IN JAIL BEFORE THE DNA TEST ON THE SURVIVOR'S CHILD PROVED THAT HE WAS NOT THE BIOLOGICAL FATHER

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh), April 2: This young man was falsely booked for rape and spent 26 months in jail before the DNA test on the survivor's child proved that he was not the biological father.

Amit Kumar, 24, was accused of raping and impregnating a minor girl at his Dattawali village in Aligarh.

Amit, who was working in Faridabad, had come to his village to attend the marriage of his elder brother in July 2018.

Seven months later, he was summoned by the police in February 2019 and accused of raping the girl. His mother and sister-in-law had already been detained. Amit rushed back and was arrested.



Amit's father, Sajjan Singh, told reporters that he had a dispute with the survivor's father over a piece of land and the case was set up to settle scores.

Amit was charged with rape and under sections of the POCSO Act while his elder brother, Chandra Shekhar, was charged with voluntarily causing hurt. With his younger

brother Sunil and a distant relative Teekshan Pal, he was also booked for criminal intimidation and house trespass at the Barla police station.

Chandrashekhar got bail, and Sunil and Teekshan's names were later removed from the charge sheet because there was not enough evidence against them.

Amit was lodged in the Aligarh district jail. Amit's lawyer Hariom Varshney said they pleaded before the court for a DNA test of the survivor's child to ascertain whether Amit was guilty of having raped her which led to pregnancy.

The survivor came with the child at the hospital in the fifth attempt and the samples of Amit and the child were taken in March last year. The report came last month which

stated that Amit was not the biological father of the child.

"It is apparent that the FIR was lodged after considerable delay, that too, when pregnancy was detected. The victim alleged that the same was a result of rape committed by Amit but DNA report submitted in sealed envelope and opened before this Court reveals that applicant is not the biological father. The bail has finally been granted by the Allahabad High Court," Varshney said. Aligarh SSP Kalanidhi Naithani, meanwhile, said the police would seek legal opinion from the joint director of prosecution after going over the case diary.

Amit's counsel said that his next step will be to apply for his client's discharge from all charges under which he was booked.

BJP has won more than 50 seats out of 60 in the first two phase of Bengal polls, Didi (Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee) herself is losing from Nandigram

AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

IT raids on Stalin ji's son in law is yet another example of GOI hounding political opponents through their trusted agencies

MEHBOOBA MUFTI | PDP PRESIDENT

Parkash Singh Badal had promised to extend free power facility to farmers for agricultural operations and fulfilled this commitment in the very first cabinet meeting after assuming power in the state

SUKHBIR SINGH BADAL | SAD CHIEF

SHORT TAKES

Fake call centre busted

New Delhi: Twenty-five employees of a fake call centre here have been apprehended for allegedly duping US nationals, Delhi Police officials said Friday. The call centre was in Saidullajab in south Delhi's Mehrauli area, they said. Its employees used to dupe US nationals by asking them to pay membership fees on the pretext of providing them US government grants for unemployed persons and handicapped persons, police said.

Senior citizen killed by tiger

Seoni (MP): A 62-year-old man was killed by a tiger in a field near Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh' Seoni district Friday, an official said. The incident took place in Ghatkohka buffer area at around 5am and the deceased has been identified as Ghisaram Verma, Pench field director Vikram Singh Parihar said. "He was collecting mahua seeds. The tiger mauled him to death and then went back into the forest," he said in a statement.

Four Naxals surrender

Narayanpur: Four Naxals, three of them collectively carrying a reward of Rs 7 lakh on their heads, surrendered before the police in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district Friday, an official said. The cadres, including three women, turned themselves in before the police citing disappointment with the "hollow" ideology of the Maoist movement and increasing pressure of the security forces, Narayanpur superintendent of police Mohit Garg said in a statement.

6 people drown

Hyderabad: In a tragic incident, six people drowned in Godavari river in Telangana Friday. The incident occurred at the VIP Pushkar Ghat at Pochampahad in Nizamabad district. Police said rescue workers pulled out five bodies while search was on for the sixth.

Farmer hangs self

Bilaspur: A 58-year-old farmer allegedly committed suicide in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district Friday after he reportedly did not get a duplicate copy of a document of his land from a local revenue official, police said in a statement.



BJP is not interested in the development of Pondicherry
V NARAYANASAMY | SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER

SIGNAL IS FASTEST GROWING APP

Amid the brouhaha over new and controversial WhatsApp privacy policy that is set to come into force from May 15, privacy-focused messaging app Signal became the fastest-growing app globally, including in India, both in downloads and monthly active users (MAUs) in the first quarter last year, according to a new report.



'Concern over nCoV cases in 11 states/UTs'

AGENCIES

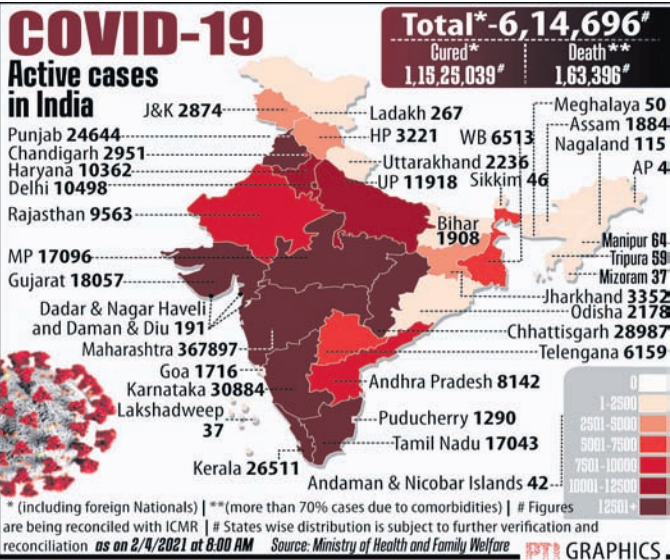
New Delhi, April 2: The Central government on Friday said that the coronavirus situation in 11 states/Union Territories is a matter of "serious concern" and urged the Chief Secretaries and Directors General of Police concerned to take appropriate action in this regard.

The directions were given during a review meeting Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba held with Chief Secretaries, DGP and Health Secretaries of Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Chandigarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Haryana.

These states and Union Territories have been reporting a very high rise in daily Covid cases and mortalities in the last two weeks. India recorded 81,466 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, the highest since October 2020.

Taking note of the present situation due to the continuous deterioration of the Covid scenario over the fortnight, the Cabinet Secretary pointed out that the current Covid case growth rate of 6.8 per cent in March 2021 has surpassed the previous record of 5.5 per cent (June 2020).

The country also reported 5.5



per cent growth rate in daily Covid deaths in this period. While India was reporting about 97,000 daily new Covid cases at the peak of the pandemic in September 2020, it has now reached the critical figure of 81,000 daily new cases.

In a detailed presentation, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan highlighted the current trajectory of Covid in the states and UTs while Information and Broadcasting Secretary Amit Khare showcased ways of effective behavioural change

communication to instil Covid appropriate behaviour among the populace.

Niti Aayog's Member Health, Dr V.K. Paul emphasised on need for states to follow a protocol for sharing clinical and epidemiological data for more detailed study of mutant strain of virus for genome sequencing.

Union Home Secretary A.K. Bhalla pointed out that the 11 states and UTs that are showing a surge in daily Covid cases have not shown

Akhilesh's dream project in shambles



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Agra, April 2: The total neglect and failure to maintain the 207 km-long cycle track from Etawah to Agra, the Rs 133 crore dream project of former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, has reduced it to a state of shambles.

No longer does the ruined cycle track attract fitness freaks. The concrete layered cycle track through wilderness and ravines of the Yamuna, never found patrons, in fact. Long-distance runner and cycling maniac Pramod Katara said that "vil-

lagers in many stretches used the track for drying cow dung cakes, or for washing clothes".

In the Bah area, close to the dreaded Chambal ravines, the track was not even fully complete, but the Akhilesh government was in a hurry to inaugurate the project on November 26, 2016.

The cycle track with colourful pillars meandering along shady trees, had to be bulldozed in Agra, to make way for the six-lane Fatehabad road, connecting the Kheria airport with the Taj Mahal. "Since this stretch of road is frequently used by VIPs and foreign dignitaries, a plan to widen it had been there in the pipeline for a long time," a contractor at the site along the city's Mall Road said.

But now the cycle track is used by buffaloes. In any case the project was a non-starter from the very beginning. These days how many people use cycles? Not many. Even students opt for scooters and mobiles.

"For want of security foreign tourists showed no interest," said environmentalist Shruvan Kumar Singh.

Shared all data with WHO to probe Covid origins: China

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, April 2: China said that it has shared all data and analyses with the experts of the World Health Organization (WHO) tracing the origin of Covid-19, and it is ready to continue working with global experts to jointly study and analyse the data.

The joint study group of WHO and China to trace the origin of Covid-19 released a report two days ago, in which it flagged that more data will be made available to the investigators by Beijing.

A day after the report was released, India had demanded a com-

prehensive and expert-led mechanism to expeditiously investigate the origin of coronavirus. The US, the UK and several other countries have also voiced their concerns over the findings.

Reacting to India's demand, China said that they had twice invited WHO experts for the study of the origin of Covid-19 and offered necessary facilitation for the team's work, fully demonstrating its openness, transparency and responsible attitude. China further said that the joint study group tracing the origin of Covid-19 has unanimously agreed that the allegation of a 'lab leak' is extremely unlikely.

toughfight to the parties. Assembly constituencies in the Pondicherry regions are small with about 25,000-35,000 voters.

The popularity of individual candidates in the area often becomes the deciding factor in winning elections. On many occasions and in many constituencies, Independents have risen up to expectations and won the elections.

This time, three constituencies in Karaikal district - Tirunallar;

Liquor shops in Chhindwara open amid lockdown

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chhindwara (Madhya Pradesh), April 2: A three-day complete lockdown has been imposed in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district from Friday, following the surge in coronavirus cases in the district. While all shops and markets are closed, liquor shops are still open and the Congress has slammed the administration for this.

Congress spokesperson Syed Jafar tweeted: "Stop fudging the Covid-19 figures in Chhindwara, even after so many deaths the officials sitting in the district administration and the state Health ministry are found sleeping just like 'Kumbhakaran'. Shivraj Singh Chouhan ji, if you have time, take the feedback of people in Chhindwara where the three-day lockdown has been imposed, but the liquor shops are open." Chhindwara SP Vivek Agarwal said that the liquor shops are open as the guideline from the Centre makes no mention of their closure.

FOLK SHOW



Artists perform Rabha Folk dance Hamja during an election rally of BJP in Kamrup district, Assam

PTI PHOTO

'Stones pelted at Tikait's convoy'



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, April 2: Stones were allegedly pelted at the convoy of farmer leader Rakesh Tikait in Rajasthan's Alwar district, damaging the rear windshield of his car. Police have detained a student leader, who the Bhartiya Kisan Union claimed, belonged to ABVP, the student wing of the BJP, and accused the party of being behind the attack.

Tikait, however, was not in his car when the stones were allegedly pelted, Bhiwadi Superintendent of Police Ram Murti Joshi said,

adding no one was injured in the incident. The incident took place when Tikait's convoy reached Tatarpur chauraha on its way to his second rally venue, the SP said, adding the farmer leader addressed two rallies in the district Friday. He said Kuldeep Rai, a student leader of Alwar-based Matsya University, along with his supporters showed black flags when the cavalcade was passing. "At this, some of the cars stopped and their occupants in the vehicles argued with them over the issue. Amid all this, the windshield of one car was damaged apparently in stone pelt-ing," the SP said. BKU's state president Rajaram Meel, who was accompanying Tikait, alleged that at least 40 to 50 people carrying sticks stopped the convoy and entered into an altercation with them. "We were moving towards Bansur after addressing the first meeting in Harsoli when the incident took place," he said.

Marimuthu, former MLA. In the Neravy TR-Pattinam constituency, two independent candidates are among the main contenders.

Sitting MLA Geetha Anandan, who was with the DMK, is contesting as an independent as she was denied a ticket this time. VMCS

INDIA DECLINES TO COMMENT ON PAK'S FLIP-FLOP ON BILATERAL TRADE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 2: India Friday declined to comment on Pakistan's flip-flop on plans to go for limited imports of sugar and cotton from the country.

"We have seen reports on this. But as is evident, we are not the right party to whom this question should be directed at," said Arindam Bagchi, Spokesperson in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). His response came following questions on the issue at a media briefing.

In a volte-face, Pakistan's Cabinet on Thursday rejected the proposal of a high-powered committee to import cotton and sugar from India. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said there can be no normalisation of ties until New Delhi reverses its decision to revoke the special status of Jammu and



Kashmir. The somersault came a day after the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) under newly-appointed Finance Minister Hammad Azhar on Wednesday decided to buy the two key items from India, lifting a nearly two-year-long ban on their import from the neighbouring country. Asked whether India is planning to restore the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to Pakistan, Bagchi said he does not have any information on it.

India withdrew the MFN status to Pakistan following the Pulwama terror attack in 2019. To a question on whether there was any interaction between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Pakistani counterpart Qureshi in Dushanbe on the sidelines of a conference, the MEA spokesperson said he was not aware of any such interaction with the Pakistani delegation.

Rajaganapathy, son of former Minister VMC Sivakumar, is also in the fray as an independent.

They both are taking on DMK's Nagathiyagarajan and BJP's VMCS Manoharan. Interestingly, the BJP candidate and the independent VMCS Rajaganapathy are brothers. If any of the independents go on to win the elections, they might play a crucial role in the formation of the next government in the Union Territory.



business

of the day quote

At present, we can roll out 9,200 units a month from the Hosur plant that we commissioned in February. Given the rise in demand now, we are planning to treble our capacity

TARUN MEHTA | CO-FOUNDER, ATHER ENERGY



We continue to explore opportunities for value creation through our portfolio realignment. We remain focused on optimizing value through such strategic exits and are equally committed to raise resources

BAJRANG KUMAR CHOUDHARY | MANAGING DIRECTOR, BRNL



Our distinguished consumers now have the opportunity to pre-book this latest offering, Aprilia SXR 125, offering to maxify lives, with the new Aprilia experience

DIEGO GRAFFI | CMD, PIAGGIO INDIA.



SHORT TAKES

Sebi attachments

New Delhi: Markets regulator Sebi has ordered attachment of bank as well as demat accounts of Alchemist Holdings and three individuals to recover investors money to the tune of Rs 444.67 crore. The recovery proceedings have been initiated against the entities after they failed to refund investors money as directed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi). The regulator, in August 2015, had asked Alchemist Holdings and its directors to refund investors money. The company had mobilised Rs 444.67 crore through the issuance of redeemable preference shares to 4.26 lakh people. In an attachment notice Thursday, Sebi asked banks and depositories not to allow any debit from the accounts of Alchemist Holdings and three individuals.

PNB eyes experts

New Delhi: Punjab National Bank is looking to hire a non-judicial member for seeking advice on issues like compromise and write off related to loans. The public sector lender has invited expression of interest (Eoi) from professional or retired personnel based in or around Delhi. "Punjab National Bank, one of the leading public sector bank in India having its corporate office in Dwarka, New Delhi, invites Expression of Interest from professional/ retired personnel based in or around Delhi, for honorary positions (One Non-Judicial member)," it said in a notice. The non-judicial member will act as a member of the Head Office Committee, which has been constituted by the bank for scrutinising the proposal relating to compromise/write off, the release of guarantors, waiver of legal action among others.

Mansa bagged

New Delhi: ANG Lifesciences India Ltd on Friday said it has acquired printing and packaging firm, Mansa Print & Publishers Ltd, which has undergone corporate insolvency resolution plan, as part of its strategic backward integration. Located at Baddi in Himachal Pradesh, Mansa Print & Publishers Ltd is engaged in printing and packaging business covering manufacturing of packaging products including cartons, corrugated boxes and aluminium foil. In addition to this, it has a separate stationery division with high-tech machinery giving good business opportunity, ANG Lifesciences India (ALI) said in a regulatory filing.



Tremendous progress has been achieved in building national highways across the country... We have achieved a road building pace of 37 km of highways a day

NITIN GADKARI | UNION MINISTER

THE GREEN MISSION

India's greenhouse gas emissions are the third largest in the world, contributing 7 per cent to overall global emissions and temperature rise.



State refiners told to review import contracts with Saudi

Govt tells four state-owned refiners to use collective bargaining power to get favourable terms with the Middle East country

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 2: Amid tensions with Saudi Arabia over oil production cuts, India has asked its state refiners to review contracts they enter into for buying crude oil from the Middle East nation and negotiate more favourable terms, a top official said.

Keen to break producers' cartel dictating pricing and contractual terms, the government has told Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) to look for oil supplies from outside the Middle East region and use collective bargaining power to get favourable terms.

India imports 85 per cent of its oil needs and is often vulnerable to global supply and price shocks. When oil prices started to rise in February, it wanted Saudi Arabia to relax output controls but the Kingdom ignored its calls. This has led to India now pressing for diversification of the supply base.

"Traditionally, Saudi Arabia and other OPEC producers have been our mainstay suppliers of crude oil. But their terms have often been loaded against the buyer," the official with direct knowledge of the discussions said. For one, Indian firms buy two-thirds of their purchases on term or fixed annual contracts. These term contracts provide assured supplies of the contracted quantity but the pricing and other terms favour only the supplier, he said.



"While buyers have an obligation to lift all of the contracted quantity, Saudi and other producers have the option to reduce supplies in case OPEC decides to keep production artificially lower to boost prices. Why should the consumer have to pay for decisions of OPEC? If we commit to offtake, they should also supply no matter what," he said. More importantly, the buyer has to indicate at least six weeks in advance of their intention to lift quantity out of the annual term contract in any month and has to pay an average official price announced by the producer.

"In an ideal market, the pricing should be of the day when the loading is taking place. That way we can get the advantage of any drop in international oil rates. But that is not the case. They insist on selling at their official selling price only," the official said. To begin with,

Indian refiners will look to reduce the quantity they buy through term contracts and instead buy more from the spot or current market. Buying from the spot market would ensure that India can take advantage of any fall in prices on any day and book quantities. "It's like stock market. You would want to buy shares on a day or time when the prices are low. So is the case with crude oil - we would want to buy when we see there is a drop. Term contracts devoid us of that flexibility," he said. Indian refiners have raised spot purchases from 20 per cent a decade back to 30-35 per cent of the total oil bought now.

"We want pricing flexibility as well as the certainty of supply even during times when production falls due to any reason," he said adding state-owned refineries have been asked to coordinate buying and explore joint strategy with private refiners.

Won't exit India: Frank Templeton

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 2: Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund Friday said its commitment to India remains 'steadfast' and the fund house has no plans to exit its operations in the country.

This comes following media reports suggesting intervention by the fund house's US-headquartered parent seeking the diplomatic route for a "just and fair" hearing by market regulator Sebi in the investigation pertaining to six wound-up debt schemes.

According to the reports, Franklin Templeton had threatened to exit India if it was not given a fair hearing. In a letter to investors Franklin Templeton Asset Management (India) Pvt Ltd President Sanjay Sapre said, "we have no plans to exit our India business. Any speculation suggesting otherwise, or any rumours around sale of business in India are incorrect and simply that-rumours".

Sapre said that Franklin Templeton was an early entrant in the Indian mutual fund industry and remained a part of the industry even while many other global asset managers decided to leave. He, however, did not deny reports of engaging with government authorities. "Our engagement with government authorities, in India and globally, is also something we, and many companies



do, as a matter of course. We have endeavored to keep all stakeholders, including the relevant government and diplomatic authorities, appropriately informed of developments, and will continue to do so," Sapre said.

The intention in reaching out remains bringing the current matters to an appropriate conclusion. The fund house said it has full confidence in Sebi and all regulatory and statutory authorities.

The fund house has been fully transparent with the regulator and extended fullest cooperation to them, to help them examine the circumstances surrounding the winding up of the six schemes by Franklin Templeton last year. The fund house had closed six of its debt funds in April 2020, citing redemption pressures and lack of liquidity in the bond markets. These schemes, together having over Rs 25,000 crore assets under management, were Franklin India Low Duration Fund, Franklin India Dynamic Accrual Fund, Franklin India Credit Risk Fund, Franklin India Ultra Short Bond Fund and Franklin India Income Opportunities Fund.

MCL eyes 168 MT coal output in FY'22

THE COMPANY SPENT RS 193 CRORE UNDER CSR IN 2021 FISCAL, ACHIEVING A 14.5 % GROWTH

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 2: The Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) has set a target to produce about 168 million tonnes (MT) of coal during the financial year of 2021-22, said PK Sinha, Chairman-cum-Managing Director of MCL, Friday.

"MCL has broken all its previous records by achieving the highest ever production of 148.01 million tonne. Now, we aim to produce about 168 million tonnes (MT) of coal during FY'22," Sinha said, adding MCL registered coal production growth 5.5%.

MCL also achieved the highest ever coal dispatch of 146 MT with a record over-burden removal of 174.5 million cubic meters (MCuM) setting a strong foundation for making Coal India achieve target

of one billion production by 2024. Coal supply to consumers achieved a growth of 8.9%.

"The coal production, dispatch and OB removal of MCL during the financial year 2020-21 was the highest ever at 148.01 MT, 146 MT and 174.5 MCuM respectively," CMD said.

Sinha also said the Capital Expenditure (Capex) of Rs 2300 crore was invested in FY'21, the highest among all the Coal India subsidiaries. According to the company, MCL is likely to double its Capex as it is expected to invest Rs 4600 crore in FY'22.

MCL is committed to providing clean coal with minimum impact of environment. In this regard, the company is implementing nine First Mile Connectivity projects to provide pollution-free state-of-the-



art rake loading system at a total expenditure of Rs 3,600 Crore. This will generate a capacity of 126 MT/Yr.

MCL, in the year ending March 31, 2021, spent Rs 193 crore under CSR, achieving 14.5 % growth over its target of Rs 168.44 crore for Financial Year 2020-21.

MCL had signed a tripartite

agreement with the state government and SUM hospital for setting-up of a 525-bedded COVID Hospital at Bhubaneswar and a 150-bedded COVID19 hospital at Talcher. Besides, company also established a dedicated COVID Health Centre of 50 beds in Jharsuguda and other Covid Care Centres having a capacity to accommodate 85 patients.

₹3,309cr disbursed to MSMEs

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 2: The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) department stated that a loan amount of Rs 3308.69 crore was disbursed under the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) during FY'21. A total of Rs 3417.02 crore was sanctioned for the help of these units.

ECLGS was launched by the



Centre to provide financial assistance to MSMEs who faced severe losses due to the pandemic.

Moreover, the department revealed that around 3694 firms out of 4358 units were provided

Rs 115 crore under PMEGP.

The state government has also offered financial support of Rs 774 lakh to 2814 members of SHGs under PMFME scheme. Also, 21 SHGs were provided subsidy of Rs 53.96 lakh by the department.

For the development of packaging and branding of the state's food products, the state government has granted Rs 8.50 lakh to the Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society (ORMAS).

Reliance extends deadline for Future deal

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 2: Reliance Retail Ventures, the retail arm of Reliance Industries, has extended the timeline for six months to complete its Rs 24,713 crore deal with Kishore Biyani-led future group to buy its retail and wholesale business.

Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd (RRVL) has extended the timeline for the "Long Stop Date" from March 31, 2021 to September 30, 2021, said a regulatory filing by Future Retail.

"Pursuant to the provisions of scheme and other transaction documents executed in relation thereto, RRVL has in exercise of the right

provided thereunder, extended the timeline for 'Long Stop Date' from March 31, 2021 to September 30, 2021 which has been duly acknowledged by Reliance Retail and Fashion Lifestyle Limited, wholly-owned subsidiary of RRVL," it said.

Long Stop, an established practice in mergers and acquisition transaction, is a timeframe in which parties agree on which all the conditions precedent for a transaction need to be fulfilled and the transaction completed.

The deal, which is contested by Amazon, is facing legal hurdles and a decision from the Supreme Court is pending over the petition



filed by the e-commerce major.

The Future-Reliance deal, which was announced on August 29, 2020,



has already received clearance from regulators such as CCI, SEBI and bourses, and the scheme of arrange-

ment is now awaiting the nod from the NCLT and shareholders.

Though the Supreme Court has granted a go-ahead to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for its proceedings but has asked it not to pass any final order sanctioning the scheme. The NCLT has reserved its order over the scheme of arrangement in which all the Future Group's retail assets would be consolidated under Future Enterprises Ltd and then would be transferred to RRVL through sale.

Last month, a Single Member Bench of the Delhi High Court had directed the Future Group to stay the deal. However, this was chal-

lenged by the Future Group before the Division Bench of the Delhi High Court, which stayed the order of the Single Member Bench.

Amazon and Future have been locked in a bitter legal tussle after the US e-commerce giant dragged Future Group to arbitration at Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC), arguing that the latter had violated their contract by entering into the deal with rival Reliance.

Amazon had invested in Future Coupons in August 2019 with an option of buying into the flagship Future Retail after a period of three to 10 years.

Barty in Miami Open final



SWEATING IT OUT: Ash Barty reaches for a backhand return during her match against Elina Svitolina (not in pic) at Miami Open, Thursday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Miami, April 2: In her first match at this year's Miami Open, Ash Barty was one point from elimination. Now she's one win from becoming a repeat champion. The top-ranked Barty returned to the final by beating No.5-seeded Elina Svitolina 6-3, 6-3 Thursday.

Barty has gained momentum after starting the tournament by saving a match point against qualifier Kristina Kucova. That was Barty's first match outside her native Australia since February 2020.

"Whenever you come back from

a match point, it's a little bit of a strange feeling," she said. "You have to be more open with what the possibilities the rest of the tournament could be, and keep going out there and keep fighting, knowing you could have just as easily been out of the tournament."

Barty, who is assured of retaining her No. 1 ranking next week, will play for the title Saturday against the winner of the second semifinal between No.8 Bianca Andreescu and No.23 Maria Sakkari.

On the men's side, unseeded 20-year-old Sebastian Korda's breakthrough run ended with a quar-

terfinal loss to No.4 Andrey Rublev, 7-5, 7-6(9-7). Korda, slowed in the second set by a left thigh injury, was the youngest American to make the men's quarterfinals in Miami since Robbie Ginepri in 2003.

While Korda departed, his sisters, Jessica and Nelly, were in contention at the LPGA's ANA Inspiration in California after breaking par in the first round Thursday.

Rublev and Hubert Hurkacz of Poland will play in their first semifinal at a top-level ATP event when they meet Friday night. Hurkacz advanced by rallying past No.2-seeded

Stefanos Tsitsipas 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Hurkacz, seeded 26th, has won three in a row when facing a top-five opponent, but he beat Tsitsipas for only the second time in their eight meetings.

"I just try to like keep building my game and improving," Hurkacz said. "Not all the time are you going to have the results that you want, but if you stay positive and improve your game, the results will eventually come."

They're coming for Barty after she was locked down for a year in Australia because of the coronavirus pandemic, which forced the

CRICKET GREAT DOWN WITH COVID-19

Sachin hospitalised as precautionary measure



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 2: Former India captain and batting icon Sachin Tendulkar has been hospitalised as a precautionary measure, six days after he tested positive for COVID-19.

The 47-year-old took to twitter to announce the development Friday. "Thank you for your wishes and prayers. As a matter of abundant precaution under medical advice, I have been hospitalised. I hope to be back home in a few days. Take care and stay safe everyone," Tendulkar wrote.

Tendulkar had tested positive for the dreaded infection March 27 and was in home isolation ever since. "He is doing fine and has been admitted for normal (course of) treatment," a source close to Tendulkar told this agency.

The batting great, who was part of India's historic World Cup win in 2011, also wished his teammates on the 10th anniversary of the victory. "Wishing all Indians & my teammates on the 10th anniversary of our World Cup win," he tweeted.

Besides Tendulkar, former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan, his elder

Iyer to go under the knife April 8

MUMBAI: India batsman Shreyas Iyer is set to undergo a surgery April 8 for his shoulder injury which had ruled him out of the last two ODIs against England and the entire IPL. The 26-year old Iyer had suffered the injury during the first ODI against England in Pune on March 23 when he dived on a drive hit by Jonny Bairstow off pacer Shardul Thakur. He looked in tremendous pain as he left the field clutching his shoulder. "Shreyas will get operated April 8 for his shoulder injury," a source in the know of things told PTL. Iyer is likely to be out of action for a minimum of four months. He had signed up with Lancashire but now is unlikely to play for the English county side in their one-day tournament starting July 23.

brother Yusuf and S Badrinath – all of whom had recently participated at the Road Safety World Series Challenge – have so far announced that they have tested positive for COVID-19.

Tendulkar had led the Indian team to victory in the veteran's tournament in Raipur where crowds were allowed inside the stadiums.

Bhagat, Kadam sail into semis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, April 2: World No.1 Pramod Bhagat and World No.5 Sukant Kadam sailed into the semifinals of the Dubai para-badminton tournament after winning their respective matches here.

In the SL3 category, Bhagat showed why he is the top ranked in the world with a strong performance against Indonesian Ukun Rukaendi, taking 44 minutes to emerge 21-16, 21-13 winner.

In the SL3 category, participants usually have impairment in one or both lower limbs and poor walking/running balance. Bhagat will play Muhammad Huzairi Abdul Malek of Malaysia in the semifinals.

Bhagat has partnered Manoj Sarkar (SL4) in the men's doubles and will play against Mohammad Arwaz Ansari and Deep Ranjan Bisoyee in the semifinals.

In the SL4 category, players have impairment in one or both lower limbs and minimal impairment in walking/running balance, but bet-



ter compared to SL3. He is also in the mixed doubles quarterfinals alongside Palak Kohli.

Kadam, in SL4 category, stormed into the semifinals with a comfortable win over Muhammad Norhilmie Mohd Zainudin from

Malaysia.

Kadam started off slowly but as the game progressed, he became more confident and won 21-17, 21-8. Kadam will be playing Marcel Adam of Germany in his last-four clash.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tokyo, April 2: A decision has not yet been reached on rerouting the Olympic torch relay later this month around the city of Osaka, the president of the Tokyo Games organizing committee said Friday.

"We are discussing with the Osaka prefectural government as well as the executive committee so we can come to a conclusion at our earliest convenience," Seiko Hashimoto said in an online briefing.

The mayor of Osaka and the governor of the prefecture said Thursday they wanted relay legs through the city April 14 to be canceled because of rising cases of COVID-19.

The relay started from northeastern Japan a week ago and is crisscrossing the country with 10,000 runners. It is to end July 23 at the opening ceremony.

The relay is a test to see if organizers can pull off a large-scale event during the pandemic. Any

failures will prompt more questions about the risks of holding the Olympics and Paralympics with 15,400 athletes entering Japan, accompanied by tens of thousands of officials, judges, coaches and media.

Organizers said last month that fans from abroad would be barred from attending the Olympics and Paralympics. Hashimoto has said repeatedly that a decision would be announced this month on maximum capacities at indoor and outdoor venues. She hinted Friday that decision might be delayed.

"Within the month of April there may be some changing circumstances," she said. "But we would like to come out with an overall direction within this month. But at which point we would be able to make that direction, I am not able to say right now. We are in the middle of discussions right now."

Organizers are hoping to fill venues as much as possible with local fans. They had budgeted USD 800 million for income from ticket sales,



but will be millions short because of the ban on fans from abroad.

Any shortfall will have to be made up by Japanese government entities. The official cost of the Olympics is USD 15.4 billion, but several government audits suggest it may be twice that much. All but

USD 6.7 billion is public money.

Hashimoto said organizers had filed a "protest" with the weekly magazine Shukan Bunshun, which published 280 pages of leaked documents this week about planning for the opening and closing ceremonies.

Organizers asked that the material be removed from the "online version" of the magazine. Hashimoto said the leaked documents "contain secret information that needs to stay inside the organizing committee, which could eventually hinder the effective management of the organizing committee." Most of the documents seem to deal with internal communication and not with concrete plans for the ceremonies.

The magazine, in a statement Friday, said it was operating in the public interest because taxpayer money was involved. "It is clear this (publication) does not constitute a violation of copyright or an interference with business operations," the magazine said.

KKR desperate to turn fortunes post tough transition

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, April 2: Two-time IPL champions Kolkata Knight Riders will be striving for consistency in their bid to recreate old magic which has been lost during a difficult phase of rebuilding after Gautam Gambhir's departure.

Be it the opening combination, middle-order or finding a finisher, KKR struggled for stability in the last edition in the UAE, while a change of captaincy at the halfway stage did not help them either.

Add the floundering forms of their two biggest Caribbean stars – a half-fit Andre Russell and Sunil Narine, who is not even half the bowler after being repeatedly called for suspect action, KKR missed the playoffs for a second time in a row in the Gambhir era.

Here's is a SWOT analysis of the side that will take on Sunrisers Hyderabad in their season-opener in Chennai April 11.

STRENGTHS

In Eoin Morgan, his first stint as full-time KKR captain, the Purple Brigade have got one of the most astute brains of the white-ball format.

The English World Cup-winning skipper, who took over the role after seven games last season, was one of the brightspots for the team in 2020.

The left-hander struck 418 runs in 14 innings at an average of 41.80 and also hit the most sixes (24), giving impetus in the death overs with his cameos.

KKR have made some smart additions to their squad in the mini-auction, apart from retaining their core of the side – 17 players – despite a disappointing season.

By bringing back Bangladesh star all-rounder Shakib-Al-Hasan and signing 2016 IPL Final man-of-the-match Ben Cutting, they have got the much-needed back-ups for the Windies duo of Narine and Russell, who failed to fire last season.

KKR will also be buoyed by the smash-hit international debut of Prasad Krishna, who took 4/54 in the first ODI against England in the recently-concluded series.

This would also mean KKR would have a settled pace attack spearheaded by Aussie superstar Pat Cummins with Lockie Ferguson as the back-up option.



Andre Russell goes big at the Kolkata Knight Riders' net session ahead of IPL 2021

WEAKNESSES

Once their strength, KKR of late has struggled in the spin department. Left arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav is a shadow of his past and retuned with just one wicket in five matches, of which

he was not given the ball in one.

One of the architects of their twin triumphs in 2012 and 2014 under Gambhir, Sunil Narine is also floundering. Narine's action once again came to haunt him in 2020 as he was warned of suspect action

and went on to miss four matches. Before that he had to be pulled out of CPL final for Trinbago Knight Riders as he was found chucking.

It was another mystery spinner, Varun Chakravarthy a Tamil Naud architect-turned-cricketer who took up the responsibility in Narine's absence to finish with most wickets – 17 – for KKR.

But Chakravarthy's fitness has come under the scanner time and again as it remains to be seen how he shapes up for the IPL.

OPPORTUNITIES

Having decided to step away from being captain to 'focus on his batting', Dinesh Karthik too will look to make amends in 2021.

Then there are the seasoned duo of Shakib and veteran Indian off-spinner Harbhajan Singh who too will look to make most of the limited opportunities that come their way on slow tracks on offer in Delhi and Chennai.

KKR have two interesting uncapped new signings in Venkatesh Iyer and Vaibhav Arora, who too will look to grab their opportunities.

Left-hand Madhya Pradesh batsman Iyer is fresh from a blistering

146-ball 198 against Punjab in the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Himachal Pradesh medium-pacer Arora is in the form of his life after taking a hat-trick on debut against Maharashtra in the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

THREATS

KKR would need good start from opener Shubman Gill to give better starts this year in the Powerplay overs. Gill consumed a lot of deliveries upfront in most games which did create pressure on middle-order.

The Morgan-led side would look to ensure that they get a winning combination, something that eluded them last time as they would be desperate to make the cut.

KKR squad: Eoin Morgan (C), Dinesh Karthik, Shubman Gill, Nitish Rana, Tim Seifert, Rinku Singh, Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, Kuldeep Yadav, Shivam Mavi, Lockie Ferguson, Pat Cummins, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Sandeep Warrier, Prasad Krishna, Rahul Tripathi, Varun Chakravarthy, Shakib Al Hasan, Sheldon Jackson, Vaibhav Arora, Harbhajan Singh, Karun Nair, Ben Cutting, Venkatesh Iyer and Pawan Negi.

SOHINI CLAIMS DOUBLE CROWN



POST NEWS NETWORK

Ahmedabad, April 2: Odisha's rising tennis star Sohini Mohanty won both the singles and doubles crown at the Super Series U-14 event at the Alexander Waske Tennis Academy in Ahmedabad, Friday. Sohini beat Hyderabad's Vanshika Maria Vaiz Vasanth 6-0, 6-0 in the final.

In the doubles final, Sohini was paired with Avani Sujit Chitale and the duo beat Prarthana Solanki and Priyanka Sanjay Rana 6-1, 6-4. The Farhan Ali-coached Sohini is touted to become one of India's top tennis players.