



## JUHI'S LOCKDOWN MANTRA

Juhi Chawla has suggested a positive way in which one could make others happy, during these tough times

LEISURE P2



## US, JAPAN ALLIANCE

Biden sought to present a united front with Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga to counter an increasingly assertive China

INTERNATIONAL P10



## DOUBLE-HEADER TODAY

In the first double-header of IPL this season, RCB lock horns with KKR before Delhi take on Punjab

SPORTS P12

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### IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Yes, Kumbh should be curtailed. I'm going to reiterate the same in my upcoming poll rallies too.

# Allow Covid vax sale in open market, Naveen urges Modi

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** In a bid to enhance the vaccination coverage, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Saturday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make COVID-19 vaccines available in the open market enabling willing citizens to avail the vaccines.

"COVID-19 vaccines may be made available outside the government supply chain, in the open market, so that willing citizens who can afford the vaccine can avail them. This will help governments to have a focused approach towards the vulnerable sections of the society, Naveen said in a letter to the Prime Minister.

He further said that the vaccines already approved globally by the credible agencies and governments may be accorded approval to increase their supply. Stating that India has a huge vaccine manufacturing potential, the Chief Minister said both the Centre and



the states should support units to ramp up vaccine production. "As this is an extraordinary situation and our governments should run the extra mile in this regard," he pointed out.

The few metropolitan cities which contribute the highest COVID cases should be allowed priority vaccination and there needs to be flexibility

## State faces acute vax shortage; 1,073 sites shut

**BHUBANESWAR:** With Odisha facing an acute shortage of COVID vaccines, inoculation of age-appropriate people could be carried out only at 427 out of the 1500 sites across the state, Saturday. Talking to the media, Dr Bijay Panigrahi, Director of Family Welfare and the state Nodal Immunisation Officer, said, that COVID vaccination has been halted in Jharsuguda, Nuapada and Koraput due to non-availability of vaccines. He further said immunisation has also been cancelled on weekends in urban areas in the 10 districts of Sundergarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Bargarh, Bolangir, Nuapada, Kalahandi, Nawrangpur, Koraput and Malkangiri on account of weekend shutdown clamped by the state government in these districts. Taking into account the stock of available doses of the vaccines in the state, vaccination can be undertaken for a maximum of 2-3 days, he added. He further said that the state currently has 3.6 lakh doses of Covishield and 2.3 lakh doses of Covaxin vaccine remaining in its stock.

in age criteria as these are economic nerve centres of the country, Patnaik suggested, saying any lockdown in these areas will have an impact on the rest of the country in terms of labour movement. "At an appropriate time, adequate quantity of vaccines should be made available for the states to procure and scale up the vaccination process," he mentioned in the letter.

On vaccination programme in Odisha, he said the state has so far administered 47 lakh doses of vaccines to healthcare workers, frontline workers and people above 45 years. Patnaik claimed that Odisha has the lowest rates of wastage in the country and has the capacity to administer 3 lakh doses in a day. Highlighting acute shortage of vaccine in Odisha, Patnaik said, "We are getting huge response from people to get vaccinated. However, intermittent supply is creating a challenge in meeting the demand." Earlier, he had requested for 25 lakh vaccine doses to help the state administer 3 lakh doses every day. The Chief Minister also hoped that the Centre would be planning to scale up the vaccination drive.

### SHORT TAKES

#### Pharma cos cut remdesivir prices

**New Delhi:** Prices of remdesivir injection have been voluntarily curtailed by various drug companies on the intervention of the government, National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) said Saturday. Drug companies like Cadila Healthcare, Dr Reddy's Laboratories and Cipla have cut the prices of their respective brands of remdesivir injection (100 mg/vial). The antiviral drug is used in the treatment of COVID-19. "Due to the government's intervention, the price of #Remdesivir Injection is now reduced! I am thankful to pharmaceutical companies for joining hands with the government to fight against COVID-19 Pandemic," Union Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers Mansukh L Mandaviya tweeted.

#### 4 Sikhs killed in US FedEx shooting

**Washington:** At least eight people, including four Sikhs, were killed and five others were left injured in a mass shooting at a FedEx facility in the US state of Indiana, according to community leaders. The gunman, identified as 19-year-old Brandon Scott Hole of Indiana, died by suicide after the shooting on early Friday morning, taking the toll to nine. About 90 per cent of the workers at this delivery service facility are said to be Indian-Americans, mostly from the local Sikh community. Maninder Singh Walia, community activist, said the four Sikhs who have died are Amarjit Kaur Sekhon, 48, Jaswinder Kaur, Amarjit Kaur Johal and Jaswinder Singh.

WEATHER	
	BHUB CTK
MAX	38.6°C 37.2°C
MIN	25.5°C 24.5°C
Humidity	57% 66%
Rainfall	Nil Nil
Forecast	Partly cloudy sky



**AS THIS IS AN EXTRAORDINARY SITUATION AND OUR GOVTS SHOULD RUN THE EXTRA MILE IN THIS REGARD. NAVEEN PATNAIK | ODISHA CHIEF MINISTER**

# SEC 144 IN TWIN CITY DURING NIGHT CURFEW

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** The Commissionerate Police have clamped prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPc in twin cities of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar during the night curfew hours starting Saturday.

Twin City Police Commissioner Saumendra Priyadarshi issued an order in this regard Saturday. The prohibitory orders will be in force in Police Commissionerate limits between 9:00pm and 5:00 am.

"There will be restriction on movements during the period. However, workers in essential services have been exempted. They will be allowed movement only on production of identity document issued by their respective organisations for bona fide official work," the order stated.

For strict enforcement of the night curfew announced by the state government to check spread of COVID-19, the Commissionerate Police is learnt to have made arrangements like putting up barricades, roadblocks and night patrolling.

During a press meet, Priyadarshi requested the denizens of the Twin City to cooperate in making the COVID-induced night lockdown



from 9pm to 5am successful. He requested the residents of the Cuttack and Bhubaneswar to follow the COVID-19 protocols. Police will take stringent actions against anyone found not following the guidelines. It is the duty of the Commissionerate Police to ensure strict enforcement of the night curfew from Saturday, he added.

As many as 25 COVID-19 enforcement points have been identified. More than 10 platoons of police force under the supervision of over 60 police officers will be mobilised across the Capital city during the curfew period. All the 35 PCR vans will be deployed for patrolling throughout the city during the night lockdown.

Priyadarshi informed the media that no passes are required for people engaged in particular sectors like medical emergency and IT and ITes to ply during the curfew. The cops on ground have been instructed to allow movement of only such persons who present their authorised identity cards.

Notably, weekend shutdown in 10 districts bordering Chhattisgarh such as Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Bargarh, Bolangir, Nuapada, Kalahandi, Nabarangpur, Koraput and Malkangiri began Saturday. There will be night curfews in these districts on weekdays from 6:00 pm to 5:00 am.

# Gujarat HC suspects govt 'fudging' Covid-19 figures

AGENCIES

**Ahmedabad, April 17:** Despite the rebuke of the Gujarat High Court, which initiated a suo motu PIL Friday in view of the looming COVID-19 health emergency in the state, the state of affairs remain sordid.

In the first two weeks of April, Ahmedabad alone saw 180 deaths listed as COVID fatalities, but the number of bodies arriving at the local crematoriums say another story. Though the High Court had directed the Vijay Rupani government to be "honest and transparent" regarding COVID positive cases and related deaths, the authorities continue to fudge figures.

For instance, the death toll released by in the government bulletins for four major cities of Gujarat show numbers much smaller than the number of bodies being cremated every day under COVID protocols. The cumulative death toll in the two main government-run hospitals in Vadodra district - SSG and GMERS, in a week is 350, whereas the official records show that there have been only 300 deaths in the entire Vadodra district ever since the pandemic broke out.

Similarly, in Bharuch district, the official data from the crematorium register shows that at least



Several bodies burning on one pyre in Surat

260 COVID-19 victims have been cremated in the district since April 7. However, the government records confirm only 36 deaths in the district since last year. The Rajkot district saw over 298 deaths in several hospitals within a span of seven days from April 8, but the death audit committee confirmed only 57 deaths due to COVID.

According to a PTI report, metal structures of furnaces at some crematoriums in Surat have started melting or breaking as they are being used round-the-clock due to the rush of bodies amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the last 10 days, around 16 gas-based furnaces at the Kurukshetra Crematorium and Ashvini Kumar Crematorium in Surat are operating 24x7 to cremate bodies, hence maintenance issues are cropping up, the news agency quoted officials.

# MY PHONE IS BEING TAPPED, WILL ORDER CID PROBE: MAMATA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Galsi (WB), April 17:** A day after a purported audio tape - in which she is heard proposing a rally with the bodies of Cooch Behar firing victims - surfaced, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Saturday alleged that her phone is being tapped and said she will order a CID probe into it.

Addressing an election rally here, she accused the BJP of being involved in the conspiracy as the saffron party "cannot match" the ruling Trinamool Congress' campaigning on development programmes.



"They (BJP leaders) are even eavesdropping on our everyday conversation. It seems they are tapping our phone calls on cooking and other household chores." "I will order a CID probe into it and not spare anyone involved in such snooping activities. I have already come to know who is behind this," the TMC supremo said.

Banerjee also claimed she has information that the "central forces are being involved in such acts with some agents".

"It is clear that the BJP is behind it though they claimed they have no role in it," she said.

A controversy had erupted Friday after the BJP released the purported audio clip in which Banerjee is heard telling the Trinamool Congress nominee of Sitalkuchi to hold rallies with bodies of the four persons killed in CISP firing during polling April 10.

Claiming that such a conversation never took place, the TMC had described the audio clip as "bogus" and wondered whether the Centre was tapping a Chief Minister's phone.

# Castro era in Cuba to end as Raul confirms he's retiring

THE 89-YEAR-OLD CASTRO MADE THE ANNOUNCEMENT IN A SPEECH FRIDAY AT THE OPENING OF THE EIGHTH CONGRESS OF THE RULING PARTY

ASSOCIATED PRESS

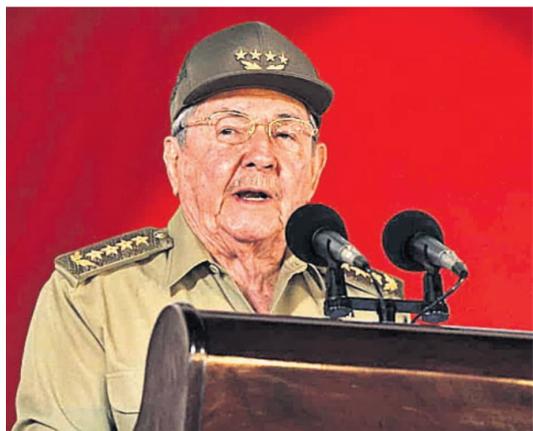
**Havana, April 17:** Raul Castro said he is stepping down as Cuban Communist Party leader, leaving the island without a Castro guiding affairs for the first time in more than six decades and handing control of the party to a younger generation. The 89-year-old Castro made the announcement in a speech Friday at the opening of the eighth congress of the ruling party, the only one allowed on the island. "I concluded my task as first secretary... With the satisfaction of having fulfilled (my duty) and confidence in the future of the fatherland," he said in a typically terse, to-the-point finale that contrasted with the impassioned verbal pyrotechnics of his brother Fidel,

who died in 2016.

Castro didn't say who he would endorse as his successor as first secretary of the Communist Party. But he previously indicated he favors yielding control to 60-year-old Miguel Diaz-Canel, who succeeded him as president in 2018 and is the standard bearer of a younger generation of loyalists who have been pushing an economic opening without touching Cuba's one-party system.

Castro's retirement ends an era of formal leadership that began with his brother Fidel and country's 1959 revolution. "One has to step aside for the young people," said 64-year-old retiree Juana Busutil, for whom Castro "is going to continue being the leader."

The transition comes at a difficult time for Cuba, with many on the is-



land anxious about what lies ahead. The coronavirus pandemic, painful financial reforms and restrictions imposed by the Trump administration have battered the economy which shrank 11% last year as a result of a collapse in tourism and remittances. Long food lines and shortages have brought back echoes of the "special period" that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

Discontent has been fueled by the spread of the Internet and growing inequality. Much of the debate inside Cuba is focused on the pace of reform, with many complaining that the so-called "historic generation" represented by Castro has been too slow to open the economy.

Fidel Castro, who led the revolution that drove dictator Fulgencio

Batista from power in 1959, formally became head of the party in 1965, about four years after officially embracing socialism.

He quickly absorbed the old party under his control and was the country's unquestioned leader until falling ill in 2006 and in 2008 handing over the presidency to his younger brother Raul, who had fought alongside him during the revolution. Raul succeeded him as head of the party in 2011. Fidel Castro died in 2016.

For most of his life, Raul played second-string to his brother Fidel - first as a guerrilla commander, later as a senior figure in their socialist government. But for the past decade, it's Raul who has been the face of communist Cuba and its defiance of US efforts to oust its socialist system.

# leisure



## MOLINA TO RETURN AS DR OCTOPUS IN SPIDER-MAN FRANCHISE AFTER 17 YRS

Hollywood actor Alfred Molina has confirmed that he will return to the *Spider-Man* franchise after 17 years. Molina will be seen in the upcoming *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, reprising his iconic role of Otto Octavius/Doctor Octopus.

## HIROYUKI SANADA'S HOMEWORK FOR SCORPION ROLE IN MORTAL KOMBAT

Japanese actor Hiroyuki Sanada, who plays Scorpion in the upcoming action thriller *Mortal Kombat*, says that he did extensive research for the character once he came on board. The film is based on the popular video game franchise.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
Today you will have an eye for beautiful and outlandish things. There is a possibility that you may even contemplate starting a business related to these things. Ganesha feels, though, that you will not be able to reach any conclusion about it.

**TAURUS**  
This day is meant for taking some time out from your busy schedule, and seeking some fun and relaxation. So says Ganesha. It is possible that you will be getting together with your friends and family members for a fun filled evening followed by a great dinner and a late night movie.

**GEMINI**  
You face a hectic and demanding day today. You will spend your entire day wondering how best to channelise your energy and enthusiasm. You may be prone to extreme mood swings as well. Meditative techniques should help you keep your mind calm, says Ganesha.

**CANCER**  
Lack of support from family members will disable your efforts. Children also disappoint you. Discord or difference of opinion in family is indicated. Beware of neighbours. Yet, says Ganesha, face circumstances with a smile.

**LEO**  
You will be filled with extra-ordinary self-confidence and will be able to take on huge risks. Sportspeople will be able to make a lot of progress in their fields. You will square off against any obstacles in your way using your entire might.

**VIRGO**  
There will be dirt on your shoulder today, so dust it off, says Ganesha, because every time you fall you will get up stronger than before. Your logic and analytical skills will help you find the necessary precision to accomplish tasks at work.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesha says the inner artist in you will come to the surface today and you will showcase your imagination powers too. You will be able to focus on topics of interest today. Those of you in the field of interest will find themselves moving ahead.

**SCORPIO**  
You may be in a mood to build castles in the air today, says Ganesha. You may be caught up in a whirlpool of thoughts and nostalgia. However, you will soon realise that the time once gone, never comes back and so, you make up for the lost time by beginning the new chapter of your life from today itself.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Suddenly, you discover that you are fully dedicated to your family. Kith and kins form the crux of your life, says Ganesha. Showing your love and affection to your kids will give you a feeling of satisfaction. Spend some quality time with your partner!

**CAPRICORN**  
You can't bear the weight of the heavy work load any more. Very cleverly, you will complete your tasks and slowly but steadily you take the load off your shoulders, predicts Ganesha.

**AQUARIUS**  
You are talented, hard working, confident and down to earth. These four characteristics are the pillars of success. Now, it is time building the building. Your curiosity and desire to achieve your goals will help you with it, feels Ganesha. In order to succeed, you may skip a 'quality check' of your output.

**PISCES**  
The day will be exceptional for working people as the planets seemed to be aligned perfectly, portends Ganesha. You will achieve all the expected results in the office and/or at work today.

## PM, Rajini, Kamal mourn Vivekh's untimely demise

Celebrities across the Indian film industry took to social media to mourn the death of Padma Shri recipient Tamil actor and comedian Vivekanandan, also known as Vivekh, who passed away in Chennai on Saturday. He was 59.

Mourning his sudden demise due to cardiac arrest, PM Narendra Modi tweeted: "The untimely demise of noted actor Vivekh has left many saddened. His comic timing and intelligent dialogues entertained people. Condolences to his family, friends and admirers. Om Shanti."

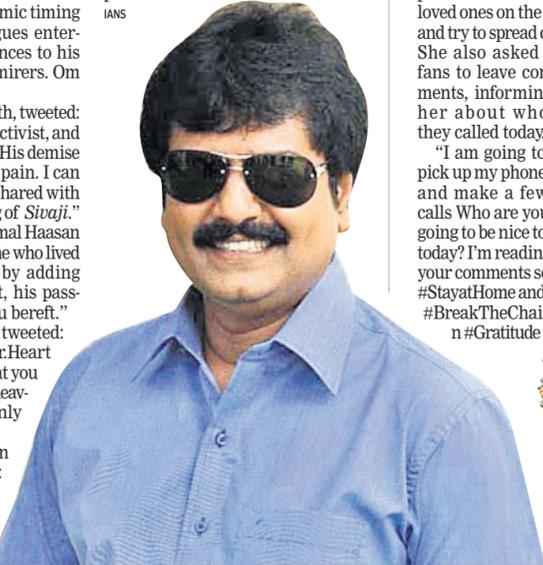
Superstar Rajinikanth, tweeted: "Jr Kalaivanar, social activist, and my close friend, Vivekh. His demise has caused me a lot of pain. I can never forget the time I shared with him during the making of *Sivaji*."

Actor-filmmaker Kamal Haasan shared: "He was someone who lived up to Kalam's dream by adding greenery to the planet, his passing has left Tamil Nadu bereft." Actor R. Madhavan tweeted: "RIP @Actor\_Vivekh sir. Heart broken and stunned that you would embark on your heavenly journey so suddenly and early."

Abhishek Bachchan tweeted condolences: "Huge admirer of his work and sheer genius. We've lost a leg-

end today." Vivekh, after experiencing chest pain, was admitted to a Chennai hospital in an unconscious state, and received angioplasty and stenting to treat a 100-per cent blockage in heart. He breathed his last in the wee hours of Saturday.

Condolences continue pouring in all through Saturday for the departed actor.



## Juhi shares her lockdown mantra

**Mumbai:** Actress Juhi Chawla Saturday took to social media to suggest a positive way in which one could make others happy, during these tough times that force people to stay at home.

The actress urged people to connect with their loved ones on the phone and try to spread cheer. She also asked her fans to leave comments, informing her about who they called today.

"I am going to pick up my phone and make a few calls. Who are you going to be nice to, today? I'm reading your comments so #StayatHome and #BreakTheChain #Gratitude



"#CovidPositivity," she wrote. She also shared a picture with the words: "A few nice words can help a person more than you think." Meanwhile, the actress will make her digital debut with a web series *Hush Hush* soon. The series boasts of an all-women cast and crew, with director, producers, writers being women.

### NASA'S HUMAN EXPLORATION ROVER CHALLENGE

## Odisha's school team bags 3rd position

POST NEWS NETWORK

**BHUBANESWAR:** A team of 10 school students of Odisha from Cuttack-based Navonmesh Prasar Student Astronomy Team (NaPSAT) won the third prize in the high school division of prestigious NASA Human Exploration Rover Challenge (NASA HERC), 2021, tweeted NASA Friday. The team led by scientist Anil Pradhan also won the 'Best Videography Award' via virtual platform, added the US space agency.

The Challenge was held virtually this year for which the team had sent its rover design in March end. "This stellar achievement puts the institute on the global map and will inspire more budding scientists and innovators. Best wishes for future," congratulating the team Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

Anil, the founder of the Navonmesh Prasar Foundation, says, "Our team was the first ever under-19 student astronomy team to represent India at NASA. Compared to other teams, my students were not so experienced but they managed to deliver their best and made the country proud."

Class X student Shreyansh Vikas Mishra, who was part of the projects, says, "Bagging the third prize in the overall category in the NASA HERC 2021 and being the first ever under-19 Indian team to represent India in the competition are proud moments for us. This was a wonderful experience for me learning practically and trying out stuff. We faced a lot of hardships including lack of infrastructure, manufacturing failures and many more, but we didn't give up. I am proud to be a part of NaPSAT."

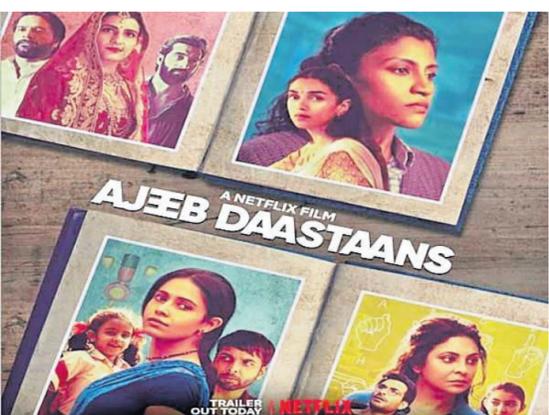


The NaPSAT team with their mentors

## Ajeeb Daastaans is like watching four different movies at a go

**DESPITE THE FLAWS, EACH STORY STANDS FOR A SHIFT IN MAINSTREAM CINEMATIC MINDSET WHEN IT COMES TO EXPLORING TALES OF LOVE**

It is provocative, for the way it twists the very concept of love -- from being an emotion that demands unconditional sacrifice to a mere tool for realising selfish gains. It is flawed, too, for the way it struggles to utilise that unusual premise, while bringing alive its spread of relationship sagas. *Ajeeb Daastaans* is a curious bag indeed, if only for its utterly wicked entertainment quotient, and also because it is a rare film coming out of mainstream Hindi cinema that looks at love as anything beyond a sacrosanct sentiment. The anthology explores that crux through four stories, directed by Shashank Khaitan, Raj Mehta, Neeraj Ghaywan and Kayoze Irani. The idea obviously was to explore a common



### Film Review

theme through varied lenses, exploiting the creative acumen of four very different minds.

It doesn't quite end up that way because the overall impact suffers from a glitch that anthologies often face. *Ajeeb Daastaans* is erratic in its overall composition and impact. It starts on a tepid note, hits a high with the stories in between, and then plummets in the end. A big challenge for

producers of anthologies is maintaining the thread of uniformity through the assorted efforts. Karan Johar, who puts together the film, far from achieves such a likeness. It's almost as if you were watching four different films at a go.

*Ajeeb Daastaans* is far from perfect as an overall production. Individually though, each of the four stories, irrespective of whether they are sloppy or smooth, do stand for a shift in mainstream movies' cinematic mindset when it exploring tales of love.

### PEANUTS



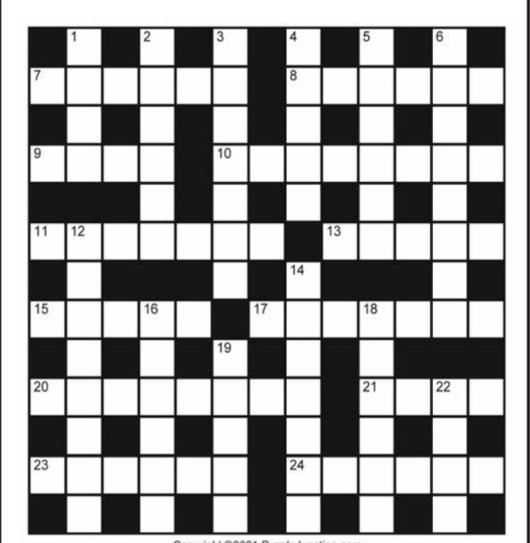
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



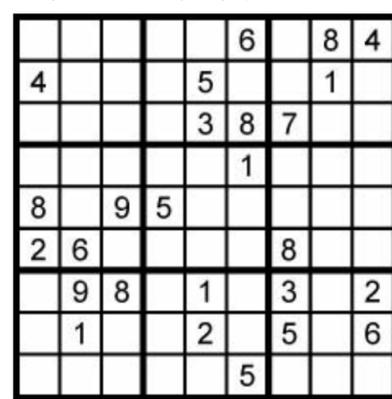
### FUN post CROSSWORD



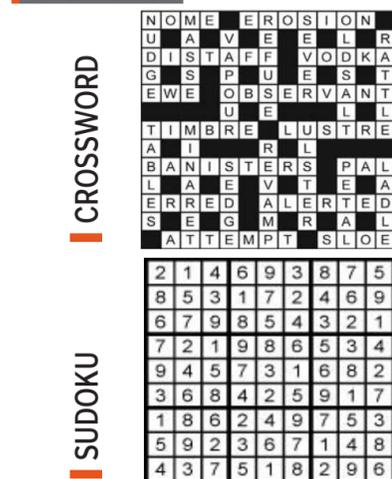
- Across**
- 7 Polecat
  - 8 Go places
  - 9 Rhine feeder
  - 10 Sled dog
  - 11 Period in human development (4,3)
  - 13 Meat topper
  - 15 Asparagus unit
  - 17 Resentment (3,4)
  - 20 Plant scientist
  - 21 Transverse flute
  - 23 Worthy principles
  - 24 Crude stone artifact
  - 25 Trite
  - 4 Weather forecast
  - 6 Celebration
  - 12 They're found on parachutes
  - 14 Jumbled mess
  - 16 Noah's landfall
  - 18 Oscillate
  - 19 Belarus's capital
  - 22 Kismet

### SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.



### SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

# downtown

## Industries allowed to operate during shutdown, night curfew

INDUSTRIES HAVE BEEN DIRECTED TO PUT ADEQUATE PROVISIONS FOR CHECKING THE COVID INFECTION IN THEIR WORKPLACES AND CAMPUSES



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** With the imposition of weekend shutdown and night curfew in many urban pockets of Odisha, the state government Saturday made it clear that economic activities will continue during the Covid counter-measures.

Weekend (Saturday & Sunday) shutdown has been imposed in all urban areas of Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Bargarh, Bolangir, Nuapada, Kalahandi, Nabarangpur, Koraput and Malkangiri. Similarly, night curfew has been imposed in urban

areas all across the state.

In a message, Chief Secretary SC Mahapatra has clarified that all industries and related activities will continue without any restriction during night curfew and weekend shutdown. All industries have been directed to put adequate provisions for checking the Covid infection in their work places and campuses.

According to government order, all industrial units and factories have been allowed to function during the shutdowns and curfew period. All construction activities and movement of goods have been allowed.

### LIVELIHOOD IN FOCUS

All industrial units and factories have been allowed to operate during shutdowns and night curfews

All construction activities and movement of goods have been allowed

Dhabas along the highways and major roads have been permitted for takeaway only so that the drivers and other staffers of good carriers can get food

Dhabas along the highways and major roads have been permitted for takeaway only so that the drivers and other staffers of good carriers can get food.

Similarly, agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, animal husbandry, veterinary services and allied activities including paddy procurement at Mandis have been allowed to continue in the 10 districts during the weekend shutdown.

## Virus claims 4 more lives

PNN/ AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** The novel coronavirus has claimed four more lives in the state taking the fatality count to 1,942.

According to a Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department official, the Covid-19 tally mounted to 3,64,594 as 3,144 more people tested positive for the infection, while four more fatalities pushed the coronavirus death toll to 1,942.

Of the new cases, 1,823 were reported from quarantine centres and 1,321 detected during contact tracing, he said.

Sundargarh recorded the maximum number of fresh cases at 523, followed by Khurda (497), Nuapada (395), Bargarh (156), Sambalpur (149), Cuttack (140), Puri (129), Keonjhar (128) and Jharsuguda (119). The four fatalities were reported from Bolangir, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi and Sambalpur districts, the official said.

Taking to Twitter, the H&FW department said, "Regret to inform the demise of four numbers of COVID positive patients while under treatment in hospitals."

Fifty-three other coronavirus patients have also died due to comorbidities, he said. Odisha now has 19,077 active cases, and 3,43,522 people have recovered.

The state has so far conducted over 95.65 lakh sample tests for Covid-19, including 37,245 Friday, and the positivity rate stands at 3.81 per cent.

## State pays tribute to Biju on death anniv



Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik pays homage to late leader Biju Patnaik at Odisha Assembly, Saturday

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** The state paid rich tribute to former chief minister and freedom fighter Biju Patnaik on his 24th death anniversary.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and Assembly Speaker SN Patro have paid floral tributes to Biju Babu at his statue on Assembly premises while leaders across the party including Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, state Congress president Niranjan Patnaik also remembered the ex-Chief Minister through social media on the death anniversary.

"Tribute to son of this soil and people's leader Biju Patnaik on his death anniversary. The way he has

shown to be always with people and work for the welfare and betterment of every person has always been a source of inspiration," Naveen tweeted.

Several ministers, MLAs and BJD workers including senior vice president Debi Prasad Mishra and organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das paid homage to the visionary leader at party office. The Bhubaneswar BJD workers also performed 'Tila Tarpana' for the stalwart at 'Bindu Sagar' lake.

Meanwhile, Odisha Mo Parivar organised blood donation camps in all constituencies and launched an awareness drive for compulsory use of masks and strict adherence to Covid-19 guidelines.

## Rejig leaves many City PSes headless

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** The Odisha police Saturday transferred 158 police officials who have been recently promoted to Deputy SP rank. Earlier, January 29, 2021, the state Home department had announced the promotion of these inspector-rank officials to Deputy SP or ACP rank.

With the reshuffle, many police stations in the Capital city became headless that turned a serious headache for the city police in view of enforcement of Covid-19 norms. According to the notification, the inspector in-charge (IIC) of Nayapalli police station Sarat Kumar Sahu has been transferred as the DSP of Crime Branch.

Similarly, the IIC of Laxmisagar police station, Bharat Chandra Sahoo has been appointed as the Assistant Commissioner of Police in Commissionerate Police. IIC of Airfield PS, Deepak Kumar Mishra has been transferred as DSP of

Special Branch. The IIC of Kharavel Nagar PS, Arun Kumar Swain has been posted as ACP of CP while IIC of Capital police station, Girija Sankar Chakrabarty was transferred as DSP of District Intelligence Bureau, Sonapur.

The IIC posts at Mancheswar and Infocity police stations have been lying vacant for the last several months following the abrupt shifting of the inspectors, Jitendra Kumar Sethi and Biswajit Mohanty respectively.

Speaking to Orissa POST, DCP Umashankar Dash said, "The state police establishment will soon decide on the transfer of inspectors for the vacant posts."

## Remand put on hold as Hyder tests nCoV + 'Gangster has 3 girlfriends'

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Cuttack, April 17:** Two days after his arrest from Sangareddy district of Telangana, dreaded gangster Sheikh Hyder Saturday tested positive for Covid-19, police said, adding that the remand of the gangster has been put off.

Hyder had escaped from police custody at SCB Medical College and Hospital in the city here April 10. A special team of the twin-city Commissionerate Police, with the help of Telangana police, had nabbed Hyder Thursday.

The gangster has been kept in isolation at Choudwar jail where the authorities are taking care of his health issues

The gangster was brought to Odisha and produced in the Judicial Magistrate First Class court here Friday. The court had allowed the Commissionerate Police to take him on remand, said Cuttack Deputy



File photo of gangster Hyder

for investigation into his escape from SCB.

"Hyder's antigen test report turned out to be negative Friday. However, his RT-PCR test showed positive for the virus today. He has been kept in isolation at Choudwar jail. The jail authorities are taking care of his health issues. Since the gangster is now infected with the virus, the police remand has been put off. Once he is cured, we will seek the court's permission to take him on remand," said Cuttack Deputy

**CUTTACK:** In an interesting revelation, sources in the Commissionerate Police Saturday said that gangster Hyder has three girlfriends and that he was in touch with all the three women over phone after his escape from police custody at SCB.

"The three women did not know each other and Hyder was having conversations with them from different mobile numbers. Police came to know about the trio from the call details of Hyder," said a source in the Commissionerate.

One of Hyder's girlfriends is a res-

ident of Bhogara in Balasore district while the other two are from Pattamundai in Kendrapara and Mahanga in Cuttack district.

"One of Hyder's girlfriends is around 18 years while the other two are around 22 and 26. Police had managed to nab Hyder from Telangana after tracking his phone calls," added the source.

Notably, twin-city Police Commissioner Soumendra Priyadarshi Friday claimed that eight persons including three women had assisted Hyder in his escape from police custody.

treatment from Sambalpur jail thrice from January this year to March 23. However, a police outpost at SCB and the nearby Mangalabag police station were not kept in the loop.

"If required, we will bring the doctors and health staff of SCB under the ambit of investigation in Hyder's escape," said the DCP.

## Accused gives cops a slip, nabbed

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** In yet another embarrassing moment for Commissionerate Police, an accused Saturday gave the cops a slip from Capital hospital here Saturday afternoon.

The accused, identified as P Rama Rao, was Friday arrested by Badagada police along with two

others who were involved in snatching of mobile phones. As many as five police personnel of Badagad PS had taken the accused persons including Rao to the Capital hospital for medical check-up.

However, Rao pushed the cops escorting him and escaped from the spot. The officials immediately swung into action and followed Rao who entered into the residence of

a former minister. Subsequently, the cops succeeded in arresting the fugitive who was hiding inside the bathroom of the ex-minister near the Capital hospital.

Later, police produced Rao along with his other associates before the court. They were sent to judicial custody. Police had arrested Rao in another case under Section 307 (attempt to murder) a few years back.

### COVID MANAGEMENT

## STATE, CENTRE NEED TO WORK IN HARMONY: BJP

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** The BJP Saturday said that the state and the Union governments need to work together on the issue of Covid-19 management and refrain from blaming each other.

BJP leader and Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi said, "The work of Chief Minister is to keep the Prime Minister updated on the issue of vaccine situation. I welcome his decision. The time is ripe for the states and Central government to work towards cooperative federalism. This is not the time to indulge in blame game. The health ministry is working well and monitoring the vaccines regularly," she said.

She also added, "I assure the state that the Union government will



The time is ripe for the states and Central government to work towards cooperative federalism. This is not the time to indulge in blame game. The health ministry is working well and monitoring the vaccines regularly

APARAJITA SARANGI | BJP MP

take steps accordingly to take care of the vaccine needs of the state. The Union government is taking all required steps on vaccines, oxygen and other things."

Senior BJD leader Debi Prasad Mishra said, "The decision taken by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to reach out to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue of vac-

cines is a welcome step. His statement on the issue of vaccination was based on the calculations and observation of Health department."

He added, "The Chief Minister has also given suggestions to the PM on the diversion of vaccines to the open market. There are a lot of developments happening in the area of vaccines. These suggestions are for the welfare of the state."

The Congress party asked the Chief Minister to personally talk to the PM over telephone and engage more passionately on the issue. Congress leader Suresh Routray said, "Naveen should talk to the PM directly. Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan should participate too in bringing vaccines to the state. For how long does the Chief Minister would write letters?"

The Chief Minister has given suggestions to the PM on the diversion of vaccines to the open market. These suggestions are for the welfare of the state

DEBI PRASAD MISHRA | BJD MLA

### WAR AGAINST VIRUS



Rajmahal Square in Bhubaneswar wears a deserted look as Section 144 was imposed in the Capital city to contain the spread of novel coronavirus, Saturday

**Amulya**  
1 kg | ₹ 380\*

**Amulya**  
500 g | ₹ 197\*

**Amulya**  
500 g | ₹ 197\*

**Amulya**  
200 g | ₹ 80\*

**Amulya**  
200 g | ₹ 80\*

**Amulya**  
100 g | ₹ 40\*

**Amulya**  
24 g | ₹ 10\*

**Amulya**  
12 g | ₹ 5\*

# NGT orders probe into Mahanadi sand mining

# RT-PCR mandatory for Kumbh returnees

All the attendees will have to undergo quarantine for 14 days

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** To control the spread of Covid-19 through Kumbh Mela returnees, the state government Saturday made RT-PCR test mandatory for devotees returning from the Mela in Haridwar. The details of the people, who have registered with Uttarakhand government for participating in Kumbh Mela, has been shared with the collectors and municipal commissioners.

The Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) has advised all collectors and municipal commissioners to contact all the returnees and find out the location, travel plan and advise them to get their RT-PCR tests done before boarding the train and flight to Odisha.

"All such persons must be personally tracked, their health condition monitored. All of them shall be directed to quarantine themselves for 14 days at home or in cluster Temporary Medical Centres (TMCs). They must be compulsorily RT-PCR tested," government told the collectors.

If symptoms are noticed, they will be immediately attended. The ASHA and Anganwadi workers have been directed to visit them regularly and monitor their health.

All such persons have to voluntarily self isolate themselves and report to local administration and health authorities. The collectors and municipal commissioners were further asked to report to Health department and SRC office on this issue on a daily basis.



The aggrieved villagers and petitioners had alleged that sand mining operation was in violation of the approved mining plan, environmental clearance conditions and other norms and orders of the Supreme Court and NGT in the matter of sand mining

The petition had said that the actions of the miner are hampering the ecology of the Mahanadi and accused the local officials of not acting against the culprits

The NGT in its latest order on the issue has directed to form of a special panel which will visit the site and examine the issue

The committee will comprise of a senior scientist from Integrated Regional Office of the Environment Ministry, a senior scientist from the Regional office of the Central Pollution Control Board, Cuttack Collector, Senior scientist/official from the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) and Cuttack District Mining Officer.

The aggrieved villagers and petitioners had alleged that sand mining operation was in violation of the approved mining plan, environmental clearance conditions and other norms and orders of the Supreme Court and NGT in the matter of sand mining and demanded action against the erring persons.

The petition had said that the actions of the miner are hampering the ecology of the Mahanadi and accused the local officials of not acting against the culprits.

that an inspection be carried out by a Joint Committee. The committee shall examine the site and submit its report stating therein specifically as to whether excess sand has been excavated beyond the license granted and whether heavy machines have been used for excavation of sand which is contrary to the rules," the written order of

NGT said. It also said that the committee should also enumerate any violation of the Environmental Clearance certificate or Consent to Operate. "We further direct that if the committee finds that there has been violation of the rules and regulations, the committee shall assess the damage caused to the environ-

# Ensure electricity to all, Energy min tells officials



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** Energy, Industry, MSME & Home Minister Dibya Shankar Mishra Saturday reviewed the progress of various developmental projects and programmes relating to infrastructure development, village electrification and implementation of 5T & Mo Sarkar initiatives in Energy Department.

While taking stock of present status of the projects, he directed the concerned officials to complete

the people centric projects in a time-bound manner. He also advised the officers and employees at all levels of operation in Energy department to be responsive to the needs and expectations of public. He told them to remain accountable for quality supply and proactive service delivery to the consumers living in remotest areas of the state and ensure electricity to all.

Principal Secretary, Energy and Chairman, GRIDCO & OPTCL Nikunj Bihari Dhal put forth the present status of all ongoing de-

velopmental projects and highlighted the achievements under 5T & Mo SARKAR initiatives in the Department.

He also spelled out the roadmap of the Department ahead in line with the commitment of the Chief Minister to the people of the state.

The Managing Directors and Directors of GRIDCO & OPTCL present at the meeting participated in the deliberation and shared their thoughts and propositions with Divya Shankar to transform the sector into a more vibrant and people friendly system. The CEOs of TP-CODL, TPSODL, TPNODL and TP-WODL who had joined through VC mode also gave presentations on their action-plans and programs undertaken in their respective areas of operations for ensuring a reliable supply network, electrical safety and efficient service delivery mechanism so as to win the goodwill and confidence of electricity consumers.

## STUDENTS' STIR



A group of students at Ravenshaw University in Cuttack stages a sit-in in front of the Vice-Chancellor's office, Saturday, to protest against a notice to vacate the hostels

## WASSUP TODAY

### BHUBANESWAR

First convention (virtual) of Odisha Unit of All India OBC Employees Welfare Association, Conference Hall, Press Club of Odisha, 11 am

### JATNI

Katyayani Besha of Maa Jagulei as part of Basanti Durga Puja, Kudiyari, 6 pm

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

# DAY TEMP SET TO RISE IN STATE

IMD predicts light to moderate rainfall and thunderstorm in some pockets of the state till April 22

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** The India Meteorological Department (IMD) Saturday said that day temperature is very likely to rise by 2 to 4 degrees Celsius at many places of the state during next 2-3 days.

Four places recorded a maximum day temperature of 40 degrees Celsius or above, Saturday. The places are Titlagarh (40.6 degrees), Jharsuguda (40.2 degrees), Baripada (40 degrees) and Malkangiri (40 degrees). Capital city Bhubaneswar recorded a day temperature of 38.6 degrees Celsius while Cuttack was at 37.2 degrees. Many western Odisha districts



Some places of Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Khurda, Puri, Dhenkanal and Mayurbhanj will experience thunderstorm

rainfall and thunderstorm in some pockets of the state till April 22. It said that light to moderate rainfall may occur at one or two places over the districts of Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Koraput, Gajapati, Rayagada and

Ganjam, Sunday. Districts including Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Gajapati, Ganjam, Khurda, Puri, Nayagarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Dhenkanal and Kandhamal may witness light shower, April 19.

Some places of Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Khurda, Puri, Dhenkanal and Mayurbhanj will also experience thunderstorm, Monday while similar weather condition will occur at one or two places of Koraput, Nabarangpur, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Gajapati, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh and Keonjhar on the next day.

# Ajit Mangaraj's mother too succumbs to nCoV

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** Two days after Congress candidate for Pipli bypoll Ajit Mangaraj died of Covid-19, his mother too lost the battle against the deadly virus Saturday night.

Khetramani Mangaraj, the deceased leader's mother, had tested positive for the highly infectious virus and was undergoing treatment at a Bhubaneswar based private hospital. According to a source, she was hospitalised well before Ajit's hospitalisation.

Ajit was busy campaigning in the constituency April 7 when he suddenly complained of breathing

problems. He was rushed to a government hospital in Pipli and then shifted to Apollo Hospital. Later, he tested positive for the infection. He passed away April 14 while undergoing treatment.

While the untimely demise of Pipli's BJD MLA Pradeep Maharathy had necessitated the bypoll, the death of Ajit Mangaraj resulted in postponement of the by-election.

## CLASSIFIED

### LOST

On 01.04.2021 HDFC Bank ID Card No.200305292200094 is lost. If the said ID Card found please return to G.P. Combines Pvt. Ltd., 155, Bapuji Nagar, Bhubaneswar, Ph.No. 0674-6677777.

### AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before the Notary Public, Bargharh, I Uppalapati Krishna, S/o. Uppalapati Satyanarayan, R/o. Kalapani Chowk, P.O.- Kalapani, Dist.-Bargharh declare that Uppalapati Krishna and U Krishna is one and same person. Henceforth, I am known as Uppalapati Krishna for all purposes.

## NOBLE DEED



Activists of Shreekhetra Bikash Manch open a drinking water kiosk at Market Square in Puri, Saturday

# Man arrested for smuggling pangolin

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Cuttack, April 17:** The Special Task Force (STF) of Odisha Crime Branch late Friday night conducted a raid at Abhimanpur village Badamba area of Cuttack and busted a pangolin smugglers' gang.

The seized live pangolin is to be handed over to DFO-cum-Wildlife Warden, Athagarh for safe custody

The STF officials raided a house at the village after being tipped off through a reliable source about a deal to sell a live pangolin. A wildlife smuggler identified as Keshab Chandra Sahoo of Abhimanpur was arrested in this



connection, an STF official said. The live pangolin and other incriminating instruments were seized from his possession. The accused could not produce any valid document in support of possessing the endangered species. A case (No. 14, dated 16.04.2021) under Sections 379/411/120 (B) of IPC/r/w 51 of Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 has been registered. Further investigation was underway when the last report came in.

# Digital literacy van rolled out for Khurda

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 17:** A digital van was Saturday inaugurated in Khurda district which will roam around different areas of the district to create awareness on digital literacy among the people especially the school and college goers.

The van was inaugurated by Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi. The initiative has been named as 'Gali Gali Gaon Gaon' undertaken under the Pradhan Mantri Grameen Digital Shaksharta Abhiyan.

All necessary instruments along with laptops have been provided in this van to create more impact. It is aimed at creating awareness among 30,000 people of Khurda about digital and financial literacy.

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**BOOTLEGGING RAMPANT ON CHHATTISGARH BORDERS**

# Covid import: Sundargarh sitting duck

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jharsuguda, April 17:** Covid-19 is surging in parts of Chhattisgarh. This has left its impact on the fringe areas of Sundargarh district bordering Chhattisgarh. Fringe areas have been witnessing an upsurge. Rampant bootlegging in the border areas is feared to add to the pandemic spread in the side, a report said.

According to the report, the state government has warned the administration of 10 districts sharing borders with Chhattisgarh against the spread of the Covid-19.

The administration, as part of preventive measures, has sealed the entry point at Kanakora. A temporary camp has been set up here while the police officials and administration have been strictly checking vehicular movements on road routes. Several other routes leading to Chhattisgarh have also been sealed.

But people living in fringe villages commute to the neighboring state through farmlands, forests and foot tracks which are out of the administration's scanner.

These unnoticed routes reportedly facilitate many bootleggers of both the sides to carry on their cross-border business which is



ILLEGAL LIQUOR TRADE IS THRIVING AT SUKHASODA VILLAGE UNDER LAKHANPUR BLOCK. IT IS ALLEGED THAT SCORES OF PEOPLE FROM CHHATTISGARH DRINK COUNTRY LIQUOR AT THIS OUTLET ON A DAILY BASIS

feared to spread the virus, locals alleged. People on both sides also commute on the porous borders.

Moreover, people in Chhattisgarh fringe areas come to villages in Jharsuguda to drink liquor almost every day. Bootlegging has been rampant in many fringe villages.

Such scenario is found at Sukhasoda village under Lakhanpur block. It is alleged that scores of people from Chhattisgarh drink country liquor at this outlet on a daily basis.

Locals alleged that some people had opposed such activities earlier, but it is of no use. Such activities have gone unnoticed by the excise and the police.

If such bootlegging is allowed in fringe areas, the pandemic situation will go out of control in the fringe areas. The efforts of the administration keeping guard on entry points will yield no results while Covid-19 will have made entry into backdoors, locals alleged.

Meanwhile, excise officials have

But people living in fringe villages commute to the neighboring state through farmlands, forests and foot tracks which are out of the administration's scanner

These unnoticed routes reportedly facilitate many bootleggers of both the sides to carry on their cross-border business which is feared to spread the virus, locals alleged. People on both sides also commute on the porous borders

Moreover, people in Chhattisgarh fringe areas come to villages in Jharsuguda to drink liquor almost every day. Bootlegging has been rampant in many fringe villages

started raids on some places, but all vulnerable areas are under strict vigil. Recently, two bootleggers were arrested at Sukhasoda.

Locals fear that bootlegging will be a potential means to bring Covid-19 from the neighboring state. There is a need for stern action on the bootleggers and tipplers from other side of the border.

The police and the administration have been carrying out strict checking of mask wearing and Covid-19 guidelines.

# Locals fume as NH-59 expansion gets delayed



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Daringbadi, April 17:** Hundreds of villagers Saturday staged a road-block at Simanbadi village in Kandhamal district alleging delay in road expansion work on a stretch of NH-59 connecting Gopalpur and Raipur areas here.

Seeking immediate intervention of the local administration to resolve the issue, the agitators brought vehicular movement on NH-59 to a halt and detained a number of vehicles of the contractor firm.

On being informed, Daringbadi police station IIC Kaushik Majhi rushed to the spot. He convinced the enraged villagers by promising them to take the matter up with the concerned authorities. With the intervention of Daringbadi police, the detained vehicles were also released by the agitators.

The project officer said an estimate of the NH expansion work has been sent to NHAI authorities for approval

Notably, local residents had earlier informed the IIC about the delay in road expansion work. Subsequently, the IIC had arranged a meeting between the project officer of the contractor firm Panchanan Das and local villagers of Simanbadi few months back.

The project officer had then suggested that an estimate of the work had been sent to NHAI authorities for approval and that the project will be completed soon after getting due approval.

**FUN TIME**



Children rolling used tyres on a road in Angul, Saturday

OP PHOTO

# 'Dupatta' around skeleton helped police crack murder mystery

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jajpur, April 17:** A dupatta around a skeleton that was recovered from a pond near Kapileswar village under Sadar police limits in Jajpur district helped police solve a murder case.

Police had recovered the skeleton from the pond April 8, but failed to identify the deceased. It focused on the dupatta around the skeleton. The police came to know that the skeleton was that of Subhashree Rout, a resident of Khandra village.

The police's investigation then zeroed in on her lover Arun Jena, a resident of Mirchandpur. He was arrested from Hyderabad.

Additional superintendent of police (Kalinga Nagar) Jayaram Satpathy and SDPO Narayan Chandra Barik briefed the journalists why and how Arun had killed Subhashree Saturday.

Arun, a married person, and

Subhashree were in love. Subhashree had eloped with Arun October 30, 2020. Arun kept her at the under construction panchayat office in his village for two days. During her stay there, he established physical relationship with her. On the third day, he sent her with a relative to Bhubaneswar.

She returned to the village from Bhubaneswar in a bus and got down at Kuakhia January 19. Arun picked her up on a bike and kept her at Khandara panchayat office for three days. Then she went to Bhubaneswar and again returned to Kuakhia January 23.

Arun took her to Kapileswar village. When Subhashree asked Arun to marry her, he turned down her proposal outright as he was already married. Arun thought of getting rid of Subhashree.

At about 11 pm, he strangled her with her dupatta and packed the body in a sack and dumped it in a pond.

# Pharmacist molests woman during X-ray

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, April 17:** A woman was allegedly molested by a pharmacist at a private hospital in Water Tank Road in this city, police said. The matter came to the fore after Town Police received a complaint in this regard. The accused was arrested and identified as Aswini Kumar Acharya, 42, of Shakti Nagar under Gosaninuaoga. Acharya was produced in the court and remanded to judicial custody, IIC Suresh Kumar Tripathy said.

Police said Dr Shankarshan Patra, a retired orthopedic surgeon, runs a hospital Patra Clinic at Water Tank Road. The incident occurred when the woman visited the clinic for her knee pain. The doctor advised her to get an X-ray done. A pharmacist took her to an X-ray room where he allegedly tried to take off her clothes and molested her. Later, the woman filed an FIR at the police station.

# Thyroid testing machine defunct; patients suffer

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, April 17:** A thyroid-testing machine in MKCG Medical College and Hospital here is lying defunct for last seven months leaving the patients to suffer while the concerned authorities have turned a blind eye to the issue, a report said. The machine lying non-operational has caused inconvenience to patients as authorities are yet to repair or purchase a new machine for the hospital.

Reports said people with cardiac problems, neuro-related problems, obesity and pregnant women besides every routine patient who has to undergo a surgery is required to get their thyroid tests done. On account of this, the thyroid testing machine is of immense importance but ignoring all this, the hospital authorities are yet to take a look at the problem.

In absence of the testing facility, people coming for the thyroid test return disappointed. That burns a hole in their pockets by paying around Rs 800 to get the test done at a private facility. Poor patients have been hit the hardest.

Sources said the state government has taken various measures to make healthcare facilities easily available to people. Facilities like free treatment, free medicines under Niramaya Yojana and free examination under Nidan scheme are some of measures of the state government. Many patients get benefits from these government

programmes. However, some of the high-powered equipment installed in the hospital becoming defunct at different points of times has posed serious challenges to the aim and objectives of the government.

Reports said the thyroid testing machine is lying defunct for the last seven months. The MKCG authorities have duly apprised the state government on the development. However, nothing has been done yet as patients continue to suffer in the absence of the equipment.

The machine has been installed at the regional diagnostic centre (RDC) building in the hospital premises in 2013. A private firm was assigned the charge of its maintenance. The machine conducts tests of over 60 patients daily in three phases for their thyroid problems free of cost.

The MKCG authorities informed the concerned firm on the development. Later, a technician from the firm verified the machine and gave an estimate of Rs 21lakh for its repairing. The high price shocked the MKCG authorities as they refused permission for repairing of the machine which was purchased at Rs 25 lakh.

When contacted, MKCG hospital superintendent Professor Santosh Kumar Mishra said the Odisha State Medical Corporation has been apprised of the matter. A decision has been taken to purchase a new machine.



# Plantation scam under Lokayukta lens

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhawanipatana, April 17:** The principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) has issued a notice to the DFO of the Kalahandi north division over irregularities in plantation work, seeking clarifications and action taken report.

According to reports, the Lokayukta had earlier received a complaint that there were irregularities worth Rs 2.21 crore in the plantation in fiscal 2015-16 and 2016-17 in Narla section of the North Kalahandi forest division.

Acting on the complaint (case-LY-167/2020), the Lokayukta has issued notice to former DFO Lalitendu Jena, former ACF Sushant Kumar Samantray, former Narla ranger Antaryami Das and former Narla forester Sampad Kumar.

All the four officials had deposited individually before the Lokayukta and submitted their replies regarding the alleged irregularities.

**PCCF SERVES NOTICE TO KALAHANDI NORTH DFO**



FILE PHOTO

Vigilance has looked into the scam and submitted its report to the state government, which will soon submit the report to the Lokayukta soon

However, the Lokayukta was not convinced about their clarifica-

tions on the alleged scam. It later recommended the case to the state Vigilance for investigation. After looking into the scam, the Vigilance has submitted its report to the state government. On the other hand, the state government will soon submit the Vigilance report to the Lokayukta.

A hearing on the case was held by the Lokayukta April 5. Complainant Bindu Mahananda had deposited before the Lokayukta

while the defendants sought more time for deposition.

The next hearing of the case will be held May 5. The state forest and environment department had issued a letter (6583/March 26, 2021) to the PCCF about the alleged scam.

The PCCF has issued a letter April 12 to Narla deputy ranger Nrutya Majhi, former Narla forester Sampad Kumar, forester Madhukar Patel and forest guard Ranjan Sahu. In the letter, the PCCF sought to know that there were no plants at the sites and how they could do maintenance of the plantation. The PCCF has also wanted the kind of action taken against those responsible for the scam.

This letter from the PCCF has stirred consternation among forest officials. It was learnt that forester Sampad Kumar has been shifted to Golamunda section while no departmental action was taken against the ranger, the forester and the forest guard.

# Mango trade hit by slump

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, April 17:** In summer, mango trade usually gathers pace in Berhampur and other mango hubs of the state. However, this summer, mango market is in doldrums at Nilakantheshwar in Berhampur due to second wave of Covid pandemic. Traders say, they would have been doing good business by this time, but the pandemic has paralysed the business completely.

Nearly 50 tonnes of mango are sold and sent to various parts of the state and other states through this market.

According to reports, some traders have started selling mangoes since April 1, but the business has slowed down in the current year. In south Odisha, the Nilakantheshwar mango hub is one of the biggest ones. Traders import varieties of mangoes like



Baiganpalli, Akhuras, Nadia Amba, Kalambi and Subarnarekha, from Karnataka, Bangalore, Srikakulam, Tirupati, Vijaywada, Rajmuhandry. From this market, mangoes are sent to Khurda, Sambalpur, Cuttack, Puri and Bolangir.

"The wholesale rate of the mango is Rs 50 to Rs 60 per kg. Mango production has fallen this year. The

demand may go up in coming days. But pandemic restrictions have been a problem," said Prakash Chandra Gouda, secretary of the Amba Bazar Sangha.

Other traders said the mango market has been caught in a slump due to Covid curbs. However, they hope that mango production will increase in next 10 to 15 days.

# Man kills wife, dumps body in forest

POST NEWS NETWORK

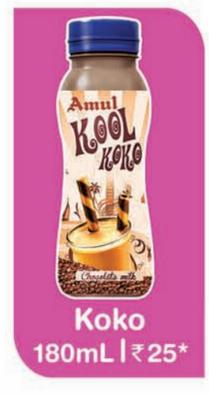
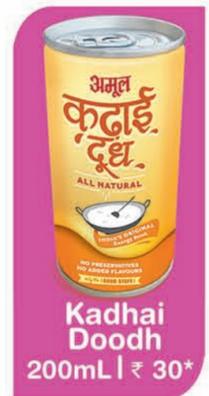
**Rayagada, April 17:** A man was arrested for murdering his wife and later dumping her body in a forest in Gunupur area of Rayagada district Saturday.

The accused has been identified as Surendra Sabar from Chinasari village under Gunupur police limits and his deceased wife as Gouri.

Gurupur Model Police Station IIC Manoj Kumar Behera informed Gouri had gone missing April 5 and subsequently her family had lodged a missing report.

The police had investigated the matter and suspected Surendra's complicity. They came to know that the couple used to fight and Surendra had wanted to get rid of her. He took the victim to a forested area and killed her before dumping the body in the forest.

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All existence is a manifestation of God.

SRI AUROBINDO



## What sort of India

What sort of India is the present generation growing up in and what will they live through? I am over 50 and with good health and good luck might see another couple of decades or so but in productivity terms my best years are behind me. The future belongs to those who are today children and young adults. What do they have in store for them? Having looked at the data and the facts of the last seven years in detail for my next book, I can see a little bit into the future and what it has in store.

Economically, the future is slightly different from what it was when I was coming into the job market. India had liberalised its economy in the year that I turned 21 and in the few years after that the market for jobs vastly improved in the cities. Even people with a generic college degree with no specialisation could get a white-collar job in an air-conditioned office if they had just basic knowledge of English.

This greatly benefited the middle class which had always had access to quality schools but not that many options in terms of work (which is why parents kept insisting on specialisation in education and asking children to become doctors and engineers). Now it was possible even for a BA or BCom woman or man to access an upper class lifestyle. I was one who benefited from this as did lakhs of others.

The majority of Indians did not benefit from this, of course, because they had access neither to the big cities nor to a decent education. But they had hope and this explains the thousands of private education institutions that sprang up in India's towns that attempted to replicate what was happening in cities. This period is now over. India's urban unemployment is at a historic high and more importantly the participation rate of India's labour force — meaning those who are employed or looking for work — is at a historic low. This means crores of Indians of working age (15 and above) have given up hope of finding a job. This was the case even before the pandemic and the position has been steady for over three years, meaning that it is not cyclical and will not change on its own. The lack of work will in time result in a lack of hope and this will have consequences. One of them will be an increase in crime and lawlessness.

Long term trends globally are also negative in terms of both trade and employment and so, unlike in the past when some of us benefited, the future does not hold out hope for those who are today young.

Socially also the India that I grew up in and knew has changed. India has always had a problem of reconciling its theoretical secular status with the reality that communal tensions existed. The 1980s and 90s give us enough evidence to prove this was the case. However, this communal impulse was dampened by efforts from government. However poor these efforts may have been, the government did not actively inflame the impulse as has happened since 2014. This has consequences both internally and, less importantly, externally. Within India our politics has become dark and election campaigns are run by the dominant political party actively targeting Indian Muslims. Because this is electorally rewarding as we have seen, we will see more of it. The consequence is that it has damaged Indian society and produced violence in neighbourhoods. To give one clear example, there were zero beef lynchings before 2015. We have introduced a new category of violence. This will have downstream consequences also, such as economic, which will affect the wider population, but there is no point talking about that today. Externally, our love for hate has brought the world's attention on us. Just to give an example from this week, this is what the European Parliament said on April 14: "Members have expressed concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in India, echoing comments by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and several UN Special Rapporteurs. This includes reports that human rights defenders and journalists in the country lack a safe working environment. The report also voices alarm regarding India's Citizenship Amendment Act, which according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is fundamentally discriminatory in nature against Muslims and dangerously divisive."

This text was approved by 61 votes in favour and 6 votes against. Indian attempts to stop it or soften the criticism failed. The Indian government will brush it off as it has several other reports this year but again, this comes with consequences. You cannot expect to be given a position on the UN Security Council, as India does, when the world sees what you are doing with distaste. India was viewed from the outside as a place which is chaotic and noisy but likeable. This was so when I first went abroad at the age of 16. This has now changed in the view of those who study and observe India. It will change soon for the rest of the world also. The optimism has gone. It is disappointing as an Indian to record this but one cannot look away from what one has found.

### WISDOM CORNER

When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace. **JIMI HENDRIX**

The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places. **ERNEST HEMINGWAY**

Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence. **ROBERT FROST**

### WORDSWORTH

#### Monkey's wedding

It's certainly a well-known South African expression. A related Afrikaans word, jakkalstrou, jackals wedding, also exists. The South African English version is the direct equivalent (what linguists call a loan translation) of the Zulu umshado wezinkawu, a wedding for monkeys. Back in 1998, Bert Vaux, Assistant Professor of Linguistics at Harvard, asked members of the LINGUIST List about expressions for this weather phenomenon. He was told that similar sayings or proverbs exist in a surprising number of languages. A great many of them have animal associations, often to do with marriage (or, as one respondent commented, that activity for which the word marriage may be considered a suitable euphemism). In Arabic, it seems the term is "the rats are getting married", while Bulgarians prefer to speak of bears doing so; Mr Vaux was told that in Hindi it becomes "the jackal's wedding"; in Calabria, it is said that "when it rains with sun, the foxes are getting married", for which there's a similar phrase in Japanese; Koreans refer to tigers likewise; there's even an English dialect term, "the foxes' wedding", known from the south west, it seems. However, in Polish, the saying is that "when the sun is shining and the rain is raining, the witch is making butter". Several languages refer to devils instead, as in Turkish: "the devils are getting married". There's a well-known version in the American South, at least among older people: "The devil's behind his kitchen door beating his wife with a frying pan", usually shortened just to "The devil's beating his wife". There's clearly a common association that is understood by widely divergent language communities, so it seems to be something at a level below that of superficial culture. But what is it?

## FOCUS ECONOMY

# SURVIVAL OF MSMEs



India's increased import duties on raw materials have made the MSMEs highly uncompetitive

An October 2020 study by McKinsey Consultants in the European Union has found that one-half medium, small and micro industries (MSMEs) believe that they will not be able to survive more than 12 months. The condition in our country is likely to be much worse because our MSMEs have faced the problems of demonetization and GST earlier.

The simple fact is that the cost of production of MSMEs is more in comparison to large industries and they cannot survive unless given special protection. First reason is that the cost of information is more for them. Let us say a businessperson of Kanpur has to get information about the market for leather goods in Mumbai. The cost of travel by a large businessperson would be, say, double of the MSME businessperson. However, the large businessperson would sell ten times the goods sold by the MSME businessperson. Accordingly, the cost of information would be five times for the small businessperson.

The second reason is that a small businessperson has to manage production, marketing, finance and accounts himself. Large businesses have specialised managers for each of these functions. The MSME businessperson does not have the level of skill in any of these functions as available with the large businessperson. The lower level of skill translates into higher cost. For example, a MSME businessperson would not be able to assess the competence of a sales outlet in same depth as the marketing manager of the large business. He may not be able to access the credit reports of the sales outlet. In course of time this lack of skill will translate into losses for the MSME.

The third reason is that MSMEs face a higher cost of compliance with regulations. A number of studies indicate that the cost of compliance of GST has been more for MSMEs. Large businesses have in-house chartered accountants who can manage such regulations with ease.

The fourth reason is digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, robots, 3-D printing, internet of things and internet-based platforms like Amazon and Flipkart. The cost of production of large businesses is reducing by the day due to the use of these technologies. They are producing large quantities with lesser number of workers by using technology. Further, they are able to persuade the large platforms to push their goods. For example, Amazon or Flipkart can sell the sales of a particular chocolate manufacturer of Switzerland. MSMEs do not have the clout to persuade the large platforms to push their goods. It is necessary to strengthen the MSMEs against big businesses in view of these inherent disadvantages if we have to ensure their survival and the jobs that they create.

A Guidebook for Supporting the Internationalization of MSMEs made by the European Commission has suggested that the task of training, research, provision of information and making their clusters could be done better through the MSME associations. The associations are in deep contact with their members and they can know what kind of training and research is needed by their members. The same training module or research programme made by academic institutions or government officials may be off the mark. Similarly, the associations have a better understanding of what goods have a sale potential in which country and

they make efforts to obtain that particular information and provide to their members. The associations have a better grasp of the potential of making clusters as well. For example, the association of weavers of Varanasi would have a better understanding as to whether the cluster of weavers should be made around a sales website, testing facility or designing. The policy of the Indian government appears to be moving in the opposite direction, however. The Board for MSMEs had large numbers of representatives of associations in the past. The government has reduced their representation and instead appointed MLAs and the like who have no grasp of the problems of MSMEs. The funds provided to the MSME associations have also dried up.

The second step especially in the present scenario of Covid is that the government must consider providing direct financial support to MSMEs. A study by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy dated April 2020 has noted that MSMEs in Brazil were being provided part salaries of their employees as subsidy. Canada and New Zealand were providing salary support to their MSMEs for three months. It was advocated that Indian MSMEs may be provided income support for some time if they can show that there has been an actual decline in their incomes. Our government, on the other hand, has been focusing on providing access to credit to MSMEs which is good. However, the util-

ity of a loan arises when there is demand in the market. The MSMEs will use the loans for consumption and sink into the quicksand of debt in absence of demand from the market. Therefore, the government should consider giving subsidies on wages and income support to the MSMEs.

MSMEs often buy imported raw materials like plastic and sell the finished goods such as dolls made by them. They can do this only if they get cheap plastic and protection from cheap imported dolls. However, the policy of the government has been exactly in the opposite direction. Heavy import duties have been imposed on certain raw materials while low import duties have been imposed on certain finished goods. Thus, Anil Bharadwaj, secretary general of the Federation of Indian Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises has said India's increased import duties on raw materials have made the MSMEs highly uncompetitive.

A 2018 report by the International Trade Centre titled "Business Systems for the Digital Age" has said that in 2017, the market capital valuation of the top ten internet platform companies reached more than USD 3.3 trillion. This is significantly higher than India's GDP of USD 2.6 trillion in that year. These platforms can push the goods of particular producers who may give them higher margins. Ola and Uber drivers have told me that their companies give more bookings to the taxis owned by themselves to the disadvantage of single-taxi owners who have attached themselves to these platforms. Therefore, the government must consider breaking the large platforms into smaller companies so that competition between them can prevent the dominance of a particular platform. The Competition Commission of India has adequate powers in this direction. The government must direct the Commission in this direction.

The writer is a former Professor of Economics at IIM Bangalore.



Bharat Jhunjhunwala

THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD CONSIDER GIVING SUBSIDIES ON WAGES AND INCOME SUPPORT TO THE MSMEs



Aakar Patel

India was viewed from the outside as a place which is chaotic and noisy but likeable. This was so when I first went abroad at the age of 16. This has now changed in the view of those who study and observe India

## SPECTRUM VACCINATION

# Our best bet for overcoming Covid

It has been a year since the coronavirus pandemic started dominating headlines and our lives. For so many here in Canada and around the world, it has been a period of unprecedented stress and grief. We have all been waiting to heave a sigh of relief once our families, friends, and communities receive their vaccines.

It is only natural that we would focus on the health of our loved ones. But we must not forget that the virus observes no borders. Focusing solely on our domestic responses is not enough. At the same time that we focus on vaccinations for high-risk Canadians, we must also ensure that the rest of the world is on track to being vaccinated, too, and that everyone has access to safe and effective tests and treatments. Beating this virus anywhere requires beating it everywhere.

Fighting a virus on a global scale is a daunting task, but there is much cause for hope. We cheered in December, when a personal support worker in Toronto received Canada's first COVID-19 vaccine. But now that the global rollout of vaccines through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) facility is well underway, we have even more reason to celebrate.

Since February 24, tens of millions of doses have been delivered

to over 70 countries around the world, making this the largest and most rapid global vaccination campaign in history. In Ghana and Ivory Coast, health-care workers and high-risk populations were among the first to be vaccinated with COVAX doses, and similar campaigns are now proceeding in Nigeria, Jamaica, and Albania. We are witnessing the global response at work, and we should recognize it for the important milestone that it is.

Canada joined COVAX last September because we believed wholeheartedly in its mission to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines and ensure equitable delivery. The facility was created to guarantee access to a wide variety of vaccines, and to put smaller and poorer countries on a more equal footing vis-à-vis larger and wealthier ones. By purchasing in bulk, COVAX can spread doses around the world in the fairest and most cost-effective way possible.

COVAX was designed as a truly cooperative partnership. With 190 participating countries, it represents more than 90 per cent of the global population, and can command far more purchasing power than most countries could on their own. Moreover, when COVAX was created, no one knew which vaccines

would work, or which would be approved first. That is why Canada called upon COVAX to procure some of its own doses. Our agreement with COVAX complemented our other contracts, and increased our chances of carrying out a successful domestic vaccination campaign, while doing our part globally.

Complementing our own procurement efforts, Canada has launched investments that will also help to make vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics affordable and accessible globally. Owing to our various advance purchase agreements, we could eventually end up with a surplus of vaccine doses. Precisely when that might happen will be determined in the coming weeks and months, as Health Canada completes its review of vaccine candidates, and as we confirm the deployment of vaccines in Canada.

Regardless of when we reach a surplus, we will work closely with our international partners — including other countries, Gavi, COVAX, and vaccine manufacturers — to explore all possible options for delivering doses to those who need them. It will take time to vaccinate the entire global population. COVAX has already secured more than two billion doses for 2021, but we now need to muster the same spirit of global cooperation

to ensure that this supply continues to increase, so that no vulnerable populations are left behind.

We can take heart in knowing that we are not starting from square one. Canada has been funding global health projects in developing countries for decades, and we will continue to do so. These investments are aiding the fight against polio, HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, and Ebola, and they have proved critical in helping countries respond to the COVID-19 crisis with proven, adaptable public health responses, such as mass testing and contact tracing.

If this crisis has taught us anything, it is that we must maintain the capacity to adapt to fast-changing conditions. The importance of the COVAX facility cannot be understated. It is one of the signal achievements of the current era. For the first time ever, the world has come together to ensure equitable, universal vaccine access.

Our global and domestic responses to the coronavirus are inextricably linked, which is why COVAX is our best bet for overcoming the pandemic. When international cooperation succeeds, we all succeed.

The writer is Canada's Minister of International Development. ©PROJECT SYNDICATE



Karina Gould

BEATING THIS VIRUS ANYWHERE REQUIRES BEATING IT EVERYWHERE

## Letters

### TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: [edit@orissapost.com](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

Orissa POST  
B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

#### Afghanistan's future

Sir, The US decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan is not a good one at the present moment. The Taliban is still controlling parts of Afghanistan. There is considerable influence of Pakistan and support from China too. The disintegration of Afghanistan is quiet likely. But it will be only for a short period of time. Afghanistan has a history of short reigns. Maybe the US troops will be shifted to some other region of the world. The US is also facing domestic problems. The US needs war to run its economy. The weapons industry needs insecurity among countries to sell weapons. Let's wait and watch till the withdrawal of troops in September 2021.

Sunil Pradhan, KHARIAR (NUAPADA)

#### Impractical suggestion

Sir, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's suggestion to the Centre that Covid-19 vaccines be made available in the open market is not a practical one. The people above the age of 45 constitute about 26 per cent of India's population and about 75 per cent of the Covid-19 deaths in the country are reported in this age group. The Centre is right in deciding that this age group of population should be vaccinated first. The country is short of vaccines and making them available in the open market will result in chaos.

Gopal Mittal, BHUBANESWAR

#### Precious oxygen

Sir, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stressed taking effective steps to ensure the supply of oxygen across the country. Modi also made a detailed review of the current situation of oxygen supply and projected use in the coming fifteen days across twelve high-burden states and suggested increasing oxygen production as per the capacity of each plant. The government has exempted all interstate movement of oxygen tankers from registration to enable easier movement. The states and transporters have been ensuring tankers move round the clock with drivers working in shifts to faster turnaround and adequate capacity to meet the surge in demand. The government is also allowing industrial cylinders to be used for medical oxygen. State governments need to develop a strong mechanism to ensure oxygen availability in all hospitals as per demand. Lives of serious patients can be saved by providing oxygen timely.

Amit Singh Kushwaha, SATNA (MP)

# Delhi's Covid situation 'very serious'

CM ARVIND KEJRIWAL RED-FLAGS SHORTAGE OF OXYGEN, REMDESIVIR, TOCILIZUMAB

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 17: Amid escalating cases of COVID-19, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Saturday said the pandemic situation in the city has become "very serious and worrisome", with oxygen stock, remdesivir and tocilizumab drugs for patients in short supply.

The number of COVID-19 cases is rising rapidly with 24,000 fresh cases reported in the last 24 hours, he said in an online media briefing.

This is the highest single-day surge in the national capital till date. A day before, 19,486 COVID-19 cases and 141 deaths were reported.

"The cases of COVID-19 are rising fast in Delhi. In the last 24 hours, around 24,000 fresh cases have been reported. Within a day, the number has gone up from around 19,500 to around 24,000. So, the situation is very serious and worrisome," Kejriwal said.

Thursday and Friday, the city had recorded 16,699 and 17,282 cases, respectively. The chief minister also said he has spoken to Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and requested him for augmenting supplies of oxygen stock, and remdesivir and tocilizumab drugs for COVID patients in Delhi.

Kejriwal said that the number of beds is also running out fast and the Delhi government is trying to escalate beds on a large-scale in the coming days.



Connaught Place wears a deserted look during weekend lockdown in New Delhi, Saturday.

PTI PHOTO

"Our biggest target is to augment beds with oxygen supply attached," he said.

In the next 3-4 days, the government will add 6,000 more beds, including 1,300 at Yamuna Sports Complex and 2,500 at Radhaswami Satsang premises, he said.

Kejriwal warned strict action against hospitals that are denying patients beds despite showing availability on Delhi government's COVID app. He also demanded from the Centre to reserve 50 per cent of the total pool of beds in hospitals run by it in Delhi for COVID-19 patients. The district magistrates have also been directed to keep a tab on

## ROADS EMPTY, MARKETS SHUT

New Delhi: Roads, markets, buses and metro trains were largely empty Saturday as the national capital, grappling with soaring COVID-19 cases, observed weekend curfew, with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal appealing to people to adhere to the restrictions. The weekend curfew, aimed at breaking the chain of spiralling coronavirus infections, was clamped at 10 pm Friday and will continue till 5 am Monday. Apart from those who have been exempted, a majority of Delhiites appeared to have stayed home during the weekend curfew. Only a few passengers were seen travelling on buses and metro trains in the city. Major markets, including Sadar Bazar, Chandni Chowk, Connaught Place, Khari Baoli and Karol Bagh, and industrial areas like Bawana, Narela, Okhla, wore a deserted look during the day.

the labs and ensure that no new samples are collected by them if they already have pending samples of COVID-19, the chief minister

said. Some labs have lifted more samples of COVID-19 suspects than their capacity leading to delay of 3-4 days in test reports, Kejriwal said.

# Woman can't be denied job saying work involves night hours: Kerala HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kochi, April 17: The Kerala High Court has held that a qualified woman cannot be denied employment on the ground that the nature of the employment would require her to work during night hours.

Setting aside an embargo contained in a job notification issued by public sector undertaking Kerala Minerals and Metals Limited, which allowed only male candidates to apply for the post, Justice Anu Sivaraman ruled that protective provisions cannot stand in the way of a woman being considered for employment for which she is otherwise eligible.



The court gave the verdict April 9 in a plea by a 25-year-old woman engineering graduate in Safety and Fire Engineering, challenging the male only provisions in a notification inviting applications for the permanent post of Safety Officer available in the company.

Treasa Josfine sought to set aside Section 66(1)(b) of the Factories Act, 1948, contending that it denies the right of the petitioner to participate in the selection for appointment as Safety Officer.

The petitioner also contended that the provision is violative of the valuable rights guaranteed to her under Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Constitution.

The court observed that the Factories Act, 1948, was enacted at a time when requiring a woman to work in an establishment of any nature, more so in a factory at night could only be seen as exploitative and violative of her rights.

"Apparently, the world has moved forward and women who were relegated to the roles of homemakers during the times when the enactment had been framed have taken up much more demanding roles in society as well as in economic spheres."

"In the present scenario, to say

that a graduate engineer in safety engineering cannot be considered for appointment as Safety Officer in a public sector undertaking because of an offending provision under Section 66(1)(b) of the Factories Act, according to me, is completely untenable and unacceptable. This is evident from the fact that the State of Kerala has approved an amendment to the Rules which permits the engagement of women on condition that all safety precautions and facilities for such engagement are arranged by the employer," the court said.

The court noted the decision in Hindustan Latex Ltd's case and the subsequent laying down of the law by the Apex Court, which made it abundantly clear that a woman who is fully qualified cannot be denied her right to be considered for employment only on the basis of her gender.

"It is the bounden duty of the respondents, who are government and government functionaries, to take all appropriate steps to see that a woman is able to carry out the duties assigned to her at all hours, safely and conveniently. If that be so, there would be no reason for denying appointment to a qualified hand only on the ground that she is a woman and because the nature of the employment would require her to work during night hours," the court said.

It opined that the embargo contained in the notification that 'only male candidates can apply' is violative of the provisions of Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Constitution.

"The said provision in the notification is, therefore, set aside," the court said.

It also said the finding of the Division Bench that the provisions of Section 66(1)(b) of the Factories Act are only protective in nature.

"I make it clear that such protective provisions cannot stand in the way of a woman being considered for employment for which she is otherwise eligible," the court said and directed the Managing Director of KMMML to consider her application for appointment to the post, notwithstanding the provisions of Section 66(1)(b) of the Factories Act, 1948.

The court also directed that appropriate action be taken without further delay.

# 'Was forced to name ISRO scientist Narayanan'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Thiruvananthapuram, April 17: Two days after the Supreme Court ordered a fresh probe to find out if there was a conspiracy in the 27-year-old ISRO spy case, one of the then 'falsely' implicated Maldivian lady Saturday revealed that the Kerala police brutally tortured her to say the name of ISRO scientist S. Nambi Narayanan.

The ISRO spy case surfaced in 1994 when Narayanan was arrested on charges of espionage along with another senior official of ISRO, two Maldivian women and a businessman.

Of the two women, Fousia Hassan presently settled in Sri Lanka told a TV channel here that she had never even heard the name of



Narayanan.

"I was brutally tortured by the police and when I refused to name him, they said they will arrest my

daughter who was a student and rape her. It was after that did I say the name of Narayanan," said Hassan.

She said she was forced to say that Narayanan and another person took dollars from her for sharing the secrets of ISRO.

She also said that just like Narayanan who was given a compensation, she also has to be paid the compensation as she has health issues because of the brutalities she suffered during the interrogation.

The ISRO spy case has now surfaced through the new directive, which came after the apex court appointed a three-member committee headed by retired SC judge DK Jain to probe if there was a conspiracy among then police officials to falsely implicate Narayanan and Thursday the apex court which went through the report ordered the CBI to conduct the new probe and it can treat this report as the preliminary document. The court also asked the CBI to submit its report in three months.

**I was brutally tortured by the police and when I refused to name him (Narayanan), they said they will arrest my daughter who was a student and rape her. It was after that did I say the name of Narayanan**

FOUSIA HASSAN

# Red Fort violence: Deep Sidhu held again after court grants bail



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 17: The Delhi Police's Crime Branch arrested actor-activist Deep Sidhu Saturday in connection with an FIR lodged by the Archaeological Survey of India for allegedly damaging pub-

lic property during the farmers' tractor parade violence on Republic Day at Red Fort, officials said.

The arrest came after a Delhi court granted bail to the actor-activist arrested February 9 in connection with the Red Fort violence. Special Judge Neelofer Abida

Perveen granted relief to the accused Friday on a personal bond of Rs 30,000 and two sureties of a like amount.

The court noted that the accused was in custody since February 9, 2021, with 14 days of remand in police custody.

It said that a police plea for further incarceration for the sole purpose of voice sampling was not justifiable.

While granting the bail, the judge directed the accused to deposit his passport with the investigating officer and appear before the police station as well as the court as and when required.

January 26, thousands of protesting farmers who reached ITO in Delhi from the Ghazipur border clashed with police, the agency claimed in its FIR registered in connection with the Red Fort violence, adding that many of them who were driving tractors reached the Red Fort and entered the monument, where a religious flag was also hoisted.

# Kerala CPI-M asks PM to reign in Muraleedharan



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Thiruvananthapuram, April 17: The Kerala unit of the CPI-M Saturday sought the immediate intervention of the Prime Minister and the national leadership of the BJP to reign in Union Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan for his curt remarks and frequent attacks on

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

The CPI-M acting secretary A. Vijayaraghavan said Muraleedharan's words and utterances, especially against Vijayan, are unbefitting of the post that he holds.

"It's high time that the Prime Minister and the party leadership intervene to reign in Muraleedharan. As a Union

Minister he has failed to do anything for Kerala and instead he is attacking Vijayan all the time. Vijayan had won accolades for the way he led the state from the front, especially when the Covid pandemic struck hard and Muraleedharan has not been able to do anything to help the state," said Vijayaraghavan.

What really hurt the CPI-M was when Muraleedharan called Vijayan a 'Covidiot' following the way he conducted himself after he turned Covid positive and the manner in which he returned home after turning Covid negative with his wife who was at that time positive.

"All wish to know what he (Muraleedharan) did to help the thousands of our diaspora who were suffering during the time when the pandemic broke out. He failed to do anything at all and now see there is a shortage of vaccines and what is he doing. It was unbefitting of a Union Minister to behave in the way he has been doing," added Vijayaraghavan.

Incidentally, early Saturday it was former Union Minister and Congress leader P. Chidambaram who first attacked Muraleedharan for his remarks against Vijayan.

# Shut in Feb, India's largest Covid facility set to be revived



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 17: The country's largest COVID-19 facility at Radha Soami Satsang Beas in South Delhi, which was closed down in February, is being revived considering the unprecedented surge in coronavirus cases, officials said Saturday.

The management at the spiritual organisation's centre in Chattarpur confirmed that the facility will be restarted soon. "The government is planning to restart the facility soon.

Officials are likely to conduct a survey and finalise the modalities," Vikas Sethi, the secretary of the Radha Soami Satsang Beas centre, told PTI.

Asked if the Sardar Patel Covid Care Centre is being revived, South Delhi District Magistrate Ankita Chakravorti replied in the affirmative.

The 10,200-bed facility was inaugurated on July 5 last year and was operated by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police.

The centre was 1,700 feet long and 700 feet wide - roughly the size of 20 football fields -

and had 200 enclosures with 50 beds each.

The Sardar Patel Covid Care Centre was closed in February when coronavirus cases in the capital had reduced significantly. The facility had admitted patients referred by 11 hospitals in the city, including AIIMS and Safdarjung.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal appointed his deputy Manish Sisodia the 'nodal minister' for overall COVID-19 management in the city and assigned him the responsibility of inter-ministerial coordi-

nation. With the unprecedented rise in coronavirus cases, the AAP government also appointed 10 IAS officers as 'nodal officers' for COVID-19 hospitals run by it and asked them to work from the health care facility they have been assigned.

The government had Thursday announced a curfew this weekend and the closure of malls, gymnasiums and auditoriums till April 30 as part of sweeping restrictions to break the chain of the infection.

Amul



Kesar Haldi Kulfi ₹20\* | 60 mL



Rosogolla Kulfi ₹20\* | 60 mL



Bombay Kulfi ₹25\* | 60 mL



Tricone Dark Chocolate ₹40\* | 120 mL



Jumbo Cup Pan Nawabi ₹25\* | 125 mL



Jumbo Cup Haldi ₹30\* | 125 mL



Camel Milk Medium Fat Ice Cream ₹30\* | 125 mL

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## of the day quote

Maharashtra is suffering from an inept and corrupt government and the Centre is doing its best for the people. People of Maharashtra are following 'Majha Kutumb, Majhi Javabadari' dutifully. It is time the CM (chief minister) also follows his duties in the spirit of 'Majha Rajya, Majhi Javabadari'



PIYUSH GOVAL | UNION MINISTER

The Congress, the Left parties and the Trinamool Congress will not be able to stop infiltration in West Bengal. The BJP is the only political party which can stop infiltration. Didi is concerned with her fake secularism. She bothers only about her votebank



AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

This has two benefits - it helps you avoid death or other serious health harm from the infection, and it helps reduce the probability you will infect someone else. So it is possible to be reinfected, but the harms of the infection will be lower



ANUP MALANI | HEALTH ECONOMIST

## SHORT TAKES

### 4 kids, 2 women drown in dam

**Nashik:** A birthday celebration turned into a tragedy for a group of friends as four children and two women drowned in a dam in Igatpuri tehsil of Maharashtra's Nashik district, police said Saturday. The incident occurred at Valdevi dam near Vadivarhe village on Friday evening, they said. "A group of nine friends, mostly minors, had gone to the dam to celebrate the birthday of one of them. While clicking a group photo, some of them fell into the dam water."

### 4 held for selling fake Remdesivir

**Pune:** Pune rural police have arrested four persons for allegedly selling fake Remdesivir injections in Baramati area, an official said Saturday. Three injection vials labelled as Remdesivir, which is used for the treatment of COVID-19, but actually filled with nothing but paracetamol in liquid form were seized from them, said the senior police official. The accused were selling the fake drug at Rs 35,000 per vial while its authorized market price is around Rs 1,100.

### Office filled with vax catches fire

**Barasat (WB):** A fire broke out at the office of a health official Saturday morning at Barasat in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, where a large stock of COVID-19 vaccines was stored. The blaze erupted inside the office of the deputy chief medical officer of health, a senior official said. At least 12 fire tenders managed to douse the flames after four hours, he said, adding, there were no reports of any injury.

### Goa bans export of oxygen cylinders

**Panaji:** In light of the spike in COVID-19 cases, the Goa government Saturday announced a ban on the export of oxygen cylinders and ordered that the stock of this life-saving gas meant for the industry be diverted to health services. State Health Minister Vishwajit Rane, who also holds the industries portfolio, issued the orders.



Shocking that while COVID ravages India, from being a vaccine exporter, it has been compelled to become a vaccine importer undoing 70 years of government effort. The pilot who had his photo plastered on boarding passes only to press the eject button during an emergency

PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONGRESS LEADER

## COVID SPIKE

# Yet another day of highest cases, deaths



AGENCIES

**New Delhi, April 17:** The country Saturday recorded a frightening single-day spike in COVID-19 cases with over 2.34 lakh fresh infections, crossing the two lakh-mark for the third straight day, as demands for increased supply of oxygen cylinders, vaccine doses and Remdesivir were raised by 11 states and UTs, including Delhi, where the pandemic situation was described as worrisome by the chief minister. As India's COVID-19 tally inched towards 1.50 crore-mark and the death toll climbed above 1.75 lakh following a record single-day rise of 2,34,692 cases and 1,341 fatalities,

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Health minister Harsh Vardhan held meetings to review measures taken by states for prevention, containment and management of the recent surge.

In the meeting to review preparedness of public health response to COVID-19 situation, Modi called for a close coordination with states to defeat the virus as also for utilisation of entire national capacity to ramp up vaccine production.

Reiterating that there is no substitute to testing, tracking and treatment, Modi said all necessary measures must be taken to ramp up availability of hospital beds for COVID-19 patient, and also asked local administrations to be proactive, sensitive to people's concerns.

He also reviewed the status of supply of Remdesivir and other medicines, and called for speeding up installation of approved medical oxygen plants.

Earlier in the day, the Prime Minister also appealed that participation in the ongoing Kumbh Mela be kept symbolic in view of the unprecedented surge in the coronavirus cases. The Hindu religious gathering in Haridwar has been at the centre of controversy amid fears that it could be a super-spreader event with lakhs of devotees attending the event without following the COVID protocols.

During the meeting with Vardhan, health ministers of 11 states and Union Territories (UTs) demanded increased supply of medical-grade oxygen cylinders and Remdesivir in hospitals.

## INS Nireekshak searching for six missing fishermen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 17:** Indian Naval Ship (INS) Nireekshak continued its underwater search Saturday to find six fishermen who have been missing since their boat collided with a foreign cargo vessel off the Mangaluru coast Tuesday, Navy officials said.

They said the bodies of three fishermen that were recovered on Friday were handed over to the local authorities in Mangaluru Saturday.

There were a total of 14 fishermen on Indian fishing boat Rabah when it collided with Singapore-registered vessel MV APL Le Havre around 41 nautical miles west of the Mangaluru coast Tuesday.

While two of the 14 were saved by the Singaporean vessel's personnel immediately, three bodies were recovered a little later Tuesday itself.

INS Nireekshak was pressed into action Friday and it recovered three more bodies after a couple of hours of search operation. These three bodies were handed over to the local authorities in Mangaluru on Saturday, Navy officials said, adding that the search for the remaining six fishermen continues.

## FRISKY FELINES



Tigers at the Arignar Anna Zoological Park in Vandalur, in Chennai

PTI PHOTO

# Modi appeals for symbolic 'Kumbh'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, April 17:** With reports of huge number of Covid positive cases from 'Kumbh Mela' area in Haridwar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Saturday appealed to observe the event symbolic to strengthen fight against the deadly virus.

The Prime Minister's appeal comes as the annual event has sparked nationwide concern amid alarming second wave of Covid-19 pandemic as tens of thousands of devotees have gathered along the banks of the Ganga in Uttarakhand's Haridwar.

Taking to Twitter, the Prime Minister said that he spoke to top seer-Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha president Swami Avdheshanand Giri Ji Maharaj - over phone and made an appeal about the event.

I spoke to Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami



Awadheshanand Giri on the phone on Saturday morning and get details about the health of all saints. I have prayed that two royal baths have taken place and that the Kumbh should be kept symbolic due to the crisis in Corona. This will give the fight strength from this crisis, the Prime Minister said.

Modi thanked all the saints for giving all kinds of support to the administration. Following this, Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha president tweeted We respect Prime Minister's

## Joona Akhara ends Kumbh participation

**Dehradun:** The Joona Akhara, one of the largest sects of seers in the country, announced the end of its participation in the Kumbh Mela Saturday, hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal that participation in the ongoing gathering in Haridwar be kept symbolic in view of the surge in coronavirus cases. "The people of India and their survival is our first priority. In view of the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, we have duly immersed all the deities invoked on the occasion of Kumbh. This is the formal immersion-conclusion of Kumbh on behalf of Joona Akhara," Swami Avdheshanand Giri, the 'mahamandaleshwar' of the Joona Akhara, said in a tweet in Hindi.

appeal. I request the people to not come for snan in large numbers, in the wake of Covid-19 situation, and follow all rules.

The Prime Minister's appeal came after a Hindu seer is reportedly lost his life after Covid-19 infection and nearly 100 other holy men have tested positive after attending a vast Indian religious festival where millions of pilgrims have been ignoring Covid-19 advice despite a national surge in infections.

# IAF to reorient itself for future challenges

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, April 17:** The Indian Air Force (IAF) has decided to reorient itself for future challenges across all threat domains and prepare a roadmap for effective utilisation of assets and future inductions, officials said.

The force is also looking for innovative and low cost solutions for enhancing training effectiveness as well as adopting a scalable contingency response model.

The decision was taken during Indian Air Force Commanders' Conference 2021 that concluded Friday.

During the Conference Commanders, the IAF said that the contours of the operational philosophy and organisational aspects of Air Defence and Joint Command Structures were also discussed.

The IAF Commanders'



Conference 2021, themed 'Reorienting for the Future' concluded at Air Headquarters late Friday. The three day conference saw detailed deliberations on ways and means to enhance the operational capabilities of the IAF.

Air Officers Commanding-in-Chief of the seven commands and key appointments from Air Headquarters attended the conference.

The conference was addressed

by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. The Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat and chief of two services - Army and Navy - also addressed the conference and interacted with the commanders on subjects of future war-fighting through joint planning and integration of service capabilities.

The actions and follow-up plans for implementing the directions given by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the

Combined Commanders' Conference were discussed by the participants.

The other key subjects included reorientation of the IAF for future challenges across all threat domains, and the roadmap for effective utilisation of assets and future inductions.

In his address to the Commanders, Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal Rakesh Kumar Singh Bhadauria emphasised the need for incorporation of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and 5G, enhanced utilisation of cyber and space domains and continuous update of doctrines, tactics and procedures.

He stressed upon empowerment of junior leadership through comprehensive human resource reforms and increasing efficiency through organisational restructuring.

# 'Double mutant now most prevalent variant in India'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, April 17:** Among all the mutant Covid-19 variants in India, the double mutated virus, B.1.617, is becoming the most prevalent, according to genome sequencing data submitted by Indian scientists to a global database.

The database has revealed that the double mutation virus, which has been found in several countries, was the most common in the samples sequenced in the 60 days prior to April 2 at 24 per cent.

The B.1.617 variant, first detected in Maharashtra, contains mutations from two separate virus variants - E484Q and L452R.

As per the assessment by scientists from Scripps Research, the UK variant, B.1.1.7, with 13 per

cent of the samples is the second most prevalent.

As on April 15, out of 13,614 Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) samples processed in labs, 1,189 samples have tested positive for variants of concern for SARS COV-2 in India.

This includes 1,109 samples with the UK variants, 79 samples with South African variant and 1 sample with the Brazil variant.

Recently, health experts said that the double mutant variant may be less dangerous than expected as the most vulnerable patients are having only mild illnesses.

The experts emphasised that as per the current evidence, new variants are observed from few states. But, details about its epidemiology are yet to be known.

# Revived by AI, Ajanta cave painting's 'future-leap' on Svalbard Isle

MAHARASHTRA'S FAMED AJANTA CAVES IN AURANGABAD, BECAME THE FIRST-EVER UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE TO 'VIRTUALLY ENTER' THE ARCTIC WORLD ARCHIVES (AWA) ON NORWAY'S SVALBARD ISLAND

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Mumbai, April 17:** When India was grappling with the Covid-19 crest in mid-2020, an ancient treasure of Maharashtra was quietly catapulted into the 'future world history', but the epochal event went virtually unnoticed in the country. Maharashtra's famed Ajanta Caves in Aurangabad, became the first-ever UNESCO World Heritage Site to 'virtually enter' the Arctic World Archives (AWA) on Norway's Svalbard Island, in November 2020.

The iconic "Renunciation of King Mahajanaka" - an early 'avatar' of Lord Buddha - in Cave No 1, clicked by renowned photographer Benoy K Behl, became the trend-setter artwork to enter AWA, in a specially-

designed digital film format using Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Incidentally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a reference to the Svalbard Isle distinction in his 'Mann Ki Baat' (Nov 2020) but it largely skipped public attention.

The AWA honour was possible by the efforts of two companies - Sapio Analytics, Mumbai and Ajantahc, London, IITs, several Indian universities, besides the pictures clicked by Behl using a new 'zero-light technology'.

"There are roughly 650 sq mts of paintings in 30 caves, with four caves considered ground-breaking in terms of their artistic value at Ajanta," Sapio Analytics' CEO Ashwin Srivastava told IANS. Ajantahc's Director BV Choolun



said that of these barely 10 sq mts have so far been restored using AI-aided digital methods.

Srivastava said that continuous efforts are on to improve the process further to make it not only perfect but speedier, as Ajanta Caves, 're-

discovered' 202 years ago in April 1819 by a British officer John Smith race against time for survival.

Various teams toiled to prepare stunning ultra-modern 'digital images' of the ancient but incredible colour paintings bejeweling the



walls and ceilings of the Ajanta Caves from around 2 BC, or over 2200 years ago. Since many of the murals have been damaged in varying degrees, the companies have

deployed a digital restoration process using AI developed by scientists from various Indian universities, including IIT Roorkee.

The "Renunciation of King Mahajanaka" - displaying the emotions of the benign King about to renounce worldly pleasures and allowing us to reflect on our worldliness - is safe in the bosom of the AWA, located deep inside a remote, icy Arctic mountain, 970 kms from the North Pole, and declared a demilitarized zone by 42 countries.

It is considered an ideal, secure setting where nothing - natural or human disasters nor time itself - can touch these artefacts in their digitized format, and maybe millennia later, future generations would marvel at them with wide-eyes.

# national

## of the day quote

The health care system in the city has completely collapsed and the Kejriwal Government has completely failed to deal with the Covid crisis endangering the lives of people of Delhi through constant lies and deceit



RAMVIR SINGH BIDHURI | OPPN IN THE DELHI ASSEMBLY

The administration is doing all it can to curb the spread of the coronavirus and ensure that minimum people gets infected in the state. In this context, all the returnees from the Kumbh Mela will not be allowed a direct entry into the villages and towns



VIJAY RUPANI | CM, GUJARAT

While one of them handled the PR exercise of building the brand image of Vijayan, the other was in charge of the social media and both have been rewarded for their work



MULLANPALLY RAMACHANDRAN | CONGRESS PRESIDENT, KERALA

## SHORT TAKES

### Man arrested for espionage

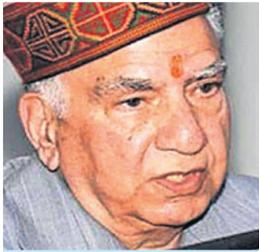
**New Delhi:** The Delhi Police has arrested a man for allegedly passing sensitive information about Army deployment to a foreign intelligence agency, officials said Saturday. The accused has been identified as Harpal Singh, a resident of Tarn Taran in Punjab, they said. The money routed through hawala channels was allegedly used for funding the espionage operation.

### Remdesivir stolen from govt hosp

**Bhopal:** A large quantity of Remdesivir injections, which are in high demand for the treatment of COVID-19 patients, have been found to be "stolen" from the stock of the state-run Hamidia Hospital here in Madhya Pradesh. Shortage of Remdesivir injections has been reported from various parts of Madhya Pradesh which are battling a surge in COVID-19 cases.

### Cop booked for raping colleague

**Mumbai:** An offence has been registered against an Assistant Police Inspector (API) for allegedly raping a colleague on a false promise of marriage in Dongri area of south Mumbai, police said Saturday. The matter came to light when the lady officer lodged a complaint of rape and cheating against the accused, who is posted with a police station in south Mumbai, an official said.



It is written in our scriptures, 'Aapat Kale, Maryaada Nasti', which means that when life itself is at stake, all rules can be broken. In today's situation, there was absolutely no need to perform Kumbh Mela, where thousands of people are taking baths

SHANTA KUMAR | FORMER CM, HIMACHAL PRADESH

# Despite a year to prepare, govt caught off guard: Sonia

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, April 17:** Interim Congress President Sonia Gandhi Saturday said that Covid-19 pandemic is a national challenge that should be kept above party politics but after a year the government is caught off guard.

Sonia Gandhi was speaking during the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting that was called virtually to discuss the issue of pandemic.

In her opening remarks she said, The Indian National Congress has always believed that fighting the Covid-19 pandemic is a national challenge that should be kept above party politics. We have extended our hands of cooperation right from February-March, 2020.

We cannot, however, lose sight of the fact that the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has hit the country with fury. Despite a year to prepare, we have, regrettably, been caught off guard again, she added.

She said that the families are being torn apart, lives and livelihoods have been lost and entire life savings depleted on healthcare. It is deeply concerning to read news reports of acute shortages of medical equipment and hospital beds. Reports from across the country speak of the scarcity of Covid-19 vaccine as also of important life-saving drugs including Remdesivir in different parts of the country.

Sonia Gandhi extended profound sense of grief and sorrow to the thousands of families who have lost their loved ones over the past



The Indian National Congress has always believed that fighting the Covid-19 pandemic is a national challenge that should be kept above party politics. We have extended our hands of cooperation right from February-March, 2020

SONIA GANDHI | INTERIM CONGRESS PRESIDENT

one year to the pandemic.

Their pain and anguish is our pain and anguish. Let me also reiterate our deepest sense of gratitude to and support for the front-line health workers and the medical fraternity who have been rendering phenomenal service in the face of the severest of pressures and risks. We salute their sense of duty and dedication.

She mentioned that recently, she had detailed discussion with the Chief Ministers of the states ruled by the Congress as also Ministers, where Congress is in alliance government, to take stock of the emergent situation from them.

The gross unpreparedness and

avoidable adhocism on part of the Modi Government in foreseeing, evaluating and managing the crisis, she added.

She also said that she had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi after meeting with the Chief Ministers who have spoken to the Prime Minister and written to the concerned minister from time to time pleading for relief but some of them were left with only a few days of vaccine, no oxygen or ventilators.

She alleged that there has been deafening silence on the part of the government. On the contrary some other states have received preferential treatment relief. Instead of listening to the constructive suggestions of the opposition, union ministers are pressed into service to attack leaders of opposition for giving those suggestions.

This convoluted 'me versus you' debate is childish and totally unnecessary, she said.

It is true that after months of denial, the Central government has now given emergency use authorisation for vaccines developed elsewhere.

## J'KHAND HC GRANTS BAIL TO LALU

The Jharkhand High Court Saturday granted bail to RJD president Lalu Prasad in the Dumka treasury case of the multi-crore rupees fodder scam on completion of half the sentence period, paving way for his release from jail. But, his release will take time for want of completion of formalities. The RJD chief is in judicial custody in AIIMS New Delhi since January.

# Govt cuts Remdesivir injection MRP by half

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Mumbai, April 17:** Spelling huge relief for lakhs of Covid-19 patients, the government has slashed the prices of the 'life-saver' Remdesivir injection by nearly 50 per cent, to MRP Rs 2,450 per injection now, according to official sources.

In a missive late Friday, the Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilisers, Department of Pharmaceuticals, NPPA - Advisor (Costs) N I Chowdhury has ordered all pharma companies to comply with the revised norms with immediate and retrospective effect.

Based on the Form-V furnished regarding voluntary reduction in Maximum Retail Price (MRP) of Remdesivir, Manufacturers and Marketers of the Remdesivir are hereby directed to implement the revised MRP throughout the distribution chain wef 15.04.2021, irrespective of the batch numbers, the stern notification said.

The decision came barely a day after a Maharashtra Barrister Vinod Tiwari demanded that the Centre should immediately bring Remdesivir under the DPCO regime in view of its alleged shortages, blackmarketing and corruption to the tune of over Rs 25,000-crore as the injection is in huge demand in ongoing Covid pandemic second wave. IANS first highlighted the issue exclusively April 15.

Welcoming the Centre's move,

Barrister Tiwari said that it is good that the government has realized the agony of the millions struggling to get Remdesivir and are compelled to cough out huge amounts from the black markets.

Now, with the MPR slashed to half and even lesser by some of the companies, people can breathe easy. It will also leash the pharma sector from exploiting the gullible masses in this critical time, a victorious Barrister Tiwari told IANS. The Centre's orders have been sent to the manufacturers Cadila Healthcare Ltd., Cipla Ltd., Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd., Hetero Labs Ltd., Jubilant Pharma Ltd., Mylan Laboratories Ltd., Syngene International Ltd.

Sources in the state FDA inform that under the new norms, the pharma companies shall sell even the existing stocks in the market with the revised prices which would hugely benefit the desperate patients or their families, besides the healthcare system.

In his petition to the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), a statutory authority under the Drugs Price Control Order (DPCO), Barrister Tiwari had demanded a high-level probe into the artificial scarcity, hoarding, black-marketing and misuse of the drug which could run into a racket of over Rs 25,000 crore under the nose of the NPPA, in the past ten months since the drug was launched after the pandemic was declared.



# Huge turnout in largely peaceful fifth phase

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Kolkata, April 17:** Though there were some stray incidents but the state recorded huge polling in the fifth phase of the election. The final figures are yet to come but the voters' turnout recorded by the commission shows that there was 78.36% polling till 5 pm Saturday evening.

According to the data released by the commission, Jalpaiguri registered the highest voting percentage of 81.73% followed by East Burdwan with 81.72%. Nadia wit-

nessed 81.57% voting while North 24 Parganas and Darjeeling had 74.83% and 74.32% voting respectively. Kalimpong recorded the lowest turnout with 69.56%. There were altogether 319 candidates from different political parties in the fifth phase of polls that was conducted in 45 constituencies including 7 in Jalpaiguri, 5 in Darjeeling, 1 in Kalimpong, 8 in Nadia, 16 in North 24 Parganas and 8 in East Burdwan.

Though overall the voting was peaceful all over the state, there

were some sporadic incidents including the arrest of an Independent candidate of Chakdah AC in Nadia district for having a firearm in his possession. Koushik Bhowmick, the candidate was found going around a polling booth at Baliadanga, Daspara area with a country made gun tucked in his trousers.

He dropped the firearm when the central forces intercepted him after the local people raised a hue and cry, CEO Ariz Aftab said.

## BENGAL POLLS

# Railways to fine ₹500 for not wearing masks

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, April 17:** In view of the rising Covid cases across the country, Indian Railways Saturday said that it will impose a fine of up to Rs 500 on the passengers for not wearing face masks in the railway premises or during the travel in trains, for a period of six months.

In an letter to all the General Managers of Railway zones Saturday, Executive Director of Passenger Marketing Neeraj Sharma said, Indian Railways is taking various measures to contain the spread of the resurgence of Covid-19 pandemic, in accordance with the guidelines issued by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and

Ministry of Home Affairs from time to time. One of the specific guideline is to wear masks in order to contain the spread of the pandemic. Sharma also said that the Standard operating procedure (SOP) for movement of trains as brought by Indian Railways on May 11, 2020 says that it should be advised to all passengers that they shall be wearing face cover or masks at entry and during travel.

In view of Covid-19 situation, controlling spitting and act of similar nature due to any person not wearing face mask and entering railway premises (including trains), is important to avoid creation of unclean or unhygienic conditions which may cause danger to life or

public health.

Accordingly, to prevent spitting and act of similar nature and thus to ensure wearing of face masks or face cover by all persons at railway premises (including trains), fines (up to Rs 500) under Indian Railways (Penalties for activities affecting cleanliness at railway premises) Rules 2012 shall be imposed by railway officials authorised for this purpose, from persons not wearing face mask or cover in railway premises including trains, it said.

Sharma in his order said that railways may take action with immediate effect for a period of six months till further instructions issued in this regard.

## HITCHED & INKED



A newly married couple show their fingers marked with indelible ink after casting their vote during the West Bengal Assembly Polls, at Santipur in Nadia district

PTI PHOTO

# Indian expedition to Antarctica returns to Cape Town

THIS ACHIEVEMENT CONCLUDES FOUR SUCCESSFUL DECADES OF INDIA'S SCIENTIFIC ENDEAVOUR IN THE CONTINENT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 17:** The Indian scientific expedition to Antarctica successfully returned to Cape Town last week after completing a journey of 12,000 nautical miles in 94 days, including stopovers, the Ministry of Earth Sciences said Saturday.

This achievement concludes four successful decades of India's scientific endeavour in the continent, it said.

The 40th Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica (40-ISEA) hosted by the Ministry of Earth Sciences successfully returned to Cape Town April 10, 2021, after completing a journey of 12,000 nautical miles in 94 days, including stopovers, the ministry said in a statement.

The 40-ISEA comprised scientists, engineers, doctors, and technicians, who began their journey from the Mormugao Port of Goa to Antarctica in January, it

said. The team reached its destination Bharati station February 27 and Maitri station March 8 in Antarctica, according to the statement.

Bharati and Maitri are India's permanent research base stations.

The stations are approachable only during the austral summer season between November and March.

On its way to Antarctica, the voyage team deployed four autonomous Ocean Observing DWS (Directional Wave Spectra) wave drifters between 35-degree and 50-degree south latitudes in collaboration with Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) Hyderabad, the statement said.

The drifters would transmit real-time data of spectral characteristics of waves, sea surface temperatures, and sea-level atmospheric pressure to INCOIS, which will help validate weather predictions in a big way, it said.



The 40-ISEA was on board the MV Vasily Golovnin, a chartered ice-class vessel, the statement said.

It made stopovers at Cape Town for picking up helicopters and replenishing fuel and provisions and at the Indian research bases Bharati and Maitri for resupply and changeover of winter crew,

it said. The expedition positioned a team of 20 personnel at Bharati led by Atul Suresh Kulkarni from the Indian Institute of Geomagnetism and 21 personnel at Maitri led by Ravindra Santosh More from the Indian Meteorological Department, the statement said.

In the spirit of international cooper-

ation in Antarctic science, MV Vasily Golovnin took a slight detour while returning to Cape Town in March and retrieved two remotely operated Norwegian Ocean observing instruments -- a sea glider and a sail buoy, the ministry said.

These ocean observing systems deployed during the onward journey and retrieval during the return voyage will help to fill in the gaps of the scantily available information in the Indian Ocean sector of the Southern Ocean, it said.

The 40-ISEA was conducted under innumerable challenges due to the persisting coronavirus pandemic, the statement said.

Necessary measures were taken to keep the Antarctic free of coronavirus. The team was subjected to a stringent medical examination by the Goa Medical College before departure and was quarantined for 14 days before boarding the ship.



Diced Blend Cheese  
200 g | ₹105\*



Cheese sauce Pizza  
200mL | ₹75\*



Cheese sauce Mexican  
200mL | ₹75\*



Cheese sauce Jalapeno  
200mL | ₹75\*



Cheese Sauce Green Chutney  
200mL | ₹75\*



Cheese Spread Pepper  
200 g | ₹85\*



Cheese Spread Garlic  
200 g | ₹85\*



Mozzarella Cheese  
200 g | ₹100\*

\*MRP (incl. of all taxes), Conditions apply.

# international



With grateful hearts, we remember the many ways in which his long life has been a blessing to us. We have been inspired by his unwavering loyalty to our Queen, by his service to the Nation and the Commonwealth, by his courage, fortitude and faith  
DAVID CONNER | DEAN OF WINDSOR

**AMERICAN, 2 RUSSIANS RETURN TO EARTH**  
An American astronaut and two Russians have returned to Earth after six months aboard the International Space Station. A Soyuz space capsule carrying NASA's Kate Rubins and Russians Sergey Ryzhikov and Sergey Kud-Sverchokv landed at 0455 GMT Saturday



## of the day quote

It is not out of the realm the possibility that for a short period of time, there will have to be some additional enabling capabilities added to Afghanistan, to help effect a safe, orderly, and deliberately planned drawdown of everybody by the president's deadline, early September  
JOHN KIRBY | PENTAGON SPOKESMAN

The inequitable distribution of vaccines is not just a moral outrage, it is also economically and epidemiologically self-defeating. The more transmission, the more variants  
TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS | DIRECTOR-GENERAL, WHO

We have to review our current policy on arrivals. We see most of the countries are experiencing third and fourth waves, some of them have completely shut overseas travel  
SUJATH SAMARAWERA | CHIEF EPIDEMIOLOGIST, SRI LANKA

# US, Japan project unity against China

The talks offered the Democratic President, a chance to work further on his pledge to revitalize US alliances that frayed under his Republican predecessor Donald Trump.

WASHINGTON, April 17: President Joe Biden sought to present a united front with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to counter an increasingly assertive China as the U.S. leader held his first face-to-face White House summit since taking office. China topped the agenda, underscoring Japan's central role in U.S. efforts to face down Beijing. The two leaders addressed an array of geopolitical issues in a joint statement, including "the importance of peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait," a slap at Beijing's increased military pressure on the Chinese-claimed, self-ruled island. "Today Prime Minister Suga and I affirmed our ironclad support for the U.S.-Japanese alliance and for our shared security," Biden told a joint news conference in the White House Rose Garden, calling the discussions "productive." "We committed to working together to take on the challenges from China and on issues like the East China Sea, the South China Sea, as well as North Korea, to ensure a future of a free and open Indo Pacific."



Other pressing concerns at the talks included China's increased military movements near Taiwan, its tightening grip on Hong Kong and its crackdown on Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang. Suga said he and Biden agreed on the necessity of frank discussions with China in the context of Beijing's activities in the Indo-Pacific region. The summit - Biden's first in-person meeting with a foreign leader as president - came just days after China sent 25 aircraft, including fighters and nuclear-capable

## China embassy's strong remark

In a strongly worded statement Saturday, China's embassy in Washington said Beijing was "resolutely opposed" to the joint statement, and that Taiwan, Hong Kong and Xinjiang were China's internal affairs. The remarks have "completely gone beyond the scope of the normal development of bilateral relations", harming the interests of third parties as well as peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific, the embassy said. The move was an attempt to split the region that "will inevitably proceed with the purpose of harming others and end in harming themselves", it added.

lar phrasing by the foreign and defense ministers of both countries after a meeting last month. Attention had been focused on the wording on Taiwan and other sensitive issues, given caution in Tokyo about the need to balance its security concerns with Japan's deep economic ties with China.

## RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

# Russia sends warships for manoeuvres near Crimea



MOSCOW, April 17: Two Russian warships transited the Bosphorus en route to the Black Sea Saturday and 15 smaller vessels completed a transfer to the sea as Moscow beefs up its naval presence at a time of tense relations with the West and Ukraine. The reinforcement coincides with a huge build-up of Russian troops near Ukraine, something Moscow calls a temporary defensive exercise, and follows an escalation in fighting in eastern Ukraine between Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian government forces. Russia's relations with Washington, which cancelled the deployment of two of its own warships to the Black Sea last week after fierce Russian protests, are at a post-Cold war low. Moscow expelled 10 U.S. diplomats Friday in retaliation for the expulsion of the same number of Russian diplomats from the United States over alleged malign activity. Russia has also temporarily restricted the movement of foreign warships "and other state ships" near Crimea, which it annexed from Ukraine in 2014, a move condemned by both Kyiv and Washington. Two Russian Ropucha-class landing ships from Russia's Northern Fleet, capable of carrying tanks and of delivering armour and troops during coastal assaults, transited the Bosphorus Saturday, a Reuters reporter in Istanbul saw. More Russian naval reinforcements in the form of two more landing ships, this time from Russia's Baltic Fleet, are expected

We don't see any attack preparations there. In fact, field hospitals have been set up. All units are in camps, on firing ranges. In military language, we are talking about a show of force.  
SERGEI NAYEV | UKRAINE'S MILITARY OPERATION HEAD,



to imminently transit the Bosphorus. The RIA news agency Saturday also reported that 15 smaller vessels from Russia's Caspian Flotilla have completed their transfer to the Black Sea as part of an exercise. In a further sign of heightened tensions in the region, a ship carrying logistics trucks and equipment for NATO forces in Romania transited the Bosphorus Friday evening. In St Petersburg, Russia's FSB security service briefly detained a Ukrainian diplomat, Ukraine's foreign ministry said Saturday. The Interfax news agency earlier cited the FSB as saying Oleksandr Sosoniuk was taken into custody when he tried to obtain classified information from Russian law enforcement databases during a meeting with a Russian citizen.

## SHORT TAKES

### Natanz suspect

TEHRAN: Iran named a suspect Saturday in the attack on its Natanz nuclear facility that damaged centrifuges there, saying he had fled the country before the sabotage happened. While the extent of the damage from the April 11 sabotage remains unclear, it comes as Iran tries to negotiate with world powers over allowing the US to re-enter its tattered nuclear deal with world powers and lift the economic sanctions it faces.

### Fire blazes in SA

JOHANNESBURG: Nearly 700 patients are being evacuated Saturday from Johannesburg's Charlotte Maxeke Hospital, where a fire blazed overnight through parts of the facility in South Africa's largest city. No injuries or casualties have been reported. The fire has been contained but the hospital has been closed for seven days, said David Makhura.

### Tunisia shipwreck

GENEVA: A shipwreck off the coast of southeast Tunisia killed at least 41 people, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said in a joint statement. The UN agencies said in the statement issued Friday that three survivors have been rescued.

### Yemen conflict

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council has called on parties to the Yemen conflict to negotiate a nationwide ceasefire and a political settlement. In a statement Friday, the members of the Security Council welcomed the announcement of Saudi Arabia March 22, supported by the Yemen government, to end the conflict in the war-torn country.

### 6 female climbers atop Mt Annapurna

KATMANDU: Six Nepali women have reached the top of Mt. Annapurna creating a record feat on the 8,091-metre tall peak, the Himalayan nation's Department of Tourism and an expedition organising company said. Purnima Shrestha, Sharmila Tamang, Dawa Phuti Sherpa, Dawa Yangjung, Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, and Maya Sherpa became the first Nepali women the top of the mountain Friday afternoon.

## Junta pardons 23k prisoners

YANGON, April 17: Myanmar's junta Saturday announced it pardoned and released more than 23,000 prisoners to mark the traditional Thingyan New Year holiday, but it wasn't immediately clear if they included pro-democracy activists who were detained in the wake of the military's seizure of power in February. The releases were announced on state broadcaster MRTV, which said that junta chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing had pardoned 23,047 prisoners, including 137 foreigners who will be deported from Myanmar. He also reduced sentences for others. The move comes as daily protests against the February 1 ouster of the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi continue, as does the use of deadly force against them. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors casualties and arrests, government forces have killed at least 728 protesters and bystanders since the takeover. The group says 3,141 people, including Suu Kyi, are in detention. In March, more than 600 people who were imprisoned for demonstrating against the February coup were released from Insein Prison, a rare conciliatory gesture by the military that appeared aimed at placating the protest movement. Those freed were mostly young people caught in sweeps of street demonstrations, while those considered protest leaders were kept locked up. Neither the military government nor those opposed to it show any signs of backing off from their struggle for power. Western nations have tried to pressure the military through diplomatic and economic sanctions with little evident effect.

## ROYAL FAREWELL



Officers of The King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery arrive for the Gun Salute for the funeral of Britain's Prince Philip at Windsor Castle in Windsor, England Saturday, April 17, 2021.

## 'Halt illegal construction at Shiva temple in Pak'

PESHAWAR, April 17: A prominent Hindu leader in Pakistan Saturday alleged "illegal" construction at an ancient Shiva temple in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and demanded that the authorities should stop the work immediately. Leader of Hindu Community in Peshawar, Haroon Sarab Dival, in a statement here said the government must stop unplanned construction at the site of Shiv Temple at Gandhayan in Mansehra district. "We would like to bring it to the notice of the authorities concerned to stop these illegal and unethical constructions at the site to ensure the sacredness and authenticity of this important temple," he said. Dival said during his visit to the temple April 11, he noticed that some toilets are being constructed at an unplanned manner in the temple, which is destroying not only its sacredness, but also its historical and architectural authenticity. "Being one of the few Shiva temples in Pakistan, the temple at Gandhayan is of great religious significance and has the potential to attract tourists and pilgrims from across the country and abroad," he said.

## Wearing 2 masks doubles protection against Covid

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE  
New York, April 17: Scientists now report that wearing two face coverings can nearly double the effectiveness of filtering out SARS-CoV-2-sized particles, preventing them from reaching the wearer's nose and mouth and causing Covid-19. The reason for the enhanced filtration isn't so much adding layers of cloth but eliminating any gaps or poor-fitting areas of a mask, according to the study published in JAMA Internal Medicine. "The medical procedure masks are designed to have very good filtration potential based on their material, but the way they fit our faces isn't perfect," said Emily Sickbert-Bennett, associate professor of infectious diseases at the University of North Carolina (UNC) School of Medicine and



lead author of the study. By measuring particle concentration in the breathing space underneath the mask compared to that in the chamber, researchers determined the FFE. "We also had the researchers in the chamber undergo a series of range-of-motion activities to simulate the typical motions a person may do throughout their day, bending at the waist, talking, and looking left, right, up and down," said Phillip Clapp, an inhalation toxicologist in the UNC School of

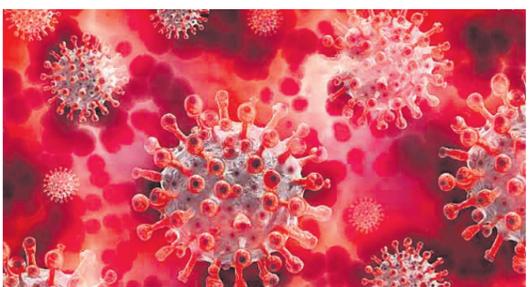
Medicine. According to their findings, the baseline fitted filtration efficiency (FFE) of a mask differs person to person, due to each person's unique face and mask fit. Generally, a procedure mask without altering the fit, is about 40-60 per cent effective at keeping Covid-19-sized particles out. A cloth mask is about 40 per cent effective. When layered over procedure masks, cloth masks improve fit by eliminating gaps and holding the procedure mask closer to the face, consistently covering the nose and mouth. When a procedure mask is worn over a cloth mask, FFE improved by 16 per cent. "We've found that wearing two loosely fitted masks will not give you the filtration benefit that one, snug-fitting procedure mask will," Sickbert-Bennett said.

# Indian-origin scientist identifies genes that fight Covid infection

THE GENES IN QUESTION ARE RELATED TO INTERFERONS, THE BODY'S FRONTLINE VIRUS FIGHTERS. SOON AFTER THE START OF THE PANDEMIC, CLINICIANS FOUND THAT A WEAK INTERFERON RESPONSE TO SARS-COV-2 INFECTION RESULTED IN SOME OF THE MORE SEVERE CASES OF COVID-19.

NEW YORK, April 17: A team of US scientists, led by an Indian-origin researcher, has identified a set of human genes that fight SARS-CoV-2 infection, the virus that causes Covid-19. According to Sumit K. Chanda, professor and director of the Immunity and Pathogenesis Programme at Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute, the scientists have gained new insights into how the virus exploits the human cells it invades. "We are still searching for its Achilles' Heel so that we can develop optimal antivirals," Chanda said in a paper published in the journal Molecular Cell.

Knowing which genes help control viral infection can greatly assist researchers' understanding of factors that affect disease severity and suggest possible therapeutic options. The genes in question are related to interferons, the body's frontline virus fighters. Soon after the start of the pandemic, clinicians found that a weak interferon response to SARS-CoV-2 infection resulted in some of the more severe cases of Covid-19. This knowledge led Chanda and his collaborators to search for the human genes that are triggered by interferons, known as interferon-stimulated genes (ISGs), which act to limit SARS-CoV-2 infection. "We found that 65 ISGs controlled



SARS-CoV-2 infection, including some that inhibited the virus' ability to enter cells, some that suppressed manufacture of the RNA that is the virus's lifeblood, and a cluster of genes that inhibited assembly of the virus," Chanda explained. "What was also of great interest was the fact that some of the ISGs exhibited control across unrelated viruses, such as seasonal flu, West

We found that 65 ISGs controlled SARS-CoV-2 infection, including some that inhibited the virus' ability to enter cells, some that suppressed manufacture of the RNA that is the virus's lifeblood, and a cluster of genes that inhibited assembly of the virus  
SUMIT K. CHANDA | PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR, IMMUNITY AND PATHOGENESIS PROGRAMME

Nile and HIV, which leads to AIDS". The team also identified eight ISGs that inhibited both SARS-CoV-1 and CoV-2 replication in the sub cellular compartment responsible for protein packaging, suggesting this vulnerable site could be exploited to clear viral infection. "This is important information, but we still need to learn more about the biology of the virus and investigate if genetic variability within these ISGs correlates with Covid-19 severity," said Laura Martin-Sancho, a senior postdoctoral associate in the Chanda lab. As a next step, the researchers will look at the biology of SARS-CoV-2 variants that continue to evolve and threaten vaccine efficacy.

# business



**Tech and growth has started to pick up a little bit because people are getting a little more cautious. Investors are in this wait-and-see mode... at least until earnings get underway**  
**LINDSEY BELL** | CHIEF INVESTMENT STRATEGIST, ALLY INVEST

## CRUDE TO BE \$60 A BARREL

Global crude oil prices are expected to be in the range of \$60 a barrel over the long term period as OPEC+ decision to cap supply until demand recovers and the pandemic continuing to keep a check on consumption



## of the day quote

India Inc. could contribute immediately by setting up Covid care facilities on their plants and premises and plan Covid-compatible workplaces for the future



**UDDHAV THACKERAY** | CHIEF MINISTER, MAHARASHTRA

Our focus (during this rights period) will be to further build on the success of PKL and work closely with Star India to offer our fans more and innovative ways to engage with PKL through various mediums including television, digital and gaming



**ANUPAM GOSWAMI** | CEO & LEAGUE COMMISSIONER, MASHAL SPORTS

We're in a unique situation with the economy beginning to rebound from the worst of the pandemic. Uncertainties remain, with many businesses yet to reopen, unemployment still high, and Covid levels lower but persistent



**ROBERT FRICK** | CORPORATE ECONOMIST, NAVY FEDERAL CREDIT UNION, VIRGINIA

## SHORT TAKES

### SPDA seeks more time

**New Delhi:** The Solar Power Developers Association (SPDA) has urged the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) to give three more months for commissioning solar projects amid the raging pandemic. The association has highlighted the continued challenges that the solar power industry is facing for the last year. It has requested MNRE for a blanket extension of an additional three months in Scheduled Date of Commissioning of solar power projects, an SPDA statement said.

### HDFC Bank Q4 profit rises 16%

**New Delhi:** HDFC Bank Saturday reported a 15.8% rise in its consolidated net profit to ₹8,434 crore for the January-March quarter on the back of healthy interest income driven by growth in advances. The country's largest private sector lender had registered a net profit of ₹7,280 crore in the corresponding quarter a year ago.

### Prakriti e-Mobility to aid Covid patients

**New Delhi:** Electric cab firm Prakriti e-Mobility Saturday said it has collaborated with the Delhi government to help Covid-19 patients and their family members commute to hospitals and healthcare centres without any charges. The commute service can be booked through 'Jeevan Seva App' and service will be available round the clock.

### AGEL arm bags solar project

**New Delhi:** Adani Green Energy arm AREHFifteenL has bagged a 150 MWac solar energy project capacity from Torrent Power. Adani Renewable Energy Holding Fifteen Ltd (AREHFifteenL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL), participated in a Tender issued by Torrent Power Ltd for procurement of power through competitive bidding process, from grid connected solar photovoltaic power projects to be setup in Gujarat. AREHFifteenL has been awarded a project capacity of 150 MWac Solar Power Project, a BSE filing said.

# Fiscal package may be on cards to maintain economic recovery



AGENCIES

**New Delhi, April 17:** A fiscal stimulus package may be on the cards again as the government looks at ways to prevent the present surge in Covid-19 cases and the ensuing restrictions imposed by the states from derailing the economic recovery.

After last year's lockdowns, which resulted in the country's GDP contracting by (-) 23.9 per cent, it was hoped that the economy will grow handsomely in FY22 to register a double digit growth. For this to happen, the RBI has projected a Q1 FY22 GDP growth of 26.2 per cent. But the recent surge in the pandemic has again raised serious questions about the health of the economy.

There are some discussions within the government about the need, shape and timing of a fresh

## BRAVING COVID 2.0

The Union Finance Ministry has so far not indicated about any new stimulus to contain the disruptions caused by the fresh Covid-19 wave

While the government has indicated against a complete lockdown, support measures could just look at the most vulnerable sections of the society and the industry

The RBI will also have to do a balancing act over growth aspirations and containing inflation

fiscal stimulus package. The idea is to see that the poor and small businesses do not suffer and their livelihood support is not disturbed, said an official source, on condi-

tion of anonymity.

The source said that any such package, if finalised, would come up later this month or next month.

The Union Finance Ministry has so far not indicated about any new stimulus to contain the disruptions caused by the fresh Covid-19 wave in the country.

Last year, the government and the RBI came up with a series of announcements to provide relief to the common man and businesses impacted by the Covid-induced lockdown. Under its 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' package and the Garib Kalyan Yojana, the government had announced packages worth over ₹20 lakh crore.

While the economic situation is still much better than last year and the government has indicated against a complete lockdown this year, support measures could just look at the most vulnerable sections of the society and the industry.

Sources said that like last year, the package may include measures by the government as well as compliance relief offered by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Already, various ministries are providing inputs to the Centre.

The worry for the government this time round is also about inflation that has seen an increase in the last few months.

This actually means that people are already struggling with higher food prices while their income is dogged with uncertainty. The RBI will also have to do a balancing act over growth aspirations and containing inflation.

# Vivo takes lead in China after Huawei's decline



AGENCIES

**New Delhi, April 17:** After Huawei's decline, smartphone brand Vivo has risen to the top spot in China, surpassing its nearest competitor OPPO due to a consumer friendly product line-up.

According to Counterpoint's China Smartphone Weekly Tracker, the battle for supremacy in China's smartphone market is heating up, with the top spot changing hands in quick succession.

Riding on the continued strong performance of its newly launched budget model Y3 and S9, Vivo was able to jump ahead of OPPO during week 11 (March 8-14) and again in week 13.

Ever since Huawei started to struggle due to US restrictions on the company, other Chinese smartphone manufacturers have been eager to take advantage.

"Vivo and OPPO are adopting aggressive market and product strategies, and we expect to see the

two brands continue to jostle for the top spot in 2021," said Senior Analyst Yang Wang.

OPPO had been aggressive in January and February this year and became the No 1 smartphone brand in China with the successful rebranding of Reno series and the strong momentum of A series in the mid-segment.

Huawei along with HONOR has been constantly losing its share in the Chinese market due to component shortages following US sanctions, and fewer new launches. Its inventory for key components has been depleting and it will not be able to source 5G smartphone components.

Huawei has also spun off HONOR as a separate brand. With HONOR now being considered as a separate brand, it further reduces Huawei's market share in China. Vivo was one of the first brands in the market to launch 5G devices, with the Nex 3 5G and iQOO Pro 5G in August 2019 and September 2019, respectively.

## BIZ BUZZ

### ASUS ZenBook laptops launched

**Bhubaneswar:** Taiwanese tech giant ASUS launched the latest additions - ZenBook Duo 14 and ZenBook Pro Duo 15 OLED, to their already expansive ZenBook range, at an online launch event. The "laptops of tomorrow" ZenBook Pro Duo 15 OLED and ZenBook Duo 14 feature a dual display with a four-sided frameless NanoEdge display. The ZenBook Duo 14 (UX482EA) is Intel Evo verified and features up to 11th Gen Intel Core i7 processor with Intel Iris Xe graphics. It also comes with the option of an NVIDIA GeForce MX450 GPU. The ZenBook Duo 14 boasts of a 14" LED-backlit Full HD 1080p display with 100% sRGB coverage. The ZenBook Pro Duo comes loaded with up to 10th Gen Intel Core i9 processor backed by NVIDIA GeForce RTX 3070 and 32 GB of DDR4 RAM.



### Bajaj Auto launches CT110X

**Bhubaneswar:** Bajaj Auto launched the new CT110X in India. The new CT110X is the top end variant of the CT portfolio and is loaded with 'XtraKadak' looks, performance, and a sturdier build. The motorcycle comes equipped with a rear carrier with the ability to carry 7 kg of weight. To enhance riding comfort, the seat is offered in a dual-texture and dual stitched finish. The CT110X is available at ₹55,494 (Ex showroom - Delhi) in four colour combinations across all Bajaj Auto dealerships in India. The CT110 X continues to be powered by the reliable time-tested 115 cc DTS-i engine delivering 6.33 kW power at 7500 rpm, and a torque of 9.81 Nm (at 5000 rpm). It also dons semi knobby tyres that provide a firm and stable grip on any terrain. Its higher ground clearance of 170mm can efficiently tackle Indian roads with ease.



### 'Second wave to disrupt fabric demand'

**New Delhi:** The second wave of Covid-19 resurgence can potentially disrupt fabric demand, said India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra). "Woven fabrics production continued to improve mom, though marginally, in January 2021, despite remaining 21 per cent YoY lower," Ind-Ra said. "While recoveries for blended and knitted fabrics were quicker, that of woven is expected to be delayed with micro-lockdowns and work-from-home culture." Besides, export demand for woven fabrics is expected to plunge over Q1FY22 with key destination countries grappling with a second wave of pandemic. "Fabric exports remained muted in January 2021 on a mom basis, and 17% Yo-Y lower. Demand for imported fabrics surged over December 2020-January 2021, led by restocking by retailers. Imports in value terms doubled between November 2020-January 2021 with higher shipments from China, Bangladesh and Vietnam."



# 'Building computer vision-based grading solution for fruits'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 17:** E-commerce major Amazon Saturday said it is building a computer vision-based solution that can help in grading the quality of fruits and vegetables that are shipped to customers. The company also plans to use near-infrared sensors to detect attributes such as sweetness and ripeness.

"Quality is one of the key drivers of fruit and vegetable purchasing decisions, and a critical factor in achieving customer satisfaction. Having humans grade the quality of fruits and vegetables by manually examining each individual piece of produce - each tomato or each onion is not scalable to millions of quality assessments per day," Amazon India Vice President (Machine Learning) Rajeev Rastogi



said at the Amazon Smbhav event. He added that the company is building a computer vision-based grading solution for products such as onions and tomatoes. "The ML (machine learning)

based approach analyses produce images to detect defects such as cuts, cracks, pressure damage, etc. And can carry out millions of assessments per day at a cost that is far below that of any other method.

We plan to develop a conveyor belt based automatic grading and packing machine," he said.

He added that the gradient pack machine will reduce the grading cost by 78 per cent compared to manual grading.

"We also plan to use near infrared sensors to detect attributes such as sweetness and ripeness that cannot be detected in RGB images captured by traditional computer vision

algorithms and require destructive methods such as eating the fruit that can't obviously scale," he said.

Highlighting that there are numerous applications of machine learning across Amazon's different e-commerce business verticals, Rastogi said the company is using ML to recommend products to customers, forecast future demand for products and improve the quality of product catalog by classifying

products and eliminating duplicate products.

"We're also applying ML techniques to rank products in search results, reduce packaging costs, improve address quality, and mine product design insights from reviews," he added.

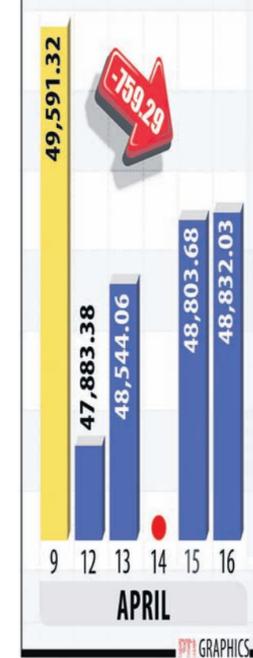
Rastogi pointed out that vernacular users on the platform have grown 175 per cent year-on-year, and users can read 98-plus per cent of product views in their regional languages.

Amazon.in supports five vernacular languages - Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam. He explained that machine translation is used to translate product content such as title, bullet points, and description from English to vernacular languages.

**Quality is one of the key drivers of fruit and vegetable purchasing decisions, and a critical factor in achieving customer satisfaction. Having humans grade the quality of fruits and vegetables by manually examining each individual piece of produce: each tomato or each onion is not scalable to millions of quality assessments per day**

**RAJEEV RASTOGI** | VICE PRESIDENT (MACHINE LEARNING), AMAZON INDIA

## SENSEX in a Week



# CHAHAR, BOULT LIFT MI



RAHUL CHAHAR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chennai, April 17:** Sunrisers Hyderabad's middle-order continued to misfire as spinner Rahul Chahar and pacer Trent Boult fashioned Mumbai Indians to a 13-run win in their IPL match here, Saturday.

Defending 150, leg-spinner Chahar (3/19) stifled the middle-order before Boult (3/28) polished off the tail as

SRH were bowled out for 137 in 19.4 overs.

Opting to bat, MI had a good start but Vijay Shankar and Mujeeb Ur Rahman claimed two wickets each as SRH stemmed the flow of runs in the middle overs. However, Kieron Pollard managed to lift MI to 150/5 with the help of a 22-ball 35 which included two sixes of the last two balls of their innings.

Chasing 151 for a win, Jonny

Bairstow smashed a 22-ball 35 to give SRH a rollicking start, while David Warner too managed a 36 off 34 but once the duo were back in the hut, the middle-order again failed to come to the fore.

Back at the top with his opening partner Warner, Bairstow amassed 18 runs from Trent Boult in the third over with the help of three fours and a six. SRH amassed 57 in 6 overs.

Lady luck smiled on MI finally when Bairstow hit wicket while looking for a slog sweep off Krunal. Chahar then removed Manish Pandey (2), while Hardik's direct throw found Warner short as SRH slumped to 91/3.

Chahar handed SRH a twin blow in his last over, dismissing Virat Singh (11) and Abhishek Sharma (2) - both playing their first games of the season.

Vijay (28) cracked two sixes off Krunal to keep SRH in the hunt but he kept losing his partners as Abdul Samad (7) was sent packing by Hardik with another direct throw and then Boult produced a perfect yorker to rid get of Rashid (0). Vijay too perished in the next over as SRH fell short once again.

Earlier, Rohit Sharma (32) and Quinton de Kock (40) scored 53 in the powerplay after opting to bat but Vijay (2/19) and Afghanistan spin duo of Mujeeb (2/29) and Rashid Khan (0/22) brought the Sunrisers back in the game.

However, MI soon slipped to 71/2 with Shankar dismissing Rohit and Suryakumar Yadav (10) in his two overs. While the MI skipper holed out to Virat Singh in the sixth over, Suryakumar was caught and bowled in the 9th over.



KIERON POLLARD

**Rohit completed 4,000 T20 runs as a skipper. He also surpassed MS Dhoni's record (216 sixes) of hitting the most number of sixes by an Indian in IPL. Rohit is now third in the list after Punjab Kings' Chris Gayle (351) and Royal Challengers Bangalore's AB de Villiers (237)**

**TODAY'S MATCHES**

RCB **V S** KKR

DC **V S** PK

TIME 3.30 PM

TIME 7.30 PM

Telecast: Star Sports channels

**BRIEF SCORES**

**Mumbai Indians 150/5** (Quinton de Kock 40, Kieron Pollard 35 n o, Rohit Sharma 32; Vijay Shankar 2/19, Mujeeb Ur Rahman 2/29) **beat Sunrisers Hyderabad 137** (Jonny Bairstow 43, David Warner 36; Rahul Chahar 3/19, Trent Boult 3/28) **by 13 runs.**

Rashid Khan and Mujeeb then tightened the screw on MI as the well-set De Kock next perished at deep mid-wicket. Hardik and Pollard couldn't produce their trademark hitting, but the West Indian's two sixes off final two balls of their innings proved to be the winning ones.

## Chahar feels good answering 'critics'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, April 17:** Deepak Chahar is deadly when he gets help from conditions but even more menacing when someone tries to deflate his confidence like a random troll did after an indifferent first IPL game.

Chahar's best IPL performance 4-1-13-4 also included 18 dot balls and also earned rich praise from national head coach Ravi Shastri. "Proven fact. Genuine swing both ways with control can undo the best. Super variations. Brilliant," Shastri tweeted.

The cricketers often say that they are not bothered by criticism on social media but on the contrary Chahar cited an instance where a random fan wrote on his social media page that CSK should "drop him" from the next game.

"Expectations are high here and you have to perform in every game. So this is for that man, who made the comment, if I would not have played, this performance might have not come," Chahar told IPL's official website.

Chahar, on his part, admitted that the help of the pitch was advantageous for him. "Looking at today's wicket and today's performance, I must say that Wankhede is my favourite ground because you get help in the starting (from the pitch)," Chahar told IPL's official website.

"But it was not the case in the previous game that we played (against Delhi Capitals) was a high-scoring one, that time there was no swing or seam. Yes, there was help today from the wicket and so this is one of the favourite grounds," said Chahar, who plays



Deepak Chahar reacts after dismissing Mayank Agarwal, Friday

domestic cricket for Rajasthan. After an indifferent last season, Chahar is satisfied as he looked in fine rhythm with Dhoni bowling him out within the first 10 overs. "It was a good feeling. It (the spell) came at an important time as we needed to win this game. "It was thus necessary to provide a good start and this was an important match for us and I am very happy that I could contribute to the team's win," Chahar said in an interview aired on IPL official website.

The seamer said that there are always multiple plans in place but always the primary strategy is to get some swing and off the pitch movement first up.

## Royal challenge ahead of Knights

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chennai, April 17:** The misfiring Kolkata Knight Riders will look to bring their campaign back on track when they take on table-toppers Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL here, Sunday.

In the battle between the world's two best white-ball captains, Eoin Morgan and Virat Kohli, the bangalore franchise will hold a slight edge over Kolkata after its two wins from as many outings.

Known for his tactical nous and management skills, the World Cup-winning English skipper will be keen to bring KKR back on track after a familiar middle-order collapse cost them the game against Mumbai Indians.

After two ordinary seasons, the purple brigade started its campaign in an emphatic fashion, ticking all the boxes against Sunrisers Hyderabad. But against their nemesis MI, KKR middle-

order collapsed in an inexplicable fashion to suffer their 12th loss from 13 matches. Morgan's astute captaincy in using his bowling resources was the highlight as KKR had bowled out MI for a modest 152.

In his new role of bowling at the death, Andre Russell has taken six wickets at an impressive average of 7.83, but has failed to deliver with the bat. With 14 runs from two matches, the big-hitting Jamaican has looked a shadow of his past.

Vice-captain Dinesh Karthik, too, will be under pressure to deliver after his painstaking stay in the middle in the last game. While Nitish Rana has impressed the most in batting, their star opener Shubman Gill has faltered after impressive starts, and KKR would hope the youngster fires in the coming days.

On a slow Chepauk deck where batting at the death has been a concern, KKR's bowling has been a revelation with Morgan cleverly using his resources.

Against the star-studded RCB who are yet to fire in unison this season, KKR's bowling would once again look to make an impact.

It would not be a bad idea to bring in left arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav in place of veteran Indian off-spinner Harbhajan Singh, who has bowled just the opening over in each of the two matches.

Boasting a famed batting line-up in Kohli, AB de Villiers, Glenn Maxwell and the talented youngster Devdutt Padikkal, RCB are yet to perform to their full potential. But it did not matter much as RCB have won both their matches with new signing Maxwell holding fort in the middle and the likes of Shahbaz Ahmed and Harshal Patel making the difference in bowling.

Bought for Rs 14.25 crore in the 2021 auction, Maxwell has bounced back from a poor last season in the UAE. On a difficult batting wicket, Maxwell's 59 - his first IPL half century since 2016 - was the cornerstone before Bengal left-arm spinner Shahbaz turned it around against SRH in the 17th over, taking three wickets for one run.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, April 17:** Delhi Capitals skipper Rishabh Pant will aim to display better tactical acumen in Catch-22 situations against a 'blow-hot-blow-cold' Punjab Kings in what promises to be a battle of brittle middle-orders in an IPL match here, Sunday.

Both teams are coming into the 'Norther Derby' of IPL after enduring defeats in their previous games but Delhi Capitals are definitely a better side on paper.

Pant, relatively inexperienced in terms of IPL captaincy, lost the plot in the last game where he didn't finish his best bowler Ravichandran Ashwin's quota and instead used Tom Curran's friendly medium pacers.

As coach Ricky Ponting pointed out, he would expect a better 'on his feet' thinking from the young captain. The likely addition of Anrich Nortje in the playing XI will only bolster Pant's bowling attack which lost its bearings during the last match with Curran's lack of pace on a slow track being cannon fodder for Chris Morris and David Miller.

Punjab Kings, on the other hand, suffered an inexplicable batting collapse against Chennai Super Kings with Deepak Chahar's extra bounce and slight seam movement causing the damage. This was

## Delhi hold edge over Punjab



**THE SQUADS**

**PUNJAB KINGS:** KL Rahul (C & wk), Mayank Agarwal, Chris Gayle, Mandeep Singh, Gurbaj Singh, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Sarfaraz Khan, Deepak Hooda, Murugan Ashwin, Ravi Bishnoi, Harpreet Brar, Mohammed Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Ishan Porel, Darshan Nalkande, Chris Jordan, Dawid Malan, Jhye Richardson, Shikhar Khan, Riley Meredith, Moises Henriques, Jalaj Saxena, Utkarsh Singh, Fabian Allen & Saurabh Kumar.

**DELHI CAPITALS:** Rishabh Pant (C & wk), Ajinkya Rahane, Shikhar Dhawan, Prithvi Shaw, Shimron Hetmyer, Marcus Stoinis, Chris Woakes, R Ashwin, Axar Patel, Amit Mishra, Lalit Yadav, Pravin Dubey, Kagiso Rabada, Anrich Nortje, Ishant Sharma, Avesh Khan, Steve Smith, Umesh Yadav, Ripal Patel, Vishnu Vinod, Lukman Meriwala, M Siddarth, Tom Curran & Sam Billings.

after a healthy 200 plus total in the opening game. The nature of the Wankhede track is posing a few questions under lights for top-order batsmen as the last two games have shown with underlying moisture aiding quality fast bowling.

So KL Rahul versus Kagiso Rabada and Chris Woakes bowling to Chris Gayle could be as enticing as Prithvi Shaw encountering the guile of Mohammed Shami and Shikhar Dhawan trying to unsettle a disciplined Arshdeep Singh.

Jaydev Anadkat and Rajasthan Royals

have shown that despite massive improvements, there are still some chinks in Shaw's armoury and Arshdeep could be used to expose that.

Both teams are top heavy in batting with DC dependant on Shaw, Dhawan and Pant for doing the bulk of scoring while the same job profile is held by KL Rahul, Chris Gayle and Deepak Hooda in the Punjab line-up. Even the weaknesses of both the teams are pretty similar. If Ajinkya Rahane's lack of power-hitting and Marcus Stoinis' indifferent show is affecting the DC middle-order, Mayank Agarwal's prolonged bad-patch coupled with Nicholas Pooran's susceptibility to short balls over his shoulder are not great news for Punjab either.

The middle-order's struggles in both the dugouts will make it an engrossing contest with DC bowlers expected to hold sway in Nortje's presence.

In case of Punjab Kings, save Mohammed Shami, the two high-priced pacers - Jhye Richardson and Riley Meredith - haven't exactly set the stage on fire.

Neither has Murugan Ashwin, a mystery spinner who has done nothing of note that would force Pant and Ponting to have sleepless nights. Anil Kumble and Rahul may like to think of Ravi Bishnoi as an option but they also need to factor in the shorter boundaries in Mumbai, which can devastating for wrist spinners if their length is haywire.

## Mirabai creates world record

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Tashkent, April 17:** Former World Champion Mirabai Chanu made a splendid return to the weightlifting arena, setting a new world record in clean and jerk while also bettering her own national record en route winning a bronze medal at the Asian Championship here Saturday.

Chanu also confirmed her Tokyo Olympic spot as she has now competed in the six mandatory qualifying events. The 26-year-old Indian lifted 86kg in snatch and a world record of 119kg in clean and jerk for a total of 205kg.

While the earlier clean and jerk world record was 118kg, Chanu's personal best total in 49kg was 203kg (88kg+115kg) at the National Championship in February last year.

The gold medal went to Hou Zhihui of China who created a new world record in snatch and total weight with an effort of 213kg (96g+117kg) while her compatriot Jiang Huihua clinched the silver, lifting 207kg (89kg+118kg) in the gold level Olympic qualifier.

Competing at an international tournament after more than a year, the former world champion was off to a shaky start as she failed to lift



85kg in her first two snatch attempts.

The diminutive Manipuri then lifted 86kg in her final attempt. However, she finished fourth best, behind Zhihui (96kg), Huihua (89kg) and Aisah Windy Cantika (87kg) of Indonesia.

Chanu began her clean and jerk with a 113kg and then lifted 117kg successfully for her personal best. The Indian then bettered her own performance, hoisting 119kg, more than twice her body weight.

Fellow lifter Jhili Dalabehera was also assured of at least a silver medal as there were only two entries including hers in the 45kg weight category. Jhili, who had won a silver medal at the 2019 edition, will fight it out with Philippines' Mary Flor Diaz Sunday.

The Asian Championships is a gold level Olympic qualifying event, the points from which will be counted when the final rankings for Tokyo Games cut are made.

## Sports Minister Rijiju tests +ve for COVID-19

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 17:** Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju Saturday said that he has tested positive for COVID-19 but is feeling 'fit and fine'. The 49-year-old posted the development on his Twitter page.

"After getting repeated test for Covid-19, today my report has come out positive," Rijiju wrote in his twitter handle. "I'm taking the advice of the Doctors. I request all those who have come in my contact recently to be observant, exercise self-quarantine and get themselves tested. I'm physically fit and fine."

Rijiju was in Uttarakhand Friday to inaugurate a Water Sports and Adventure Institute in Tehri. State chief minister Tirath Singh Rawat, who recovered recently from the dreaded infection, was with him at the inauguration ceremony.

Rijiju, Thursday, had visited the Nelong Valley region of Uttarkashi district, accompanied by Surjeet Singh Deswal, the director-general of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).

## RAVI RETAINS ASIAN TITLE



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Almaty, April 17:** Indian wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya retained his Asian Championship title with a solid performance but Bajrang Punia settled for a silver medal after withdrawing from the much-awaited final against Takuto Otoguro due to an elbow injury, here Saturday.

Bajrang told this agency that he did not want to aggravate the condition of his right elbow. He said he started feeling the pain during the quarterfinal against Korean Yongseok Jeong.

"When I was pulling the Korean, the pain in my right elbow resurfaced. It's the same elbow that I had injured during the World Championship. The coaches advised that I must not take risk so close to the Olympics, so I withdrew," Bajrang said.

Also finishing on podium were Narsingh Panchanm Yadav (79kg), Karan (70kg) and Satywart Kadian (97kg), who won a bronze each, as all five Indians in action Saturday returned with medals.

It was Yadav's first international medal in five years as he last won it in July 2015 at Grand Prix of

Spain. He served a four-year doping ban which he completed only recently. Yadav beat Iraq's Ahmed Mohsin Kadhim 8-2 comfortably in the bronze play off.

Bajrang did not look his usual self but did not face much competition en route the final. He had no difficulty in getting past Jeong, who hardly attacked in his opening 65kg bout.

His first scoring point was a take-down on counter and earned one more for the passivity of his rival. Next for him was Mongolia's Bilguun Sarmandakh, whom he pinned to ensure his passage into the summit clash.

Bajrang had lost the 2018 World Championship title clash and last year's Asian Championship final to the Otoguro and could have tested himself against the Japanese but it turned out to be an anti-climactic end to the 65kg competition.

Ravi Dahiya, though, gave India the first free style gold medal of this edition with a commanding show. His supreme stamina and relentless attacking prowess was too good for his opponents in the 57kg. He returned to the mat after a year and in style. He had last competed at this event in New Delhi where he had won gold.