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## NEARBY



New COVID cases drop as testing dips by 9%

NEW DELHI

The Capital on Wednesday reported 249 fatalities and 24,638 new COVID-19 infections in the past 24 hours, taking the case tally to 9,30,179 and the death toll to 12,887. A total of 78,768 tests were done in a day, which is 8.96% less than on Tuesday. Out of the total 20,097 beds available for COVID treatment, 88.1% were occupied at 11 p.m.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

## MSP via bank transfer in Punjab and Haryana

CHANDIGARH

With wheat harvesting in full swing in Punjab and Haryana, farmers, for the first time, have started receiving the minimum support price payment directly in their bank accounts under the Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme. Official data show ₹5,385 crore has been transferred in the ongoing procurement season.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 8



# 24 COVID-19 patients in Nashik die without oxygen as gas leaks

Valve malfunction in hospital led to the incident, says State Health Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
PUNE

At least 24 COVID-19 patients on life support died after a leak in a medical oxygen tank disrupted the supply of the gas at Dr. Zakir Hussain Hospital in Nashik, Maharashtra, on Wednesday.

Attributing the leak to a valve malfunction, State Health Minister Rajesh Tope said a high-level inquiry had been ordered to ascertain if negligence had caused the tragedy.

Sources said the tragedy unfolded around 10 a.m. when the tank was being refilled after the oxygen level went down. The massive leak caused disruption in the vital oxygen supply for at least half-an-hour. A fire brigade team had to be rushed to the hospital to contain the leak.

### 157 patients

Mr. Tope said 61 of the 157 patients in the hospital were in a critical condition and required oxygen.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, expressing grief over the incident, announced a thorough inquiry. "The kin of every patient who died will receive a compensation of ₹5 lakh. I appeal to the people not to indulge in any kind of politics," he said in a statement.



Tragedy unfolds: Medical oxygen leaking out of a storage unit at Dr. Zakir Hussain Municipal Hospital in Nashik on Wednesday. ■ PTI

Mr. Thackeray said the tragedy showed the need to be careful in the struggle against the pandemic. "We have been facing the pandemic for more than a year now and the available doctors and medical staff are working day and night to save lives of patients... Such incidents should not happen in the future. The administration will have to work very carefully to prevent any such occurrences that could erode the morale of the health personnel," Mr. Thackeray said.

Nashik Collector Suraj Mandhare said the tank belonged to a private vendor. Apparently, technicians tried to fix the valve when

low pressure caused the leakage," he said.

"Currently, the other patients are being supplied oxygen from the repaired tank. They are in a stable condition, as per medical authorities," Mr. Mandhare said.

Chaotic scenes erupted on the hospital premises as relatives of patients converged on the scene of the tragedy. They accused the Nashik Municipal Corporation authorities of not giving them proper information on the incident.

### PM 'anguished'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed anguish over the incident. "The tragedy at a hospital in Nashik be-

cause of oxygen tank leakage is heart-wrenching. An-

guished by the loss of lives due to it. Condolences to the bereaved families in this sad hour," he tweeted.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi also condoled the deaths of the patients. Mr. Gandhi urged the Maharashtra government to provide all assistance to the affected.

The tragedy comes at a

time when Maharashtra, the worst-hit State in India in terms of COVID-19 cases and fatalities, is reeling under an acute shortage of oxygen.

MAHARASHTRA TIGHTENS RESTRICTIONS ▶ PAGE 10

# Centre steps in to restore oxygen supplies to Delhi

24/7 control team will mediate disputes between States'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI/GURUGRAM

Oxygen stocks at several hospitals in the national capital dipped to alarming lows following disruption of supplies from Haryana on Wednesday. Supplies were restored by late evening after intervention by the Centre.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said, "The problem regarding Haryana and Delhi has been resolved."

Hospitals in Haryana too might be staring at oxygen shortages soon, Chief Secretary Vijai Vardhan said.

"There is a 24/7 control team by the Centre that will mediate in disputes between the States on supply of oxygen... We are in a pandemic and there will be differences that crop up between the States on oxygen supply," Mr. Bhushan said, adding that there was a committee for every hospital, and guidelines on appropriate management of oxygen. "Green corridors have been set up to ensure smooth passage of oxygen trucks."

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted, "Central govt has increased Delhi's quota of oxygen. We are very grateful to Centre for this."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8



Gasping for air: A relative of a COVID-19 patient carrying an empty oxygen cylinder for refilling in New Delhi. ■ PTI

# Saving lives the bottom line, HC tells Centre

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Laying down the bottom line that no life should be lost due to lack of oxygen, the Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the Centre why oxygen supply has not been diverted from steel and petroleum industries to hospitals to tide over the emergency COVID-19 situation.

The court made the remark during an urgent hearing on a petition by Max Hospital (Patparganj) claiming shortage of medical oxygen for treatment of critical COVID-19 patients.

During the initial part of the hearing, the court or-

dered the Centre to take over the supply of oxygen at steel and petroleum industries.

It later withheld the order till 3 p.m. on Thursday after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, assured the court that allocated oxygen, which was increased from 350 to 480 metric tonnes, would be facilitated to Delhi.

The court was later informed that Max Hospital and its associate facilities have received oxygen needed for the day.

The Bench asked the Centre to protect right to life of citizens and to supply oxygen by any means necessary.

# Covaxin phase 3 trial shows vaccine has 78% efficacy

JACOB KOSHY  
NEW DELHI

cines, have been reported globally, including in India.

"This is roughly around two in 10,000 and is a very, very small fraction. We have seen similar rates of reinfection internationally, too, from the use of other vaccines," said V.K. Paul, Chairman, National Expert Group on Vaccination that oversees the COVID-19 management strategy.

When comparing patterns of infection and mortality in the first and second waves of the pandemic, a slight percentage increase in cases among those in the age group of 10-20 is seen in the current wave – 8.5% compared with 8.07% earlier. There is an increase in cases among those in the 40-70 age group from the previous wave, and the same fraction persists in the 30-40 age group.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

the final report will be submitted to a peer-reviewed publication. "Based on the achievement of the success criteria, placebo recipients have now become eligible to receive two doses of Covaxin," Bharat Biotech said.

In a press briefing on Wednesday, Balram Bhargava, Director-General, ICMR, furnished data to show that four in 10,000 of those who had been inoculated with Covaxin went on to test positive.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

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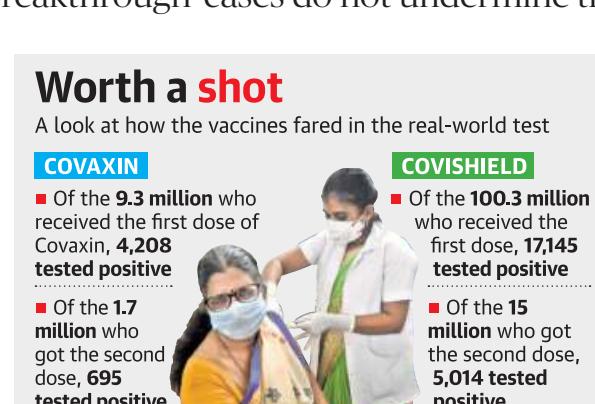
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# Very few post-vaccine infections: ICMR

Council says such 'breakthrough' cases do not undermine the efficacy of shots

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI



### Worth a shot

A look at how the vaccines fared in the real-world test

#### COVAXIN

■ Of the 9.3 million who received the first dose of Covaxin, 4,208 tested positive

■ Of the 1.7 million who got the second dose, 695 tested positive

#### COVISHIELD

■ Of the 100.3 million who received the first dose, 17,145 tested positive

■ Of the 15 million who got the second dose, 5,014 tested positive

ceived the second dose, 695 tested positive.

For Covishield, of the 100.3 million who received the first dose, 17,145 tested positive; of the 15 million who got the second dose, 5,014 tested positive.

#### Key reasons

Two key reasons for this, Dr. Bhargava said, were that healthcare and frontline workers, who were among the first to be vaccinated,

were as a population far more exposed to the virus and therefore, more susceptible. Second, the emergence of "the highly transmissible second wave (newer variants)" may have contributed to instances of infection among those vaccinated. Several variants, which have mutations that have been shown to avoid detection by the immune system and in some cases, reduce the efficacy of vac-

cines, have been reported globally, including in India.

"This is roughly around two in 10,000 and is a very, very small fraction. We have seen similar rates of reinfection internationally, too, from the use of other vaccines," said V.K. Paul, Chairman, National Expert Group on Vaccination that oversees the COVID-19 management strategy.

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There is an increase in cases among those in the 40-70 age group from the previous wave, and the same fraction persists in the 30-40 age group.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

SII fixes price for Covishield

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

From May 1, the Serum Institute of India will sell its COVID-19 vaccine, Covishield, to the States at ₹400 a dose and to private hospitals at ₹600 a dose, its chief executive officer, Adar Poonawala, said in a statement on Wednesday.

The vaccines, however, would not be sold in retail for four or five months, and corporates and private individuals could in the meantime only get these vaccines from "state-facilitated machinery", the statement added.

Covishield constitutes over 90% of India's vaccine supply and is learnt to be sold to the Centre at ₹150-₹200 a dose.

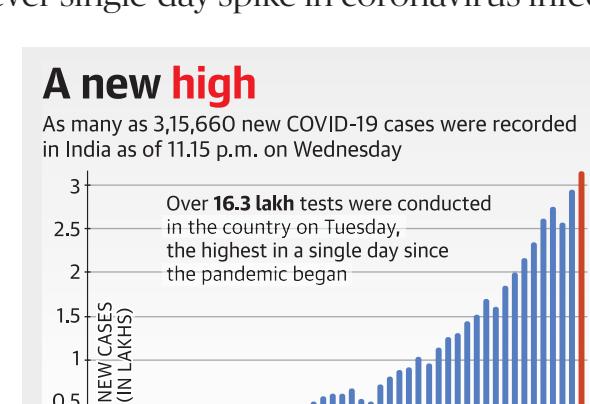
The international figures have been collated from Our World in Data.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

This is the highest-ever single-day spike in coronavirus infections in the world

### A new high

As many as 3,15,660 new COVID-19 cases were recorded in India as of 11.15 p.m. on Wednesday



of the new cases, followed by Uttar Pradesh (33,214) and Delhi (24,638). Maharashtra also recorded the maximum casualties (568). Delhi followed with 249 deaths, while Uttar Pra-

desh registered 187 new casualties. As many as 16,39,357 samples were tested in India on Tuesday (results of which were made available on Wednesday), the highest-ev-



Migrant workers at Sarai Kale Khan ISBT as they continue to leave for their home towns in view of the week-long lockdown; people enquire about availability of oxygen cylinders as COVID-19 cases surge in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHAKAR, PTI

**'Cheap politics being played over oxygen'**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Wednesday said that cheap politics is being played in the name of oxygen for patients and lashed out at the Delhi government for its failure to tackle the spread of COVID-19 infection in the Capital, which has lead to a breakdown of the healthcare system.

Congress leader Alka Lamba said that Deputy CM Manish Sisodia's tweet about the lack of oxygen in the Capital created an outcry due to which the family of patients could not sleep peacefully all night and the government had not made it clear whether oxygen had reached those hospitals. She accused the "sleeping government" of playing a "tweet-tweet game" which worked to shock the public and patients of Delhi.

"There is not a single ICU, ventilator vacant in government hospitals. Why is the Delhi government silently watching the spectacle while serious patients are doing the rounds at the hospitals," she asked.

## Chaotic scenes outside GTB Hospital ward

Stretchers double up as beds as the second largest Delhi government hospital struggles to cope with rising virus cases



A crowded emergency ward of GTB Hospital on Wednesday.  
■ NIKHIL M BABU

Doctors carried out the ECG on the patient but left without conveying anything to the relatives. The family understood that he might be dead.

However, his family kept rubbing his hands, trying to keep him warm, and the wife repeated: "Please open your eyes once... Please open your eyes once..."

It was around 11.45 a.m., after waiting in a line outside the emergency and several requests to the doctors, his ECG was done again. It drew a straight line.

The doctor tore a small paper, which was the ECG report, and the family left. The death was not recorded at the hospital.

A woman in her early 30s,

Our resources are stretched and doctors are testing positive. The staffer number has not gone up with the increase in patients, but we are trying our best

SENIOR DOCTOR AT GTB HOSPITAL

senior doctor of the hospital said. "Many people are dying inside and outside the emergency ward. It's not that doctors are not trying, but there are too many patients. I was there the whole night," Deepak Kumar, 32, who came for his uncle's treatment said.

### Delay in bodies

Outside the mortuary of GTB Hospital, Muskaan, 25, complained that her 29-year-old brother, a COVID-19 patient, died at the hospital around 1 p.m. on Tuesday but they were yet to get his body even after 15 hours.

"We have fought with them, but they're saying that we'll have to wait," Muskaan said. The family alleged that he had only minor symptoms when he was admitted and the hospital did not take care of him well.

At 4 p.m., Mehraj Ali, 36, said that they have been waiting for his elder brother's body for more than 18 hours. "We were looking for a bed from 8.30 a.m. on Tuesday and finally got a bed here around 8 p.m. and my brother died at 10 p.m.," he said.

A Delhi police officer post-

New COVID-19 cases dip as tests fall by 9%

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Capital reported 249 COVID-19-related deaths and 24,638 new cases in the past 24 hours, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Wednesday.

The total number of deaths went up to 12,887 and cases to 9,30,179.

A total of 78,768 tests were done in a day, the bulletin said, which is less than Tuesday's by 8.96%. Last week, on many more than one lakh tests were done in a day.

The positivity of new cases was 31.28%, which means more than 31 out of 100 people taking the test are now COVID-19 positive.

A total of 49,461 beneficiaries took the COVID-19 vaccination in the city in the last 24 hours, as per the bulletin. Of the total 20,097 beds for COVID-19 treatment, 88.1% were occupied at 11 p.m. on Wednesday, as per a government website.

Many hospitals, including Lok Nayak Hospital, Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital and Burari Hospital, did not have a single vacant bed.

## Private oxygen suppliers struggle to keep up

Cost of 10-litre oxygen cylinder goes up 3 times after govt's admission on stocks

JATIN ANAND  
NEW DELHI

Private oxygen suppliers and NGOs volunteering to provide oxygen to seriously ill COVID-19 patients in the city are running from pillar to post to fulfil the demand over the last three to four days but to no avail.

While some who mainly deal in supplying oxygen for industrial purposes have switched over completely to dealing in medical oxygen, the cost of a 10-litre cylinder of oxygen had, they claimed, shot up three times as many days since the Delhi government's admission that oxygen supplies were running low at city hospitals.

"Patients are coming to us in visible desperation, folding their hands and request-

We are trying our best to help as many patients as possible and have switched completely to supplying medical oxygen from industrial oxygen

PRAMILA JUNEJA  
Industrial oxygen supplier

ing whatever amount of supply we can provide because they are somehow managing to get hospital beds but not oxygen," said Pramila Juneja (name changed on request), from Patel Nagar, who runs an industrial oxygen supply business with her husband.

"We are trying our best to help as many patients as possible and have switched completely to supplying medical

oxygen from industrial oxygen. Things have gone from worse to worst over the last three to four days," she said.

### Distress calls

Mohammad Umair, a businessman who volunteers for the NGO 'Youth for Nizamuddin' in south east Delhi, said distress calls for food and water during last year's lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic had been raised by distress calls for oxygen this time around.

"Four days ago, I got a 10-litre oxygen tank, which can last around five to six hours for one patient, filled for ₹6,000. But the very next day, after issues about oxygen supply were raised by the Delhi government the same tank now costs

₹16,000," Mr. Umair said. "We are managing small supplies from U.P. but no matter how much we get it is not adequate due to the current panic around the supply of oxygen," he complained.

Dheeraj Kumar, an oxygen supplier based in north-west Delhi's Rohini said the panic around oxygen supply had set in all of a sudden after the weekend.

"All I can say is that I have received 450 calls which started around 5 a.m. today. This was not the case two days ago, but has happened since last night," he said. "I am trying my best to be able to help anyone and have missed three calls while talking to you. The demand has suddenly shot up but the supply has not kept pace," he said.

PETA India argued that the animal was being illegally retained by the Asiad Circus. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



PETA India argued that the animal was being illegally retained by the Asiad Circus. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

could be in danger, approached the Delhi High Court seeking immediate seizure of the hippopotamus.

### Illegally retained

PETA India argued that the animal was being illegally retained by the Asiad Circus, despite licence of the circus having been cancelled. It was alleged that the circus was making the animals perform illegally.

On January 22 this year, PETA India informed the High Court that despite repeated orders, Asiad Circus had failed to disclose the status and location of the hippopotamus. Following this, the High Court had then directed Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Delhi, to immediately

take steps for seizure of the hippopotamus from the custody of Asiad Circus.

Last week, the court was informed that Radhe Krishna Temple Elephant Welfare Trust has been given the custody of the hippopotamus on October 27, 2019, and since

then, he has been living in the facility maintained by the Trust.

### Satisfied with care

An inspection done at the facility by the Animal Welfare Board (AWB), including representatives of PETA India, found "complete satisfaction in the manner in which the hippopotamus is being kept in the said facility, in terms of its living condition, food etc."

found "complete satisfaction in the manner in which the hippopotamus is being kept in the said facility, in terms of its living condition, food etc."

The AWB also confirmed that all the facilities and minimum standards are being completely taken care of. It said the Trust may continue the life-long care of the hippopotamus.

The report also concluded that the hippopotamus was found to be healthy, mentally as well as physically.

Taking note of the submission, Justice Prathiba M. Singh said, "It is heartening for this court to learn that such a facility with good living conditions and high standards is being run by the Trust."

Since the last two days, the police have been flooded with requests by city hospitals to arrange oxygen cylinders amid shortage of supply during the ongoing pandemic.

On Wednesday, 32 lives

were saved after they managed to arrange 11 oxygen cylinders for Amarjeela Hospital in west Delhi's Janakpuri after they got a distress call around 9 a.m. saying oxygen stock at the facility was nearly exhausted.

"The police contacted local oxygen suppliers and succeeded in finding medical oxygen. Eleven cylinders were arranged for the hospital from three different locations - Kirti Nagar, Gole Market and Mayapuri," Additional DCP (West) Prashant Gautam said.

In another instance, a green corridor was provided to facilitate movement of a truck carrying oxygen containers amid shortage of supply during the ongoing pandemic.

On Wednesday, 32 lives

The Alipur police station received an information around 9 a.m. that a Haryana-bound truck carrying oxygen containers was stuck on KMP flyover at Kundli border. A green corridor was established for quick movement of the oxygen tanker. Under police escort provided by Alipur police station, the oxygen tanker was escorted to Jaipur Golden Hospital and it was ensured that the truck safely reached the hospital in minimum possible time," said DCP (Outer North) Rajiv Ranjan Singh.

According to the police, in Shahdara, SHO Vivek Vihar and his team managed to save 52 lives in ESI Hospital in Jhilmil by arranging oxygen cylinders on emergency basis on Wednesday.



■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHAKAR, PTI

## Over 1,000 last rites performed in 3 days

Capacity for COVID-19 victims ramped up at cremation and burial facilities

JATIN ANAND  
NEW DELHI

Over a thousand residents, 1,057 to be precise, were laid to rest after losing their battle to COVID-19 in the last three days, according to official data maintained by the Capital's three civic bodies.

A daily average of around 352 deaths, compiled data from the three municipal corporations released by the BJP posited, was recorded between April 18 and April 20 at 21 crematoria and burial grounds located in the nine municipal zones in the city.

### Municipal data

According to the data, 290 last rites which included 273 cremations and 17 burials were performed on April 18; 357, including 334 cremations and 23 burials on April

19 and 410, including 391 cremations and 19 burials were performed on April 20.

The most cremations, 208, were carried out at Nigambodh Ghat in north Delhi followed by 185 at the Punjabi Bagh crematorium. Most burials, 22, were recorded at ITO Ferozeshah Kotla Muslim

Kabristan followed by 17 at the Mongolpuri Christian Burial Ground.

Given the rising daily death toll, the authorities concerned have ramped up the capacity dedicated to the last rites of victims at such facilities from 475 to 655 over the same period.



Cremation in progress at Nigambodh Ghat in Delhi. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

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The police contacted local oxygen suppliers and succeeded in finding medical oxygen. Eleven cylinders were arranged for the hospital from three different locations - Kirti Nagar, Gole Market and Mayapuri," Additional DCP (West) Prashant Gautam said.

In another instance, a green corridor was provided to facilitate movement of a truck carrying oxygen containers amid shortage of supply during the ongoing pandemic.

On Wednesday, 32 lives

## HC entrusts circus hippopotamus with welfare trust

The animal was at the centre of a three-year-long legal battle between PETA India and Asiad Circus

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH  
NEW DELHI

"The journey of Chotu - the Hippopotamus has finally been a happy one!" the Delhi High Court said while giving the responsibility of life-long care of Chotu, who was part of the Asiad Circus, to Radhe Krishna Temple Elephant Welfare Trust.

'Chotu', a male hippopotamus, has been at the centre of a three-year-long legal battle fought by the PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) India against the Asiad Circus.

The hippopotamus was originally part of the Asiad Circus, which went into difficulties due to financial constraints.

PETA India, after acquiring knowledge that 'Chotu'



PETA India argued that the animal was being illegally retained by the Asiad Circus. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## Delhi Police keeps the spirits high

Officers arrange oxygen cylinders, get patients admitted

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

From arranging oxygen cylinders to providing green corridors and facilitating movement of the same, supplying food to admitting COVID-19 patients to hospitals, the Delhi police have saved hundreds of lives by going beyond the call of duty.

The police have received zero calls for food or money assistance but have received around 130 calls of medical assistance mainly oxygen cylinder requirement.

Since the last two days, the police have been flooded with requests by city hospitals to arrange oxygen cylinders amid shortage of supply during the ongoing pandemic.

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On Wednesday, 32 lives



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## Timings

DELHI

THURSDAY, APR. 22
RISE 05:49 SET 18:51
RISE 13:46 SET 02:44
FRIDAY, APR. 23
RISE 05:48 SET 18:52
RISE 14:49 SET 03:24
SATURDAY, APR. 24
RISE 05:47 SET 18:53
RISE 15:54 SET 04:01

## Delhi Weather

max min

Delhi City 33 19

Safdarjung 33 19

Palam 33 18

Delhi Palam Today

35°C Short spell rain or

thunderclouds development

may occur at few places over the city.

Warm afternoon likely.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

36°C A pleasant morning and

very warm day likely.

Thunderstorm with gusty

winds likely at few areas.

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## Coach arrested for molesting minor student

## STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A 57-year-old basketball coach was arrested for allegedly molesting his minor student in south Delhi's Hauz Khas, police said on Wednesday.

On April 10, a 17-year-old girl, along with her parents, approached Hauz Khas police station and levelled molestation allegations against her basketball coach, a senior police officer said.

The victim further alleged that when she reached Siri Fort, her trainer molested her. She came home and narrated the incident to her parents, the officer said. A case was registered under relevant sections of the IPC and POCSO Act. The accused was arrested on the same day and sent to judicial custody, police said.

## RWAs face hurdles as they plan to set up COVID care facilities

Inadequate oxygen supply, building space and finding nursing staff add to woes

## HEMANI BHANDARI

NEW DELHI

The concept to set up small COVID care facility in residential areas was a novel initiative, but practical difficulties have made life difficult for Resident Welfare Associations in the Capital. Several RWAs are thus facing hurdles in establishing these centres in residential areas as per the guidelines.

Nothing has vexed them as procuring oxygen cylinders, a shortage the whole country is reeling under. Saurabh Gandhi, Rana Pratap Bagh RWA president and member of United Residents of Delhi (URD), said they possess four oxygen cylinders of 10 litres each while another one was to reach them. But that is proving to be inadequate.

“We are getting calls for oxygen cylinders every few minutes. All our cylinders are currently with residents. We are also helping people with contacts to buy oxygen cylinders, whoever can afford them. But it’s been extremely tough,” he said.

This RWA has been able to help 11 persons with oxygen in the last few days. “Oxygen, in these times, is being prioritised to those that des-



People carrying oxygen cylinders for free refilling provided by RWA of Turkman Gate in Delhi on Wednesday. ■ PTI

perately need it and can't find a hospital bed,” he added.

## Facilitating oxygen

Rajiv Kakria (62), member of an RWA in Greater Kailash, said they possess just two oxygen concentrators and a cylinder and hence, facing acute shortage. “We [RWAs] are possibly doing more than what the government is.

Four days ago, a person needed to be admitted to a hospital because his oxygen levels dropped. We provided him with oxygen concentrator. Unfortunately, he died Wednesday morning,” he said.

B.S. Vohra, a resident of Krishna Nagar and president

of East Delhi RWA Joint Front Federation, said while they don’t have oxygen cylinders in their possession, they are trying their best to facilitate oxygen. “We are helping people in need with information and making calls for them. The situation, however, is terrible,” he said.

Their woes don’t end there. Mr. Kakria said they could not get the builder to agree to lend building space to set up the COVID care centre. “There is stigma. The builder says he won’t be able to sell any flat for the next one year,” he said, adding that doctors were exhausted and no one was willing to consult.

Mr. Gandhi said they have

a community hall in their area which they could have turned into a COVID care facility and they had also spoken to doctors who were willing to consult but they couldn’t find nursing staff. “The cost of one nursing staff is about ₹25,000 a month but either they are not available or they are demanding ₹80,000 for a month. It is not affordable,” he said.

## Managing perils

He also said that given the situation, they wouldn’t be able to manage the facility because people need oxygen, which they are hard-pressed to provide. “For refilling an oxygen cylinder, one has to wait for two hours in the queue. Earlier, the price of refilling was ₹50-₹100 and now it has crossed ₹400,” he said.

Talking about house helps being allowed in colonies, members said that unlike last lockdown, this time, house helps are allowed in most of the localities. It’s down to individual residents whether to hire them or not. “We have told everyone that if they decide not to call them, they have to pay their salaries,” Mr. Vohra said.

## Hospitals should have oxygen stock for at least 48 hrs: doctors

Delhi says it has less than 12 hrs; Haryana says its share cut

## STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Doctors of several hospitals in Delhi said that ideally there should be a buffer stock of oxygen for at least 48 hours. But since the record surge in COVID-19 cases for the past two weeks, they have less stock and they are refilling almost on a daily basis, doctors said.

Meanwhile, a Delhi government spokesperson said that currently almost all hospitals have less than 12 hours of oxygen. The State does not have its own source of oxygen and supply comes mainly from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.



Oxygen beds at the Yamuna Sports Complex isolation centre in the city. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

graduate Institute of Medical Sciences in Rohtak.

The hospitals in Gurugram have a large number of patients spilled over from Delhi and even outside the country. We are managing with 70-80 MT now, but it can soon go up to 100 MT in a couple of days. It will then be difficult to manage,” said Mr. Vardhan.

He said that he had made a request to Home Secretary for a videoconference meeting with the Chief Secretaries of 5-6 affected States and find a solution to it. “This problem is going to crop up every day. One possible solution could be to airlift liquid oxygen from North-eastern States where it is in abundance. It could be expensive proposition, but can be the only solution,” said Mr. Vardhan.

## Critical patients can register on portal for beds in Gurugram

2,988 cases reported; active cases at 16K

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GURUGRAM

The district administration on Wednesday incorporated a new feature on its web portal, allowing the critical patients to register themselves for admission to hospitals in view of increasing demand for beds.

“We acknowledge your worry for getting the best treatment for your loved ones in this crisis. Hereto, launching a ‘Register for Hospital Bed’ form on <http://covidggn.com>. Fill it & our doctors shall get back to you based on criticality of the patient and availability of beds [sic],” said a tweet from the official handle of Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg.

Mr. Garg also made it clear that lockdown would not be imposed in the district and those engaged in black marketing and overcharging of essential items would be dealt with strictly. “Chief Minister Manohar Lal too has made it clear that the government has no plans to impose the lockdown in the present scenario. CM has even made an appeal to the workers and labourers to not leave city,” said Mr. Garg.

Meanwhile, Gurugram reported record 2,988 fresh COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, taking the number of active cases to 16,027. As many as 391 people have died so far with four deaths on Wednesday.

## Private schools told to discontinue online classes during vacation

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

After several private schools continued online classes despite Directorate of Education’s (DoE) order declaring summer holidays from April 20, the DoE on Wednesday issued a circular saying that all online and semi-online teaching and learning activities shall remain suspended during the summer vacation from April 20 to June 9.

“It has been brought to the notice of this directorate that despite the summer vacation, which has



A private school student attending virtual class in Delhi. ■ FILE PHOTO

been advanced due to surge in COVID-19 cases, the regular online learning method continues to be adopted in one way or the

other by some private schools. The online classes are being used as a substitute of physical classroom learning without any break,” the DoE said in its circular.

“Keeping in mind the prevailing situation due to the virus and in the overall interest of all stakeholders of the management of private schools, it is expedient that direction issued in respect of government schools regarding suspension of online classes is extended for private schools too,” it added.

## More farmers joining protest: SKM

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Farmers in large numbers have started coming towards Delhi after the harvesting season to strengthen the protest against the Centre’s new farm laws, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) said on Wednesday.

The only way for the Centre to resolve the deadlock with the protesting farmers is by repealing the contentious farm laws and coming out with a legislation

to guarantee the minimum support price (MSP), it said.

“On the call of the SKM, farmers in large numbers have started coming towards Delhi. The farmers are coming back after harvesting, to strengthen the protest against the Centre’s new farm laws, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) said on Wednesday.

“If the government is equally worried about the health of farmers, it should immediately repeal the three

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## IN BRIEF



Vaccine sites now hubs of transmission: Minister

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM  
Union Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan on Wednesday said the Kerala government should procure vaccines directly from manufacturers to tackle the shortage. "Kerala could deliver only fewer than 1 lakh doses a day. But it invited double the number of people to State-run vaccination centres. The resultant anarchy turned the centres into virus transmission hubs," the Minister said.

## TTD sacks channel editor named in smuggling case

TIRUMALA  
The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) issued orders terminating the services of Mittapalli Ravikiran, working as editor on contract basis in Sri Venkateswara Bhakti Channel (SVBC), for his alleged involvement in the smuggling of red sanders. He is presently in Piler sub-jail in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. The officials of Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force had booked a criminal case recently against Ravikiran.

## Ganja worth ₹100 crore seized in Kerala

PALAKKAD  
An Excise special squad seized 1,000 kg of ganja from a truck at Walayar on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border near here on Wednesday night. It is roughly valued at ₹100 crore. The ganja, said to be brought from Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, was being taken to Kochi. Excise officers said it was the biggest seizure ever in the State. It could be the biggest in the country too, they said. The ganja was hidden in a compartment in the truck. Three youngsters were held.

## Case surge crosses 23,500 in Karnataka

116 die in State, Bengaluru accounts for 13,640 cases; Kerala announces travel testing protocol

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

Karnataka on Wednesday reported 23,558 new cases of COVID-19, of which 13,640 were from Bengaluru Urban.

With 116 deaths, the toll rose to 13,762. The test positivity rate (TPR) for the day stood at 15.47%.

Kerala's mass testing led to the identification of 22,414 new cases. The TPR rose to 18.41%. Nine districts reported over a thousand new cases and there were 22 more deaths.

As per the State's revised travel guidelines, all domestic travellers coming in must undergo RT-PCR test, irrespective of vaccination status.

The high-risk primary contacts should undergo quarantine for 14 days. They must undergo RT-PCR testing on the eighth day. Even if they test negative, they should continue in quarantine for seven more days.

All international travellers should undergo RT-PCR test

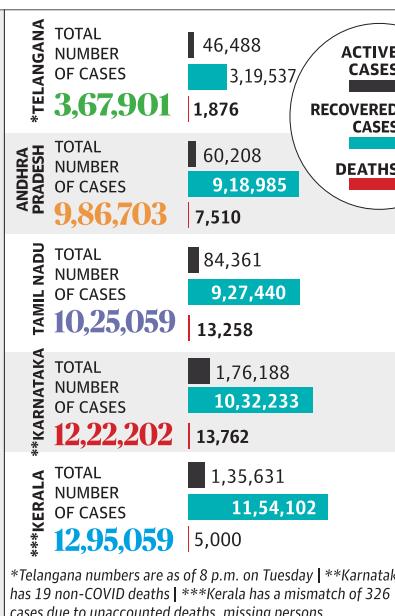
## Risky outing

People continue to crowd markets and beaches despite appeals by authorities for COVID-19 appropriate behaviour. The graphic shows the spread of the pandemic in the southern States



Safety check: Police turning away visitors from the Beach Road in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

■ K.R. DEEPAK



and remain in home isolation. Even if they test negative, they should be on self observation for seven days. Business travellers should register on e-jagratha portal and produce a negative RT-PCR test got within 48 hours.

Those without RT-PCR test should take one on arrival.

Cases and deaths continued to rise in Telangana and on Tuesday, 20 patients died and 6,542 were detected with the virus. Doctors in government and private hos-

pitals said deaths exceeded figures in official bulletins.

Of 6,542 cases, the highest of 898 cases were from Greater Hyderabad region.

The coronavirus claimed 38 lives in Andhra Pradesh, while 9,716 infections were

reported on Wednesday. A TPR of 24.52% was recorded from 39,619 samples.

The State branch of the All India Lawyers' Union (AILU) requested the Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court to disallow physical appearance of advocates and parties at the trial court level and to declare vacation from May 1 to June 1.

In Tamil Nadu, new COVID-19 cases exceeded 11,000 on Wednesday. A total of 11,681 persons tested positive and 53 persons died, taking the overall case tally to 10,25,059 and the toll to 13,258. Chennai accounted for 18 of the 53 fatalities while Kancheepuram and Chengalpattu recorded six and five deaths respectively.

The active case-load rose to 84,361, of which Chennai accounted for 29,256 patients.

(With inputs from Thiruvananthapuram, Hyderabad, Vijayawada and Chennai bureaus)

## No lockdown in Kerala; Karnataka seeks oxygen

Telangana gets a little over 6 lakh additional doses of vaccine

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday ruled out a State-wide lockdown.

However, the government would curb civic life to a considerable measure on the weekend to slow down the transmission of the virus. There was no change in the higher secondary examination schedule, he said.

Only essential services would operate on April 24 and 25. The government has declared Saturday a holiday. Mr. Vijayan said the go-



Fighting the virus: Annam Varkey, 104, taking her first jab at the Angamaly Taluk Hospital in Kerala on Wednesday. She is the oldest recipient of the COVID-19 vaccine in the State.

vernment had not insisted on a lockdown. It was incumbent upon citizens to save the State from a shutdown, he said. The 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew would continue till May 3. Shops should shut at 7.30 p.m. District magistrates could relax hotel timings to deliver food to citizens observing Ramzan fast, he said.

## Karnataka CM's plea

Amid raging cases in Karnataka, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Wednesday asked his Cabinet colleagues to work more proactively in

districts to check the spread.

The direction comes a day after Opposition leaders, at an all-party meeting, criticised the government over its han-

dling of the crisis.

The Karnataka government has directed labs and testing agencies to give the RT-PCR test results within 24

hours of collecting samples.

Amid concerns over shortage of oxygen, the Karnataka government has requested the Centre to fill the lacunae, State Health Minister K. Sudhakar said on Wednesday. He said the State might require 1,500 tonnes of oxygen every day.

## Vaccine doses

Telangana received a little over 6 lakh additional doses of COVID-19 vaccine on Tues-

day.

Up to Wednesday night, the State had around seven lakh doses. This is expected to last for four to five days.

The State is vaccinating over 1.2 to 1.7 lakh people a day.

(With PTI inputs)

districts to check the spread. The direction comes a day after Opposition leaders, at an all-party meeting, criticised the government over its handling of the crisis.

The Karnataka government has directed labs and testing agencies to give the RT-PCR test results within 24

## Rajasthan CM seeks free COVID-19 vaccine for people above 18 years

Youths' resentment against Centre will grow on not getting free jab, says Gehlot

MOHAMMED IQBAL  
JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Wednesday sought free COVID-19 vaccination for youths above 18 years, while affirming that a uniform policy should be adopted for people belonging to different age groups.

"The youths' resentment against the Union government will increase on not getting free vaccine," Mr. Gehlot said.

Appreciating the Centre's decision to vaccinate every person above the age of 18 from May 1, as demanded by the Congress party, Mr. Geh-



Despite India being among the leading countries producing oxygen, medicines and vaccines, people are dying due to lack of these basic facilities..

ASHOK GEHLOT  
Rajasthan Chief Minister

above 18 years," Mr. Gehlot said on Twitter.

In another tweet, the Chief Minister reiterated his call to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to stop his political programmes and rallies in West Bengal and instead pay attention to the improvement of medical and health infrastructure.

"Despite India being among the leading countries producing oxygen, medicines and vaccines, people are dying because of lack of these basic facilities... No other country has witnessed deaths owing to this reason," Mr. Gehlot said.

lot said it would not be appropriate to charge a price from youngsters when others were getting it for free and that the same medical staffers were engaged in in-

oculations for all age groups. "The virus is now spreading fast and the death rate is also high. In such a situation, the Central government should speed up free vaccination instead of putting the financial burden on those

## Provide uninterrupted oxygen supply: Punjab

CM asks govt. for at least 120MT daily

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

Punjab has requested the Central government to ensure uninterrupted oxygen supply for the State.

Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Wednesday wrote to Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Harsh Vardhan seeking at least 120 MT daily allocation of oxygen for Punjab.

He also reiterated urgent steps to set up two pending Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) plants approved by the Centre two months ago.

In his letter, the Chief Minister sought immediate consideration to his request for uninterrupted oxygen supplies from the Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) sup-

pliers as per commitment on daily basis. While the capacity for storage of oxygen for all healthcare facilities in the State is around 300 MT, daily requirement as per the present case load is 105-110 MT, the Chief Minister pointed out, adding that this figure was expected to rise to around 150-170 MT in the next two weeks as per the projections of increase in hospital admissions due to the rising case load.

Captain Singh noted that since the main requirement of the State is fulfilled from outside, adherence of supply as per the allocation made by the Centre for all States, including Punjab, is critical to be able to meet the daily requirements.

## Special package sought for needy during pandemic

## Workers of unorganised sector in crisis'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
JAIPUR

Civil society groups in Rajasthan have sought a special package for the poor and needy to ensure supply of food, social security and health care for the vulnerable population during the second phase of COVID-19 pandemic.

The activists said workers of the unorganised sector need immediate attention owing to loss of livelihood.

In a memorandum submitted to CM Ashok Gehlot here on Wednesday, following an announcement of COVID-19-related restrictions till May 3, rights groups said that homeless workers, street vendors, ragpickers, construction labourers and house helps

should get financial assistance of ₹5,000 each per month.

The beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act should be given pulses and cooking oil in addition to foodgrains, which should also be increased to 10 kg per person, they said. Besides, the State government's Indira Rasoi Yojana should be implemented in all small and big towns to provide cooked food to the poor for free, said the groups.

For making health services available to patients, a COVID-19 dashboard should be created in the State following the pattern of Maharashtra and Delhi, the memorandum stated.

## Three ONGC employees abducted in Assam

## Involvement of ULFA-I suspected

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

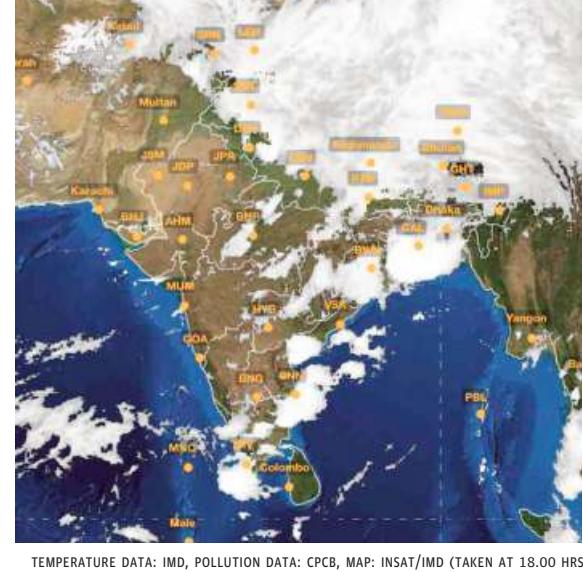
Suspected members of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam-Independent (ULFA-I) have abducted three employees of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Ltd. from an oil rig in eastern Assam.

The police said the three men were taken away at gunpoint from a workover rig within the Lakwa Tea Estate around 3 a.m. on Wednesday. The estate is in Charaideo district but the area is under the jurisdiction of the police in the adjoining Sivasagar district.

The abducted employees have been identified as Mohini Mohan Gogoi and Ritu Saikia, junior technicians (production), and Alakesh Saikia, junior engineering assistant (procurement).

## WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP, INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18 HRS)

**Forecast for Thursday:** Thunderstorm with lightning/hail/gusty wind likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Delhi, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Vidarbha, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...37.1...	26.2	25.8	Kozhikode	0.6...	33.2...	25.8
Ahmedabad	...39.8...	26.0	26.0	Kurnool	...38.6...	38.6	26.0
Aizawl	...31.4...	16.9	16.9	Lucknow	...35.4...	35.4	25.5
Alhambad	...36.4...	27.0	26.1	Madurai	...38.1...	38.1	26.1
Bengaluru	0.6...	34.6...	22.8	Mangaluru	...34.2...	34.2	25.0
Bhopal	...37.5...	24.2	24.2	Mumbai	...32.6...	32.6	25.6
Bhubaneswar	...39.2...	27.6	27.6	Mysuru	...33.6...	33.6	20.6
Chandigarh	3.6...	18.3	18.3	New Delhi	...33.4...	19.2	19.2
Chennai	...36.4...	28.0	28.0	Patna	...35.5...	35.5	25.7
Coimbatore	...35.9...	23.2	23.2	Port Blair	...32.2...	24.2	24.2
Dehradoon</							



## Open and safe

Prime Minister Modi is right about lockdowns, but the vaccination policy needs reform

If Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the country amid the raging storm of COVID-19 cases was intended as reassurance of the government's commitment to averting economic decline and ramping up health facilities, he provided little insight into specific measures. It should be evident from the pace of infection spread and the large number of deaths in several regions that the sensible course open to the Centre and State governments is to enable economic production and consumption while massively scaling-up the health response. Mr. Modi, who advised States to treat lockdowns as a last resort, has virtually acknowledged, with the benefit of hindsight, that last year's measure dealt a severe blow to unorganised labour and the self-employed. The priority now is for the workforce to be vaccinated and containment measures against disease spread to be restricted to micro locations. Yet, the crucial question is that of universalising vaccinations for everyone above 18 years of age from May 1. The Centre's latest policy has effectively opened the floodgates to an unregulated system with market-determined vaccine pricing. Rather than use monopsonist power to procure all vaccines for price-capped distribution, extending the model that has been in place since March 1, the move has led to a 266% to 400% price increase for Covishield for State governments and private hospitals, respectively. Bharat Biotech has also hinted at the need to recover its investments in Covaxin through price flexibility. Manufacturers should not be rushing to seek approvals in those regions where the profits are the highest, leaving out the poorer territories. All vaccines need a sustainable manufacturing base, but the government must ensure a good, free people's vaccine for all.

With 2,94,365 new cases and 2,011 dead on just April 20, India is waging a war against the virus that calls for strong leadership, decentralisation to allow States to take speedy action and the effective use of regulatory authority. The Prime Minister is right to identify urban workers and labour as key coverage groups for vaccination, with support from the Centre and States. Here, the Union Budget allocation of ₹35,000 crore for COVID-19 vaccines should be able to cover more categories this year and the outlay can be enhanced if necessary. Worldwide, governments have made COVID-19 vaccination a fully state-funded effort. The case for free market pricing for vaccines, on the ground that private enterprise is leading vaccine development, is overstated. For AstraZeneca-Covishield, the single biggest research funding component, at over £38 million, came from the British government, followed by overseas governments, universities and charities. What India needs is free universal vaccination, modelled on the polio campaign. The Centre cannot abdicate that responsibility.

## Towards racial justice

Conviction in the George Floyd case and the police reform bill should help build bridges

A U.S. judge found Derek Chauvin, a Minneapolis police officer, guilty of murdering an unarmed African-American man, George Floyd, an incident last May that ignited a nationwide storm of protest against police brutality and a worldwide outpouring of anger at America's racial injustice. Mr. Chauvin has been convicted of second-degree and third-degree murder, and manslaughter – all three for an encounter that lasted around nine minutes, during which he pinned Mr. Floyd's neck to the roadside with his knee until he stopped breathing. Mr. Floyd's final words, "I can't breathe", became the clarion call of a massive wave of street protests across the U.S. At the time, erstwhile President Donald Trump fanned outrage when he described the protests a result of the "radical left" and threatened to send in the National Guard. President Joe Biden, at the time a presidential race frontrunner, contrarily went to Houston to meet with Mr. Floyd's relatives. He said at the time that he would not "fan the flames of hate", but instead, "seek to heal the racial wounds that have long plagued this country". A few months ahead of one of the most remarkable presidential elections in recent history, his words lent hope to many Americans that should he win, there might be a real possibility for reform in law enforcement and criminal justice that could result in less violence against racial minorities.

Yet, it is clear that the road towards achieving a more perfect union is laden with pitfalls that render the task at hand formidable. Literally minutes before the verdict in the Chauvin trial, a teenage girl in Columbus, Ohio, was killed by the police. Her death comes in the wake of others felled in police encounters, including Eric Garner, Michael Brown and Tamir Rice in 2014, and Breonna Taylor in 2020, to name but a few. In most such cases, charges have been rare, and convictions rarer still. Analysis of these cases suggested that most often charges were dropped, or plea bargains and civil settlements agreed. It is only a minority of these instances of what many consider police brutality against people of colour that result in convictions at trial. Four years under Mr. Trump did little to build, across communities, bridges of the sort necessary to bring about a greater measure of empathy and nuance in policing. Now, Mr. Biden's ambitious police reform bill, which bans chokeholds, offers qualified immunity from lawsuits for law enforcement and creates national standards for policing towards greater accountability, has cleared the House and faces a steep climb at the Senate, where analysts say it is unlikely to pass without the support of at least some Republicans. If some of these Republicans can eschew unproven allegations about Democrats seeking to "defund the police" that will be a good start.

# The last word on the state and temples

In Tamil Nadu, the movement seeking a delinking of state and religion misprizes the law's value



SUHRITH PARTHASARATHY

In the midst of the recent electoral campaign in Tamil Nadu, a movement to free Hindu temples from state control gained some traction. Ask the proponents of the movement who they see as the state's successor and the answer you get is, the community of Hindus. But by that, what do they mean? Who selects the personnel that will constitute this community? Does the movement want a reversion to the *status quo ante* that existed before the state intervened in the management of temples? If so, what was that *status quo ante*? A lack of clear answers to these questions suggests that what the programme really seeks is to plant in the state's position powerful private interests, and in the process, reinstate some of the hierarchical divisions that might have been negated, albeit not entirely, through the Constitution and its processes.

### Civic history and faith

At an intuitive level, the idea of governments overseeing the management of religious institutions strikes one as anathema to a secular, democratic republic. But the principles on which secularism rests in India are distinct from their western antecedents. The makers of India's Constitution were conscious of the dangers in promising an American style right to non-establishment. To them, there was little doubt that all persons must be entitled to a freedom of conscience. But that freedom, they believed, ought not to be circumscribed by extending to ex-

treme limits the divide between the state and religion.

The Constituent Assembly was especially mindful of the civic history surrounding matters of faith in India. It understood that left unattended, religion could lead to a perpetuation of historical evils. To treat religion as a subject beyond the state's sovereign reach was to thwart the Constitution's aim of establishing a free and egalitarian society at its very founding. The framers were also conscious that achieving these goals meant that the government had to ensure that resources vital to the commonweal were properly managed. As they saw it, it was the state's responsibility to guarantee, for instance, that a temple dedicated for public use was, in fact, being put to such use.

### Caveats and provisos

It was with these ends in mind that various caveats and provisos were written into Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution. The former makes the freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion subject to public order, morality and health. What is more, this right, the provision clarifies, will not stand in the way of the state making laws regulating any economic, financial, or other secular activity associated with religion, or in the way of the state making laws providing for social welfare and reform.

Article 26, on the other hand, protects group rights. It grants to every "religious denomination" the right to establish institutions; to manage its own affairs in matters of religion; to own and acquire property; and to administer that property in accordance with law. This right too is bound by considerations of public order, morality, and health.

A plain reading of these provi-



sions shows us that a religious denomination has substantial freedom over matters concerning its faith. But this right does not override the state's power to make laws regulating the management of properties belonging to these denominations. The state's authority is wider still in attending to religious institutions that partake a public character. The protections of Article 25 are expressly restricted to matters within the domain of religion. Government has every authority to regulate and restrict a secular function performed by a public religious institution. It was in exercise of this power that the government of Madras enacted a Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act in 1951, which was replaced in 1959 by the Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) Act.

### As essential role of the state

But this power to oversee administration of religious bodies was seen as an incident of sovereignty long before the Constitution came into force. In his 1918 treatise, The Law Relating to Hindu and Mohammedan Religious Endowments, P.R. Ganapathi Iyer points to how Hindu kings habitually employed ministers to supervise temples and charitable bodies. Indeed, the regulation of temple management was seen as an essential role of the state. The book also shows us how under Mughal

administration, the governments of the time recognised that it was their duty to guarantee that all religious endowments were "applied according to the real intent and will of the grantor," and appointed Mutawallis to manage Waqf properties.

To be sure, that this was once the case does not by itself suggest that state control over religious institutions must now continue. But the circumstances that existed in the 1920s, when the government of Madras enacted its first endowment law, have not substantially changed. The provincial administration of the time introduced the law because it found that the colonial regime, in ceding regulatory authority over temples, had paved the path for a division of power in which powerful castes and communities within the Hindu fold appropriated control over religious institutions. The statutes of 1951 and 1959 which succeeded the 1927 legislation were both framed with the same objective: to ensure that Hindu public endowments were being put to use for the true purposes for which the endowments were first made.

To that end, the law accords to a state-appointed commissioner a power of general superintendence over all Hindu religious endowments, and it authorises the commissioner, among other things, to appoint executive officers to temples to ensure that their funds are being properly applied. The Supreme Court of India tested the rationale for this oversight in the Shriram Mutt case (1954). In substantially upholding Tamil Nadu's 1951 legislation – which was repealed and re-enacted in 1959 – the Court recognised that the basic framework of the law was in perfect consonance with the authority vested in the state under Articles 25 and 26. Today, with no obvious successor available,

should the state surrender its regulatory authority, it will surely be acting in breach of its sovereign duties. The consequence of such action will be precisely what the Constituent Assembly strived to avoid: a reassessment of social power by dominant groups.

### In other religions

Those calling for deregulation also point to the state's approach to other religions. But a reading of the Waqf Act, 1995, will show us that the government also exercises substantial supervisory control over management of properties dedicated for religious purposes under Muslim law. It is possible to argue that this legislation does not go far enough, as Justice S.A. Kader, a former judge of the Madras High Court has in his book, *The Law of Waqfs*. Similarly, in the State of Kerala, repeated demands have been made by reformist Christian groups for the creation of state-managed committees to administer the church's finances and properties. Perhaps a time will come for such laws.

In the meantime, though, we must consider the HR&CE law on its own merits. An examination of the legislation enforced in Tamil Nadu demonstrates that the movement seeking a delinking of state and religion misprizes the law's value. If applied properly, the regime will allow the state to act as a genuine tribune of social justice. No doubt there might be deficiencies in how the statute is applied today. For this reason, we must constantly demand transparency and hold the state responsible to the administrative standards prescribed under the law. But a call to do anything more is to risk the abandoning of the promises that underpin the Constitution.

*Suhirth Parthasarathy is an advocate practising at the Madras High Court*

# Strengthening the process of choosing the police chief

A balance needs to be struck between the government's legitimate role and the police chief's operational autonomy



DEVYANI SRIVASTAVA

Recent developments in the Mumbai Police which resulted in the removal of Param Bir Singh from the Mumbai Police Commissioner's post focus the spotlight once again on long overdue reforms needed in the process of appointing and removing police chiefs. A crucial way in which governments exercise control over the State police is through their unregulated power to decide who the chief will be.

There is no independent vetting process to assess the suitability of qualified candidates, and the government's assessment, if it is done at all, remains opaque and is an exercise behind closed doors.

While the principles of democratic accountability necessitate the police chief to remain answerable to the elected government at all times, the moot reform issue is in ensuring the right balance between conditioning the government's legitimate role in appointing or removing the police chief with the need to safeguard the chief's operational autonomy.

### Have an oversight panel

Two elements are vital to reforms in this area. The first is the need to shift the responsibility of appointment and removal from the government alone to a bipartisan, independent oversight body of the government is one part.

Establishing a state-level oversight body with a specified role in

the appointment and removal of police chiefs was first suggested by the National Police Commission (NPC), constituted in 1979, and much later reaffirmed by the Supreme Court of India in its judgment in 2006, in *Prakash Singh*. While the top court entrusted the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) with a role in shortlisting candidates from which the State government is to appoint the police chief, the Model Police Bill, 2015 (<https://bit.ly/3at9U8q>) places the responsibility with a multi-party State Police Board, also referred to as the State Security Commission (SSC), instead (Section 8). Made up of government officials, the Leader of the Opposition as well as independent members from civil society, the board provides the additional safeguard of civilian oversight over the appointment process.

### Gaps in SSCs

India, however, has made little progress in constituting truly independent bodies. While 26 States and the Union Territories (<https://bit.ly/2P8nab3>) have established SSCs, either through new police acts or amendments or through executive orders, not a single one adheres to the balanced composition suggested by the top court. Some do not include the Leader of the Opposition; others neither include independent members nor follow an independent selection process of the members. In essence, the commissions remain dominated by the political executive. Keeping aside the concern over non-functioning SSCs (as of 2019, information secured through the Right to Information Act (<https://bit.ly/3n7DInl>) indicates that only four SSCs have held



meetings since 2014), their design itself will have to be strengthened if they are to drive meaningful reforms.

Moreover, in as many as 23 States (<https://bit.ly/3as9aAC>), governments retain the sole discretion of appointing the police chief. Assam, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Meghalaya and Mizoram are the only States where, on paper, the SSC is given the responsibility of shortlisting candidates. Whether this process is followed in practice each time remains to be verified.

### Need for transparency

The second element critical to police reforms is instituting an independent and transparent selection and decision-making process around appointment and removal, against objective criteria. Much standard-setting work is needed on this as only basic safeguards have been defined in reform measures towards protecting the operational autonomy of the police chief. On appointments, the Court and the Model Police Act require the UPSC/SSC to shortlist candidates on the basis of length of service, service record, and range of experience and a performance appraisal of the candidates over the past 10 years.

However, no further guidance has been developed on explaining

these terms or specifying their elements to guide the appointments. What qualifies as a "good" range of experience? How is the integrity of a candidate measured during appraisals? What is the process required to be followed by the SSC in reviewing the suitability of candidates? Should not interviews with the candidates be considered as a requirement, for instance?

Similarly, no scrutiny process has been prescribed to justify removals from tenure posts. The NPC had required State governments to seek the approval of the State Security Commission before removing the police chief before the end of term. This important check was diluted under the Prakash Singh judgment that only requires governments to consult the SSC. Most States omit even this cursory step. Broad terms such as "on administrative grounds" or "in the public interest" continue to be retained in police acts to justify the government's power to remove the police chief. Such terms remain liable to misuse.

Indeed, the Supreme Court has rightly emphasised that "prima facie satisfaction of the government" alone is not a sufficient ground to justify removal from a tenure post in government, such as that of the police chief (*T.P. Senkumar vs Union of India*, 2017).

The rule of law requires such decisions be for compelling reasons and based on verifiable material that can be objectively tested.

Clear and specific benchmarks need to be integrated into decision-making processes, both on appointments and removals, to prevent politically motivated adverse actions.

In improving transparency of the review process, the United

Kingdom provides a useful example. The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act, 2011, introduced public confirmation hearings as an additional layer of check for the appointment of the heads of their police forces known as Chief Constables (outside of London city).

### Enabling fairness

The proposed candidates are required to participate in a hearing organised by the police and crime panel in each area (made up of representatives from local councils and co-opted independent members) where questions centre on the candidate's ability to "recognise and understand the separation of political and operational responsibilities in relation to the post". This constitutes a crucial step of the time-bound vetting process based on which the panel makes its recommendations on the suitability of the candidate. Importantly, these panels have the power to veto (by two-thirds majority) the proposed appointment as well. On removals too, the panels allow the police chief an opportunity to respond to the allegations on the basis of which their removal is being sought as part of the scrutiny process.

Such steps can help ensure fairness in administrative decisions and need to be considered in our context as well in order to protect the political neutrality of the police. Any further delay in implementing reforms in this area will continue to demoralise the police and cripple the rule of law.

*Devyani Srivastava is Head, Police Reforms Programme, at the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### Pandemic fight

It is clear that States have to fend for themselves as far as fighting the pandemic is concerned. The reports in the visual media are disconcerting especially as far as the acute shortage of medical oxygen and hospital beds are concerned. It makes one wonder what sort of development has been achieved by so-called model States. Given that we have a political class that seems more concerned about constantly winning elections than tending to the suffering masses, the

situation is not surprising.

G.B. SIVANANDAM, Coimbatore

■ The Prime Minister's address to the nation made little sense. He only detailed what is already there in the public domain. From what I could gather, he reiterated that State governments should not declare lockdowns as they create immense problems. Given the vaccine shortages, the advice to get oneself vaccinated makes little sense. Perhaps, one has to be thankful that banging utensils and lighting candles

were not asked for to honour doctors, who are having a terrible time dealing with the surge in COVID-19 cases.

ANTHONY HENRIQUES, Mumbai

■ The Prime Minister's appeal on lockdowns is in sharp contrast to his own action last year which brought immense hardship to many in the country. Tuesday's appeal is perhaps a tacit admission of error. Recently, mass election rallies were allowed to go on. Moreover, a super-spreader, but avoidable, event like the Kumbh Mela was allowed to

take place. The Union Government continues to commit mistakes. The country and its people deserve better.

D. BHUTIA, Guwahati, Assam

■ Winning the battle Fast development of the Maoist-affected regions is the way ahead to win the battle against the Maoists. Ideological battles cannot be won by hard measures as they will only lead to greater alienation and resentment, and, hence, are counterproductive. The government needs to strike

at the root cause of the problem – economic deprivation. There need to be both developmental funds and a deepening of grassroots democracy.

AMIT YADAV, Macchalisahar, Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh

■ Oxygen supply I write this as a professional with 50 years of experience in the chemical industry. The issue of oxygen supply is that of logistics and last kilometre reach. Excluding the extremely large capacities for captive use by steel and certain chemical industries, there is sufficient capacity of

the order of 7,000 to 8,000 TPD merchant capacity. In normal times, about 15%-20% of capacity is used for medical supplies. The logistic chain is transporting bulk quantities by cryogenic tankers from liquid oxygen plants, refilling into cylinders near the use centres and delivery to users. The other method is to provide PSA plants at bulk user premises.

# A recipe for vaccine inequity

The Centre's latest policy may push a huge chunk of the population out of the safety net



R. PRASAD

With the stroke of a pen, the Central government on April 19 abdicated its responsibility to ensure equity in vaccine availability by clearly stating that free vaccination would be limited to healthcare and frontline workers and people above 45 years of age. Worse, the government has set the stage for State governments, private hospitals and the private market vying to have access to vaccines from the Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech.

The April 19 announcement of the roll-out of vaccines in the third phase, wherein anyone above 18 years is eligible for vaccination, comes at a time when many States have already been reporting shortages in supply, which is reflected in the dropping number of vaccine doses administered daily, the four-day *Tika Utsav* (vaccination festival) notwithstanding.

While allowing all adults above 18 years is indeed a welcome move, the Centre's announcement comes with several caveats.

The two vaccine manufacturers will supply 50% of their vaccine doses to the Union government, while the remaining doses will be made available to State governments and private hospitals. A press release from the SII says Covishield will be available in retail and free trade after four to five months.

Unlike the rest of the world, the Indian government took the first step of charging for vaccines by fixing the cost of jabs at private hospitals at up to ₹250 per dose. But with the April 19 announcement, the government has gone the whole hog by allowing the two companies to decide the price of vaccines.

#### A contradictory approach

Many developed countries have sealed vaccine supplies many times their total population; most countries, including the U.S., where healthcare is highly privatised, are vaccinating adults for free. Against this, India has taken a dangerous



REUTERS

gamble in allowing companies to sell vaccines at huge profits amid a pandemic, and particularly so when the second wave is ravaging the country and daily deaths are spiralling.

The government's projected population for the year 2021 for the 18-44 years age group is 595 million. With two doses per person, this translates to 1,190 million doses. This huge population has not been included in priority groups to have access to vaccines, and it would be covered solely by State governments and the private sector. While the private sector may be able to cater to a small percentage of the population that can afford to pay a higher price per dose, the States must buy vaccines and administer them for free for a huge number of people, lest the poor are left out. Whatever policy each State government formulates to identify those eligible for free vaccines, it would need to allocate huge resources to buy the doses. A significant number of people are likely to be left out in this process.

As per the Centre's demand, on Wednesday, the SII announced the price at which vaccines will be sold to States and private hospitals. Adar Poonawalla, CEO of the Serum Institute of India, told *CNBC-TV18* that Covishield will cost ₹400 for both Central and State governments and ₹600 for private hospitals.

On April 6, Mr. Poonawalla went on record saying that even at the subsidised price of ₹150-₹160 per dose, the company was not selling at the cost price but was making a profit. "I would not say we are not making any

profits, but we have sacrificed what we call 'super profits,'" he told *NDTV*. "Super profits are needed to further build capacity, innovate and compete with the western companies. But we don't care for these at the moment as we want to address the needs of the nation first ... and we can make profits after a few months."

However, since the Centre has already agreed to advance ₹3,000 crore to the SII and ₹1,500 crore to Bharat Biotech to ramp up manufacturing facilities, would the two vaccine manufacturers still feel the need to make a killing?

#### Rising costs

On several occasions, the latest being December 30 last year, both Oxford University and AstraZeneca promised to manufacture and distribute the vaccine "on a not-for-profit basis for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic". When AstraZeneca walked back on its word with Brazil, the company said it had the right under the contract "to declare the pandemic over by July 2021" and that it could extend the agreement beyond July 2021 but only in "good faith" and if it considered that the COVID-19 pandemic was not over.

In India, the SII, despite not selling the vaccine at the cost price, is making a small profit while supplying it at ₹150 per dose. With the price tags of ₹400 and ₹600 per dose, the company will be earning more than 2.5 to three times the profit as early as May 1, when the pandemic is nowhere close to ending and the second wave is raging in India.

With around 2.4 million doses being produced a day, the SII is currently manufacturing 60-65 million doses a month. According to Mr. Poonawalla, the company will be able to ramp up production only after June; capacity addition at Bharat Biotech, too, will take a few months. Hence, the current shortage is likely to continue for a few more months.

Amid the sharp criticism for the shortfall, the Central government, by allowing States to procure vaccines directly from manufacturers, has deftly shifted any future blame to State governments.

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How much vaccine inequity will be seen in each State will depend on the policies that governments design to identify beneficiaries. Since no one is safe till at least a vast majority is protected to achieve herd immunity against COVID-19, it is imperative that the Indian government ensure that companies do not become greedy while selling to State governments. Any "super profit" that a company plans to make can come from retail and free trade about four to five months later.

Further, India may soon have three more vaccines, in addition to the three already approved for restricted use. The rich can then avail of the best vaccines in the open market, in line with the government's announcement that all imported vaccines will be available only in the private market.

The second wave has amply demonstrated that unlike last year, more people in the age group of 18-40 years have been symptomatically infected, with many requiring hospitalisation. Hence, a policy that promotes vaccine inequity based on age bands is a dangerous proposition.

A bigger issue is that with States required to procure 50% of vaccines directly from manufacturers, the governments will end up competing with each other and with private players. A similar situation was seen in the United States last year, when former President Donald Trump made individual States procure ventilators and Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) on their own, leading to a chaotic situation where States outbid each other and diversion of supplies from one State to another became rampant.

Third, data streams are now at the centre of global trade and countries' economic and national power. India, thus, has the capacity to negotiate new rules as an equal with the U.S. and China.

# Data and a new global order

India has a key role to play in the hyper-connected world



MUKUL SANWAL

nology-led capitalism is moving fast to utilise the economic potential of data, pushing the recently launched e-yuan and shaking the dollar-based settlement for global trade.

China has a \$53-trillion mobile payments market and it is the global leader in the online transactions arena, controlling over 50% of the global market value. India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) volume is expected to cross \$1 trillion by 2025. The U.S., in contrast, lags behind, with only around 30% of consumers using digital means and with the total volume of mobile payments less than \$100 billion. The global strategic balance will depend on new data standards. Earlier this year, China formed a joint venture with SWIFT for cross-border payments and suggested foundational principles for interoperability between central bank digital currencies at the Bank for International Settlements. The U.S., far behind in mobile payments, is falling back on data alliances and sanctions to maintain its global position.

India's goal is to become a \$5-trillion economy by 2025. While the country is fast-tracking its digital rupee, the challenge is promoting engagement with major powers while retaining its data for innovation and competitive advantage.

#### Fluid dynamics

With Asia at the centre of the world, major powers see value in relationships with New Delhi. India fits into the U.S. frame to provide leverage. China wants India, also a digital power, to see it as a partner, not a rival. And China remains the largest trading partner of both the U.S. and India despite sanctions and border skirmishes. These fluid relationships have their own trade-offs, raising the question: whose interests do the current rules really serve? India, like China, is uncomfortable with treating Western values as universal values and with the U.S. interpretation of Freedom of Navigation rules in others' territorial waters. New Delhi's Indo-Pacific vision is premised on "ASEAN centrality and the common pursuit of prosperity". The European Union recently acknowledged that the path to its future is through an enhanced influence in the Indo-Pacific, while stressing that the strategy is not "anti-China". The U.S. position in trade, that investment creates new markets, makes it similar to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

India alone straddles both U.S. and China-led strategic groupings, providing an equity-based perspective to competing visions. It must be prepared to play a key role in moulding rules for the hyper-connected world, facing off both the U.S. and China to realise its potential of becoming the second-largest economy.

Mukul Sanwal is a former UN diplomat

# A fresh push for green hydrogen

India must address several challenges to enhance commercial-scale operations

TIRTHA BISWAS  
DEEPAK YADAV  
KARTHIK GANESAN

India will soon join 15 other countries in the hydrogen club as it prepares to launch the National Hydrogen Energy Mission (NHEM). The global target is to produce 1.45 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2023. Currently, India consumes around 5.5 million tonnes of hydrogen, primarily produced from imported fossil fuels.

In 2030, according to an analysis by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), green hydrogen could be up to 1 million tonnes in India across application in sectors such as ammonia, steel, methanol, transport and energy storage. However, several challenges in scaling up to commercial-scale operations persist. We propose five recommendations.

#### Key steps

First, decentralised hydrogen production must be promoted through open access of renewable power to an electrolyser (which splits water to form H<sub>2</sub> and O<sub>2</sub> using electricity). Currently, most renewable energy resources that can produce low-cost electricity are situated far from potential demand centres. If hydrogen were to be shipped, it would significantly erode the economics of it. A more viable option would be wheeling electricity directly from the solar plant. For instance, wheeling electricity from a solar plant in Kutch to a refinery in Vadodara could lower the transportation cost by 60%, compared to delivering hydrogen using trucks. However, the electricity tariffs could double when supplying open-access power across State boundaries. Therefore, operationalising open access in letter and spirit, as envisioned in the Electricity Act, 2003, must be an early focus.

Second, we need mechanisms to ensure access to round-the-clock renewable power for decentralised hydrogen production. To minimise intermittency associated with renewable energy, for a given level of hydrogen production capacity, a green hydrogen facility will typically oversize the electrolyser, and store hydrogen to ensure continuous hy-



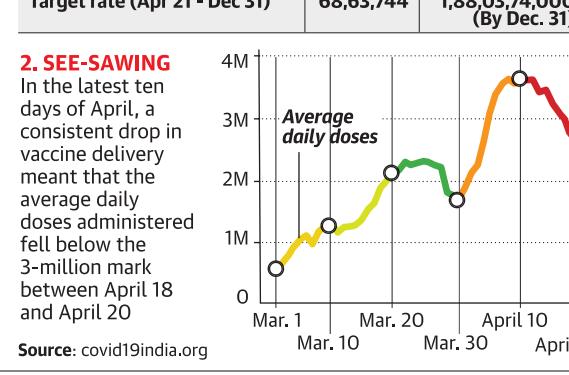
#### DATA POINT

## Vaccination pace drops again

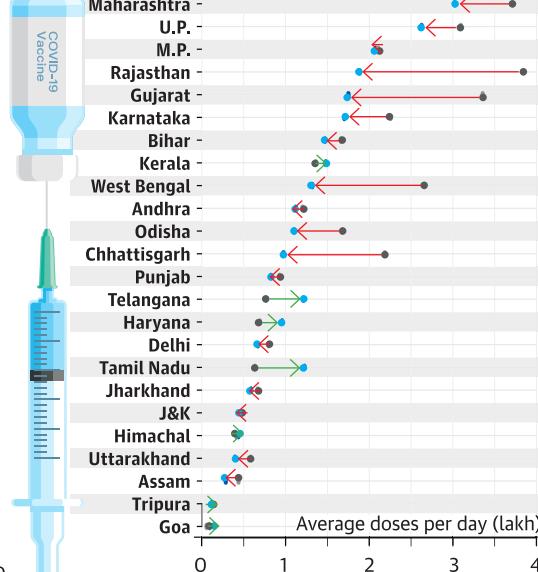
India dropped again in the latest ten days of April compared to the first ten days. From over 3.6 million (mn) average daily doses administered in the first ten days of April, vaccination levels dropped to 2.8 mn in the next ten days. If the latest vaccination rate continues, the number of doses will still exceed the lower bound of the 400mn-500 mn target set for July 31. However, if India is aiming to vaccinate all adults (940 mn people \* 2 doses) by 2021, the average doses should increase to at least 6.8 mn per day, 2.5 times the current rate. Worryingly, many States that witnessed a rapid increase in cases during the second wave registered a drop in vaccination rates. By Sumant Sen and Vignesh Radhakrishnan

**1. DEGREE OF DROP!** From April 11-20, 2.85 mn doses were administered daily on an average in India, compared to 3.64 mn between April 1-10. At the current pace, India would be able to administer 421 million doses by July 31, around 21 million doses more than the target (lower bound) of 400 million, and 79 million fewer than the upper bound

Phases	Doses/day	Target achieved by July 31
Phase 1 rate (Jan 16 - Feb 27)	3,32,588	6,55,19,818
Phase 2 rate (Mar 1 - Mar 10)	11,38,375	18,84,72,636
Phase 2 rate (Mar 11 - Mar 20)	18,91,883	29,62,24,280
Phase 2 rate (Mar 21 - Mar 30)	18,45,051	28,99,95,626
Phase 3 rate (Apr 1 - Apr 10)	36,47,725	51,01,40,347
Phase 3 rate (Apr 11 - Apr 20)	28,52,416	42,10,65,742
<b>Target rate (Apr 21 - July 31)</b>	<b>36,26,281</b>	<b>50,00,00,000</b>
<b>Target rate (Apr 21 - Dec 31)</b>	<b>68,63,744</b>	<b>1,88,03,74,000 (By Dec. 31)</b>



**3. STATE OF PLAY!** The chart shows average daily doses administered from April 1-10 (P1 ●) and April 11-20 (P2 ●) in major States. Most States that are seeing a rapid rise in infections administered a lower number of doses during P2 than P1 on an average. An increase in the average daily dose in P2 compared to P1 is indicated by → and a decrease is shown as ←



The Hindu  
FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 22, 1971

6,000 Bengali Muslims killed

[Moraghati, Bangladesh Border, April 21] Troops aided by non-Bengali Muslims have killed over 6,000 persons at Thakurgaon Sub-divisional town and Shibganj military aerodrome during the last two days, according to refugees entering the border here.

West Pakistani troops combed the villages around Thakurgaon town, apprehended pro-Mujib students, officials and Awami League workers, assembled them at one place and machine-gunned them according to eyewitness accounts.

At some places, West Pakistani troops sprinkled petrol on innocent people and burned them.

The refugees said that the West Pakistani troops first shot dead a batch of people and then asked another batch to dig graves for those killed. After they had dug graves, they too were shot dead.

The local non-Bengali Muslims, the refugees said, helped the troops in locating the liberation fighters. The troops set fire to houses in Thakurgaon town and a number of villages around.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 22, 1921

Cow protection

The following Resolutions were passed at the last sitting of the All India Hindu Conference held at Haridwar on April 10, 1921.

Resolved that this Conference expresses its gratitude to those Moslem Leaders, organisations, and rulers as well as Christian and Parsi gentlemen who are trying to stop cow-killing in India with a view to cultivate national unity and promote economic condition of India and trusts that so far as respect for Hindu religious sentiment is concerned, the matter can well be left in their hands in future.

... Resolved; (a) that this conference expresses its strong protest and resentment against the callous disregard of the deep-seated and most cherished religious sentiment of the Hindu displayed continuously by the present Government in the matter of allowing slaughter

FROM PAGE ONE

## Centre steps in to restore oxygen supplies to Delhi

The disruption in supplies from Haryana was preceded by a tweet by Health Minister Anil Vij, who said a tanker carrying oxygen for a hospital in Faridabad in the State had been "looted" by the Delhi government on Tuesday. "Also, pressure is being mounted on us to supply oxygen to Delhi, but we will supply only if we have spare oxygen. Our first priority is Haryana," said the Minister. The Delhi-based Holy Family Hospital authorities said they had been informed by the "supplier of liquid oxygen in Faridabad that the Haryana government was not allowing to supply oxygen outside the State". Sumit Ray, the hospital's head of the De-

partment of Critical Care, said the hospital had stock that would last only until 11 a.m. on Thursday.

Haryana has a cumulative capacity of 270 MT liquid oxygen per day with a plant each in Faridabad and Panipat. The Centre on Tuesday reduced the State's share to 80 MT from the earlier 118 MT, and fixed a quota of 140 MT for Delhi, Mr. Vardhan said. The State was also directed to supply around 20 MT of liquid oxygen to neighbouring Punjab. "When Haryana is producing 270 MT and giving 200 MT to others, there is sometimes popular and public resentment here as well as to why we are not safeguarding our interests," he said.

## Very few post-vaccine infections: ICMR

In terms of deaths – that is now nearly 2,000 a day – COVID-19 continues to be disproportionately fatal for those above 70. There were 22% deaths among those in the age group of 70 to 80 in the second wave compared with 19% in the first, and 9.8% deaths in those above 80 compared with 7.8% previously.

There is no evidence of any change in patterns of death in the younger age groups of 30-70, with about 70% deaths during both waves falling in this age bracket. However, for the mortality comparison, a far smaller sample – 24,814 – was used in the second wave compared with the 83,189 in the first wave.

## Covaxin phase 3 trial shows 78% efficacy

"Even if it had been five or 10 per 10,000, it wouldn't be a cause for worry because the objective of the vaccine is to protect against severe disease, and we have demonstrated that in protecting against severe disease it is 100%", a senior scientist from Bharat Biotech, who declined to be identified, told *The Hindu*.

The vaccine had been tested against emergent international variants of concern, such as the U.K. strain and the Indian B.1.617 strain, the scientist said. "Because the vaccine produces a very broad range of antibodies, unlike many other vaccines that are solely directed at the spike protein, it does a great job at neutralising the various." The company has reported efficacy against the U.K. variant in a peer-reviewed journal (*Journal of Travel Medicine*) but is yet to publicise results on the vaccine's efficacy against the Brazilian strain.

"Covaxin has been found to effectively neutralise the double mutant variant as well," the ICMR tweeted on Wednesday.

## Serum Institute of India fixes Covishield price

On Monday, when announcing vaccination for all above 18, the Centre said companies could sell half their approved lot of vaccines in the open market, opening up avenues for the States to directly procure them without intervention from the Centre.

States have, however, expressed reservation. Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said such a policy would only place additional burden on States' finances.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the policy amounted to

States abdicating their responsibility.

In an interview to CNBC TV 18, Mr. Poonawala said his company had sold 100 million doses at ₹150 a dose, and was fulfilling a fresh order from the Centre of 110 million doses at ₹2,000 crore (about ₹180 a dose), but in future, it would also charge the Centre ₹400 a dose. "I've always maintained that ₹1,000 a dose would be a reasonable price. However in the early days we had to support the country and so had agreed to reduced prices."

## India records the highest single-day spike

During the peak of the first wave, India's daily case tally did not cross the 1 lakh mark. On September 16, 2020, the country recorded 97,860 new infections, the highest single-day rise for the first wave.

Around 29.9 lakh of COVID-19 vaccination doses were administered in the 24 hours ending at 7 a.m. on Wednesday, which is about 2.86 lakh doses lesser than what was recorded in the previous 24-hours.

# India should be a 'country of particular concern': U.S. panel

Commission says there were severe violations of religious freedom in 2020

**SIRRAM LAKSHMAN**  
WASHINGTON

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent bi-partisan commission, has recommended for the second year in a row that the State Department put India on a list ('Countries of Particular Concern' or CPCs) for the worst violations of religious freedoms in 2020. One of the 10 USCIRF commissioners presented a dissenting view.

The USCIRF recommended that the administration impose targeted sanctions on Indian individuals and entities for "severe violations of religious freedom".

A second recommendation was for the administration to promote inter-faith dialogue and the rights of all communities at bilateral and multilateral forums "such as the ministerial of the Quadrilateral [the Quad]."

The key concerns of the 2021 report include the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

The report says, "Mobs sympathetic to Hindu nationalism operated with impunity," and used "brutal force" to attack Muslims in Delhi's riots in February 2020.

On the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the report says, "The consequences of exclusion – as exemplified

by a large detention camp being built in Assam – are potentially devastating..." Efforts to prohibit interfaith marriage – such as those in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh – are also highlighted as a concern. "These efforts targeting and delegitimising interfaith relationships have led to attacks and arrests of non-Hindus and to innuendo, suspicion, and violence toward any interfaith interaction," the report notes.

In an apparent reference to the Tablighi Jamaat Mazar in March 2020, the US-CIRF says, "At the beginning

of the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation and hateful rhetoric – including from government officials – often targeted religious minorities, continuing familiar patterns."

Johnnie Moore, an evangelical who is the president of The Congress of Christian Leaders as per his USCIRF bio, included a dissenting note in the text of the report saying India should not be designated a CPC but was at a "crossroads". India is "diversity personified" and "its religious life has been its greatest historic blessing," Mr. Moore wrote. "India's government and people have everything to gain and nothing to lose from preserving social harmony and protecting the rights of everyone," he said. Last year, three of 10 commissioners – including Mr. Moore – had presented dissenting views.

## India at 142nd rank on press freedom index

It was in the same place last year too

**SOBHANA K. NAIR**  
NEW DELHI

The World Press Freedom Index, 2021, produced by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a French non-governmental organisation, has again ranked India at 142nd out of 180 countries. This is despite the fact that for a year, on directions from Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba, an index monitoring cell worked to improve the rankings, even holding a meeting between the Indian Ambassador to France and the RSF officials to lobby for a change in the ranking.

In 2016, India's rank was 133, which has steadily climbed down to 142 in 2020.

### Internet ban in J&K

The RSF report says India is one of the world's most dangerous countries for journalists trying to do their job properly. They are exposed to every kind of attack, even police violence against reporters, ambushes by political activists, and reprisals instigated by criminal groups or corrupt local officials.

In February last year, fearing such an adverse assessment, the cell was set up in 18 Ministries to find ways to improve the position on 32 international indices.

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry was delegated to look at the freedom of press index.

According to the report of this cell, accessed by *The Hindu*, on April 26 last year, the Additional Director-General, Public Information Bureau, first wrote to RSF chairman Pierre Haski asking for the criteria on the basis of which it compiles the

## SC paves way for ad-hoc judges in HCs

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

Terming pendency of around 57 lakh cases in High Courts as "docket explosion", the Supreme Court activated a "dormant" constitutional provision to pave way for appointment of retired High Court judges as ad-hoc ones for a period of two to three years to clear backlog and came out with guidelines to regulate appointments.

Article 224A, used rarely, of the Constitution deals with appointment of ad-hoc judges in High Courts and says "the Chief Justice of a High Court for any State may at any time, with the previous consent of the President, request any person who has held the office of a Judge of that Court or of any other High Court to sit and act as a Judge of the High Court for that State". A bench of Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and Justices S.K. Kaul and Surya Kant issued a slew of guidelines pertaining to issues such as tenure, salary, perks, etc, and their role in adjudicating cases.

## MSP via bank transfer in Punjab and Haryana

Producers, arhtiyas happy: Minister

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
CHANDIGARH

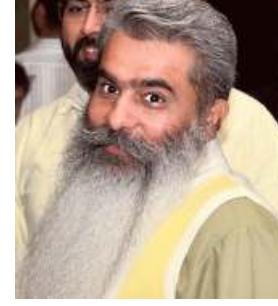
With wheat harvesting in full swing in Punjab and Haryana, farmers, for the first time, have started receiving the minimum support price (MSP) payment directly in their bank accounts under the Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme (DBT).

The government data show ₹5,385 crore had been transferred in the ongoing procurement season by the Central and State procurement agencies to farmers against purchase of their crops in both the States.

In Punjab, ₹2,600 crore has been paid to accounts of farmers till April 20 under the scheme. In Haryana, ₹2,785 crore has been transferred directly to the accounts of farmers.

Punjab Food Minister Bharat Bhushan Ashu said "under the DBT scheme payments more than ₹2,600 crore has been paid to the accounts of farmers till April 20."

He said 54 lakh tonnes of wheat have arrived in 'mandis' till April 20, out of which 50 lakh tonnes have



Bharat Bhushan Ashu

been procured and more than 20 lakh tonnes lifted by various government agencies.

"In Punjab, both the farmers and the arhtiyas [commission agents] are happy over the wheat procurement," he said.

In Haryana, ₹2,785 crore has been transferred directly to the accounts of farmers in Pamed area of Bijapur in which some plants and trees were destroyed and a few animals were injured.

The statement signed by Vi-kalp, spokesperson of the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee of the Maoists, said on April 19, the drone dropped "12 bombs" between Bottalanka and Palagudem villages in Pamed area of Bijapur border where 22 security personnel were killed by the banned group.

Chhattisgarh IGP P. Sundarraj said, "The security forces in Bastar operate within the legal framework with a single objective of protecting life and property

## Maoists allege drone attack in Bijapur by security forces

The claims are totally baseless, say Chhattisgarh police

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

The Maoists said in a statement on Wednesday that security forces had on April 19 dropped 12 bombs from a drone near a village in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district.

The Chhattisgarh police said the "allegation being levelled by Maoists regarding air strike/drone attack were baseless and it was an outcome of fear and confusion in the rank and file of Maoist cadres".

A statement signed by Vi-kalp, spokesperson of the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee of the Maoists, said on April 19, the drone dropped "12 bombs" between Bottalanka and Palagudem villages in Pamed area of Bijapur border where 22 security personnel were killed by the banned group.

Chhattisgarh IGP P. Sundarraj said, "The security forces in Bastar operate within the legal framework with a single objective of protecting life and property

freed and all charges against her, including UAPA, be dropped.

Hidme Markam was arrested on March 9 by police and paramilitary forces from Dantewada's Sameli village, where a programme was under way to remember and mourn the rapes and murders of adivasi women.

minutes before the attack took place. They claimed that this was the first time that a drone had been used to aerially bomb areas, adding the attack was a retaliation of the April 3 encounter at Tarrem on the Sukma-Bijapur border where 22 security personnel were killed by the banned group.

Chhattisgarh IGP P. Sundarraj said, "The security forces in Bastar operate within the legal framework with a single objective of protecting life and property

of the native population. It is the Maoist cadres who have taken away the lives of thousands of innocent civilians by using IEDs and explosive materials. They haven't even spared children, women and animals during their desperate attempts to harm the security forces by using IEDs. The Maoists do not have any moral authority to level such baseless allegation against the security forces. It is high time that they stop unleashing cruelty against innocent tribals of Bastar."

Special Task Force to monitor J&K government employees

It will scrutinise cases in time-bound manner, says govt.

**PEERZADA ASHIQ**  
SRINAGAR

The J&K government on Wednesday constituted a Special Task Force (STF) for identifying and scrutinising the government employees who are involved in any cases related to posing threat to the security or anti-national activities.

"The STF will have the ADGP, (CID), J&K, as its chairman and the IGP, representatives of the Home Department; Department of Law, Justice Member and Parliamentary Affairs and

the concerned department as its members," reads a notification issued by Commissioner-Secretary Manoj Kumar Dwivedi.

It said the STF will scrutinise cases of employees suspected of activities requiring action under Article 311(2) (C) of the Constitution.

The STF has been tasked to compile records of such employees and engage with other members of the Terror Monitoring Group (TMG) for identifying such other employees.

The government spokes-

The messaging app had challenged CCI order for a probe

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court is likely to pronounce its verdict on Thursday on a petition filed by WhatsApp challenging a decision of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) calling for an investigation into its controversial new privacy policy.

WhatsApp said the CCI jumped the gun and started the probe when this was not in fact a competition issue. The issue with respect to personal data of the users, and sharing of personalised data, was already before the Supreme Court.

CCI, on the other hand, said the probe order was made to gauge whether access to data would lead to abuse by WhatsApp of its dominant position. The commission said it was dealing with the app's new privacy policy that could lead to excessive collection of consumers' data and the use and sharing of the data in an anti-competitive context.

The commission said it was not concerned with the privacy aspect of the issue, as the Supreme Court was already seized of it.

WhatsApp has contended that the CCI need not have ordered the probe since the

# Cannot club remaining poll phases: ECI

Trinamool had suggested combining three phases in West Bengal to curb the spread of COVID-19

DAMINI NATH  
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Wednesday told the Trinamool Congress that its suggestion of clubbing the last three phases of polling in West Bengal following the COVID-19 surge was "not feasible".

The ECI's response to a letter sent by Trinamool MP Derek O'Brien came on the eve of the sixth phase of polling in the eight-phase West Bengal election on Thursday. The seventh and eighth phases are scheduled for April 26 and 29.

"You are aware that scheduling for an election is an activity planned much in advance taking complex interplay of variety of factors ranging from optimal utilisation of resources, and training thereof, logistics involved in the mammoth exercise, voters' convenience, festivals, etc. and assessment of prevailing law and order situations," the ECI reply stated.



**Final preparations:** Poll officials checking EVMs at a distribution centre in Nadia on Wednesday. • PTI

It said the Representation of the People Act, 1951, also placed a statutory requirement for at least 14 days for the schedule of each phase of poll. It said each phase of poll was notified separately.

"Your submission that 52 days of campaign period has already been availed is misleading and not in accordance with law," the ECI said, adding the duration of elections had been reduced to 66 days, which was 11 days less than the 2016 election.

It also responded to West Bengal Congress president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury's letter requesting deferment of the remaining phases till after Ramzan and the current wave of the pandemic was over, saying it was not acceptable.

Meanwhile, some former Chief Election Commissioners raised concerns over the suggestion made by the Trinamool. Former CEC O.P. Rawat, who held the post in 2018, said while the remain-

## ECI again warns parties on COVID-19 protocols

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India on Wednesday once again warned the political parties that they would face action and cancellation of permissions for events if they did not follow the COVID-19 protocols in place

ing poll dates could have been clubbed with the last one, it would have only "added to the evil" by extending the campaign period.

He said the Home Ministry could have addressed the deployment concerns, but only if it had been planned earlier. "The Election Commission has done what was the best option. They have increased the silence period from 48 hours to 72 hours," he said.

Former CEC N. Gopalas-

for campaigning.

In a letter to all national and State parties, the commission reiterated its earlier guidelines and warning to parties, with campaigning for the final two phases of the West Bengal Assembly election remaining.

wami, who had the role from June 2006 to April 2009, said the clubbing of phases could not be done due to the requirement of security forces to be deployed. He added that political parties would need to be more "responsible" by not having large rallies during the pandemic.

However, S.Y. Quraishi, who was the CEC between July 2010 and June 2012, said the proposal of clubbing the last three phases was a sensible one.

# States promised seamless oxygen supply

Pharma firms to raise Remdesivir output from 36 lakh vials a month to 1 crore

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday assured the States of a seamless supply of medical oxygen, even as pharmaceutical manufacturers told the government that they will ramp up production of Remdesivir injections from 36 lakh vials a month to 1 crore.

"Measures that the government is taking include importing medical oxygen, round-the-clock working of the oxygen filling stations and allowing containers used for nitrogen and argon to be used for oxygen," Ms. Sitharaman said.



menal increase in demand for medical oxygen, a critical treatment tool for COVID-19, the Finance Minister assured seamless supply to States," the Finance Ministry said in a statement after she met 150 industry leaders virtually, in an interaction hosted by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

In a separate meeting with

FICCI, she said oxygen supply has been "very neatly mapped and new permissions have been given, particularly for the hard stressed 12 States".

She also laid out measures taken to ramp up production capacity of Remdesivir from 36 lakh vials to 78 lakh vials per month, such as rapid clearances for new capaci-

ties, stopping exports of the injection and APIs and formulations used in its manufacture, and allowing export-oriented units and manufacturers in Special Economic Zones to sell in the domestic market.

CII members that produce Remdesivir told the Minister "that they were in fact working towards exceeding the committed target of 78 lakh vials per month and aiming to reach a production of 1 crore vials per month," the statement added. "The government has cleared an advance payment of ₹4,600 crore to Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech," Ms. Sitharaman said.

leaders are participating in the summit. They will represent countries which are members of the Major Economies Forum [India is a member], and those vulnerable to climate change, among others. The leaders will exchange views on climate change, enhancing climate actions, mobilising finance towards climate mitigation and adaptation, nature based solutions, climate security as well as technological innovations

for clean energy," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement on Wednesday.

Mr. Modi will address the summit during the Leaders' Session I on Thursday and speak on "Our Collective Sprint to 2030". The April 22-23 summit will also feature Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Canadian leader Justin Trudeau, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro among others.

"The leaders will also deliberate on how the world can align climate action with inclusive and resilient economic development, while respecting national circumstances and sustainable development priorities," said the MEA. As part of the preparatory diplomacy for the Leaders' Summit, United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry, visited India during April 5-8 when he urged India to cut fossil fuel imprint.

## Poet Sankha Ghosh passes away at 89

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

Eminent poet and critic Sankha Ghosh passed away in Kolkata on Wednesday. The Jnanpith awardee was 89 and had tested positive for COVID-19. He was under home isolation for the past few days, but his condition deteriorated late on Tuesday. He is survived by wife and two daughters.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee extended her condolences to the family and said that the poet's final rites will be performed with full State honours.

# Indian ads further gender stereotypes, shows study

It measured over 1,000 ads aired across India in 2019

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

An analysis of Indian advertisements on television and YouTube has shown that while they are superior to global benchmarks insofar as girls and women have parity of representation in terms of screen and speaking time, their portrayal is problematic as they further gender stereotypes – they are more likely than male characters to be shown as married, less likely to be shown in paid occupation, and more likely to be depicted as caretakers and parents.



These are some of the findings of a study released on Monday by UNICEF and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (GDI) titled "Gender bias and inclusion in advertising in India". The research measures over 1,000 television and YouTube advertisements aired across India in 2019. The ads analysed were those that received the most reach.

A greater percentage of female characters is depicted as married than male characters (11% compared with 8.8%). Female characters are nine times more likely to be shown as "stunning/very attractive" than male characters (5.9% compared with 0.6%). Female characters are also invariably thin, but male characters appear with a variety of body sizes in Indian advertising.

"Misrepresentation and harmful stereotypes of women in advertising have a significant impact on women – and young girls – and how they view themselves and their value to society. While we do see female representation dominate in Indian ads, they are still marginalised by colorism, hypersexualisation, and without careers or aspirations outside of the home," said Geena Davis, Academy Award Winning Actor, Founder and Chair of the GDI adding that the stark inequality must be addressed to ensure an equitable society.

volved in the purchase or preparation of meals (5.4% against 3.9%).

For characters where intelligence is part of their character in the ad, male characters are more likely to be shown as smart than female characters (32.2% compared to 26.2%). Male characters are almost twice as likely to be shown as funny than female characters (19.1% compared to 11.9%).

Two-thirds of female characters (66.9%) in Indian ads have light or medium-light skin tones – a higher percentage than male characters (52.1%). Female characters are nine times more likely to be shown as "stunning/very attractive" than male characters (30.6%) and nearly half the speaking time (33.5%).

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"Misrepresentation and harmful stereotypes of women in advertising have a significant impact on women – and young girls – and how they view themselves and their value to society. While we do see female representation dominate in Indian ads, they are still marginalised by colorism, hypersexualisation, and without careers or aspirations outside of the home," said Geena Davis, Academy Award Winning Actor, Founder and Chair of the GDI adding that the stark inequality must be addressed to ensure an equitable society.

# 4 more Rafale jets arrive in India

This completes first Rafale squadron of IAF based in Ambala



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The fifth batch of four Rafale jets landed in India on Wednesday night, flying non-stop from France after being flagged off from the Merignac air base by Indian Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria who is there on a five-day visit.

This completes the first Rafale squadron in the IAF, the No.17 Golden Arrows

after flagging off the jets.

The fighters flew a distance of almost 8,000 km with air-to-air refuelling support by the French Air Force and the UAE Air Force, the IAF said on Twitter.

India had contracted 36 Rafale jets from France under a ₹7.87 billion Inter-Governmental Agreement in September 2016 and the first five jets were inducted last September.

## Rajasthan Medical Services Corporation Limited

(A Govt. of Rajasthan Undertaking)  
Gandhi Block, Swasthya Bhawan, Tilak Marg, C-Scheme, Jaipur - 302005 India  
Ph. No. 0141-228060, Fax: 0141-511040, Website: www.rmsc.health.rajasthan.gov.in  
CIN: U24232RJ2011SC035067, E-mail: osdrmsc@rsc.in

S. No: F. 4/ ( )/RMSC/Admin./BME/2021/27 Dated: 19.04.2021

### Consultants Required for Bio-Medical Engineering Services

Services of fourteen Consultants in the field of Bio-Medical Engineering are required in the Corporation. The terms of reference (ToR), essential qualifications, experience required and other details may be accessed at [www.rmsc.health.rajasthan.gov.in](http://www.rmsc.health.rajasthan.gov.in). The proposal along with bio data and other documents may be submitted during office hours up to date.

06.05.2021.

Rajasthan Samvardhan/C705/2021-22

Managing Director

**PARADIP PORT TRUST**  
1<sup>st</sup> Corrigendum to e-Tender Call Notice  
Name of the work : "Operation and Maintenance of Oil Spill Response(OSR) Facility at North Oil Jetty", Estimated Cost : Rs. 2,62,68,00/- Plus GST. With reference to above e-tender call notice, the date and time are extended as follows: Bid Submission end date : 10.05.2021 of 15:30 Hrs. Tender Opening date(Technical Bid) : 11.05.2021 of 15:30 Hrs. For details, please log on to the website : <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app/>

Deputy Conservator

PPT/PR/17/21-22 Date : 21.04.2021

**MANGALORE ELECTRICITY SUPPLY COMPANY LIMITED**  
(A Government of Karnataka undertaking)  
Corporate Office, MESCOM Bhavana, Bejai, Mangaluru - 575004.  
Ph: 0824-285795 E-mail: [sepmescom@gmail.com](mailto:sepmescom@gmail.com)  
CIN: J40109 KA 2002 SGC 030425

No: MESCOM/SEE(P)/EE(W)/70 Date: 19.04.2021

### TENDER NOTIFICATION (E-Procurement Mode Only)

MESCOM invites tenders on total turnkey basis for the following works pertaining to Kavoor & Shivamogga Divisions vide respective bid enquiry numbers:-

S.I.No.	Name of the Work	Bid Enquiry No.
1	Construction of New 11kV Aliyoor feeder from 110/11kV Moodabidre MUSS to bifurcate the load of existing 11kV Shirthady feeder in Moodabidre Sub-division of Kavoor division	MESCOM/2021-22/EL/WORK_INDENT 1668
2	Formation of 05 Nos. of new 11kV feeders from 110/11kV McGann Sub-station to release the overload of existing 11kV feeders emanating from 110/11kV Alkola & 110/11kV Mandli Sub-stations of City Sub-division 1 & 3 in Shimoga Division.	MESCOM/2021-22/EL/WORK_INDENT 1669

The interested eligible bidders may log on to : [www.eproc.karnataka.gov.in](http://www.eproc.karnataka.gov.in) on or after 23.04.2021

Sd/- Superintending Engineer (Ele.) (Proc.) MESCOM, Mangaluru

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(A Government of Karnataka Undertaking)  
# 49, East Wing, 4th & 5th Floor, Khanija Bhavan Race Course Road  
Bengaluru - 560 001. Phone No. 080-2265383  
website : [www.kiadb.in](http://www.kiadb.in)

No. IADB/ENGG/ETND-DPR-01/884/2021-22 Date:20.04.2021

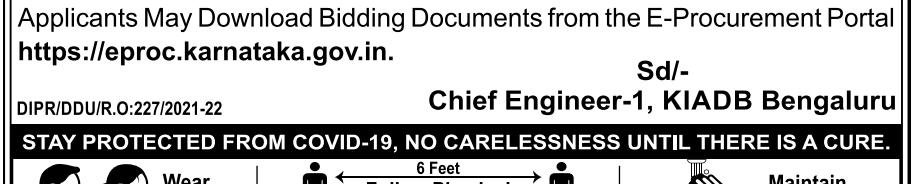
### NOTICE INVITING TENDER

(Through GOK e - Procurement Portal Only)

KIADB invites tender from reputed consultants/firms under two cover bid system having an office at Bengaluru with vast experience and proven record of similar nature of work for the mentioned work: Consultancy Services for Preparation of Detailed Project Report (DPR) Including Economic Analysis, Surveying, Layout Plan, Design, Preparation of Estimates, Cost Structure etc., for the proposed Harohalli Industrial Area Phase-V, Bidadi Hobli, Ramanagara District. (Extent 912A 12½ G) The last date and time of receipt of tender is : 12.05.2021 upto 04:00 pm Applicants May Download Bidding Documents from the E-Procurement Portal <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>.

Sd/- Chief Engineer-1, KIADB Bengaluru

STAY PROTECTED FROM COVID-19, NO CARELESSNESS UNTIL THERE IS A CURE.



**MISSING**  
Above shown Shahad Saleem 34/21, S/o Sameera Saleem from Shamma House, Nr Bismy Bakery Neerchal, Kannur city, Kannur, Kerala is missing from November 2015. In this event a Case in CR No.132/21 U/s 57 of KP Act has been registered and investigation is underway. If anybody gets any information about him please intimate it to any of the phone number furnished hereunder.

**Identification details**  
White Complexion, 5'3/4 height, Proportionate body size, modern hair style, trimmed beard and mustache.

1) Asst. Commissioner of Police Kannur City - 9497990137

2) Inspector of Police Kannur City - 949798204

3) Sub Inspector of Police Kannur City - 9497935438

4) Relative - 9995196786

716/F2/2021/I&PRD

**MYSORE PAINTS & VARNISH LTD.,**  
(A Govt., of Karnataka Undertaking)

</div

# Variant in Bengal can evade immune system

It has a major mutation that can lead to increased infectivity and possibly compromise vaccine efficacy

JACOB KOSHY  
NEW DELHI

With the election on in West Bengal, scientists report the emergence of a new lineage of the novel coronavirus that may make up as much as 15% of the genomes identified in the State from January to March. The new variant, B.1.618, has a major mutation called E484K – found in several internationally identified variants of concern – that helps it evade the immune system and possibly compromise vaccine efficacy.

On April 8, INSACOG (Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics), a group of 10 Indian labs working across the country on sequencing genomes from coronavirus patients, named a “double mutant variant” as B.1.617 that contains two mutations: E484Q and L245R. Though more studies are under way, there is suspicion that this variant, whose mutations have also been found in variants in other countries, may be playing a significant role in the nearly month-long exponential rise in cases that is now seeing nearly 3,000,000 new infections a day, the most in the world, and straining India’s health infrastructure to its seams.

#### Characteristic mutations

The B.1.618 was first isolated on October 25, 2020 and most recently on March 17. The variants that carry some of the mutations associated with B.1.618 have also been found in the U.S., Switzerland, Singapore and Finland. While mutations occur in all parts of the coronavirus genome, key changes to the spike protein – that help the virus bind better to the body’s cells – are most closely tracked. In the case of B.1.618, there are four characteristic mutations to the spike protein associated with increased infectivity and immune escape.

The proportion of B.1.618 has been growing significantly in recent months in West Bengal,” Vinod Scaria, who



**Temporary relief:** Beds and fans are arranged in a quarantine centre for COVID-19 patients at a stadium in Kolkata. ■ AFP

researches genome mutations at the CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, said on Twitter. “Along with B.1.617, it forms a major lineage in West Bengal.” The IGIB is part of the INSACOG. The samples detailing the genetic structure

of the virus was collected by the National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBG), Kalyani, West Bengal, also an INSACOG lab. Though its goal is to sample 5% of coronavirus samples, the consortium has sampled around 1%.

He said that at the moment, there was no “conclusive” evidence that the lineage was driving the epidemic in West Bengal, other than the fact that the numbers and proportions were rising. As in other States, West Bengal too has seen a sharp spike in cases. On April 1, it was reporting 829 cases a day and that has since spiked to 7,000 a day with 53,000 active cases reported as of Tuesday. This has prompted some Opposition parties to scale down the campaigns and calls to club the remaining phases of the polling.

Partha Majumdar, geneticist and former director of the NIBG, said though the variant was spreading rapidly, it alone could not be linked with the acceleration of cases in West Bengal.

“Mutations play a role but as only 15% of those infected carry the B.1.618, it cannot alone explain the surge,” he said.

The 15% only represents the number of samples

whose data have been shared by Indian scientists on the global repository GISAID, a forum for researchers everywhere to collate data and track emerging variants and strains. In spite of its huge number of cases, there are relatively fewer samples and details of their genetic information regularly uploaded out of India.

#### Laboratory tests

Some laboratories have started tests on the virus containing these mutations. Rakesh Mishra of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, said the institute was testing plasma from those inoculated with Covishield and Covaxin against virus variants to check if it escaped antibodies. Studies have shown that the Novavax, Johnson and Johnson and Pfizer vaccines were less effective against the South African variant, which has the E484K mutation. Some vaccine makers are developing vaccines that reportedly work against the mutation.

# Shashi Tharoor, Adhir Ranjan test positive

Both had campaigned for the polls

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader and MP Shashi Tharoor tested positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday.



Shashi Tharoor

“After waiting two days for a test appointment and another day & a half for the results, I finally have confirmation: I’m #Covid positive,” Mr. Tharoor tweeted.

“Hoping to deal with it in a ‘positive’ frame of mind, with rest, steam & plenty of fluids. My sister & 85 year old mother are in the same boat.”

Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha and West Bengal State unit chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury too tested positive.

These Congress leaders have joined party colleagues who recently turned positive.

While former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and senior leader Anand Sharma are recovering in hospital, former party chief Rahul Gandhi isolated himself after testing positive on Tuesday.

## 38 inmates of Byculla jail test positive

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

Jyoti Jagtap, accused in the Bhima Koregaon violence case, and Indrani Mukerjea, prime accused in the Sheena Bora murder case, have tested COVID-19 positive among 38 other inmates in the Byculla jail.

A prison official, requesting anonymity, said Sudha Bharadwaj and Shoma Sen, also accused in the Bhima Koregaon case have been vaccinated but have fever and an upset stomach.

They have all been kept in a quarantine centre at Patankar School opposite Arthur Road jail. Rapid Antigen Tests were conducted on the inmates and some of those infected are admitted to JJ Hospital, St. George Hospital and GT Hospital.

The tests were conducted on 350 women prisoners, 225 men prisoners and 60 prison staff out of whom 40 women prisoners tested positive. The Byculla prison has the capacity of 462 prisoners (262 women and 200 men), but presently, it houses 306 female and 203 male inmates.

Ms. Jagtap is an artiste belonging to Pune-based cultural group Kabir Kala Manch who was arrested from Kondhwa on September 8, 2020. Ms. Mukerjea, a television executive was arrested in August 2015 and has been lodged at Byculla jail since then.

## Congress flays pricing of vaccine

The higher cost for States will bleed them dry, say Opposition leaders

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI



**C** The government needs to be sensitive at this time. The Prime Minister needs to show up, he needs to get off the stage of the rally where he is laughing and cracking jokes

PRIYANKA GANDHI  
CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY

Can’t they talk to Opposition leaders? I don’t think there is any Opposition leader who is not giving them constructive and positive suggestions... The government needs to be sensitive at this time. The Prime Minister needs to show up, he needs to get off the stage of the rally where he is laughing and cracking jokes. He needs to come here, sit in front of people, talk to them and tell them how he is going to save lives.”

“Manmohan Singhji was Prime Minister for 10 years. Everyone knows how digni-

fied a person he is. If he is giving suggestions when the nation is facing a pandemic, then suggestions should be taken up with the same dignity with which they were offered,” she added.

Ms. Vadra flagged the issue of shortage of vaccines because of “the Modi government’s PR exercise”, lack of planning to ensure smooth supply of oxygen despite India being its largest producer, and allowing export of critical drugs.

The party also sharply reacted to the announce-

ment by the Serum Institute of India (SII) on vaccine pricing. Mr. Ramesh tweeted, “The Central government will continue to pay ₹150 per dose for Covishield. State governments will now be charged ₹400 a dose. This is not cooperative federalism. This will bleed dry the already reeling State finances. Atrocious. We demand One Nation, One Price for Centre and State governments.”

“Who will pay the ₹400 for one dose in government hospitals? The State government or the beneficiary? How many persons between 18 and 44 years can afford to pay ₹400 per dose? Will the beneficiary be burdened with the cost? How many States would be willing to pay the price of the vaccine and subsidise the people?” asked Mr. Chidambaram.

The affidavit read, “In case of any Adverse Event Following Immunisation, case management may not be proper and there will be delay in reaching the health facility and challenges in maintaining protocol of observation of the patient for

## Door-to-door vaccination not possible: Centre to Bombay HC

Contamination and wastage may affect efficacy, says govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The Central government told the Bombay High Court on Wednesday that door-to-door vaccination against the COVID-19 virus is not possible as it was expected to lead to contamination and wastage.

Satyendra Singh, Under Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, filed an affidavit and listed reasons for not being able to go door-to-door.

The affidavit read, “In case of any Adverse Event Following Immunisation, case management may not be proper and there will be delay in reaching the health facility and challenges in maintaining protocol of observation of the patient for



Adverse events after vaccination can be better managed at hospitals.

30 minutes after vaccination. There were chances of contamination as during door-to-door inoculation, the vaccine container will be delayed in reaching the health facility and challenges in maintaining protocol of observation of the patient for

“There was also the possibility of high wastage as inoculation drive will take longer. At the request of State governments, more vaccination centres have been approved with special consideration for senior citizens.”

As to the registration for vaccination, it said that people could register in advance or on site.

The reply was submitted in a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by two city-based lawyers who sought those above 75 years, bed-ridden or wheelchair-bound may be vaccinated at home.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G.S. Kulkarni is expected to hear the PIL on April 22.

## Assam gives ambulance status to carriers of medical oxygen

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

The Assam government has granted ambulance status to all vehicles carrying oxygen, nitrogen and argon.

Officials said the ambulance status would also be given to oxygen carriers to and from Assam’s neighbours in the northeast.

The State Health Minister also said everyone in Assam aged 18-45 would get two

doses of the COVID-19 vaccine free.

#### Covaxin doses

The State government, he said, had also written to Covaxin maker Bharat Biotech for procurement of 1 crore vaccine doses.

“Funds collected in Assam Arogya Nidhi account shall be used to procure the vaccines,” he added.

## Maharashtra tightens restrictions

Govt. offices to function with 15% attendance

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

Contrary to speculation over a complete lockdown in the State, the Maharashtra government on Wednesday night issued guidelines that only tightened restrictions.

Under the new guidelines to kick in at 8 p.m. on Thursday, all government offices

can operate only with 15% attendance, except for emergency services directly connected to management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Private offices should function only with 15% of their total strength or five persons, whichever is more. For work required for essential services, offices can work at no more than 50% of their total strength.

Wedding ceremonies may be conducted as a single event in a single hall, not ex-

tending beyond two hours, with a maximum of 25 persons attending. Any family flouting the rules may be fined ₹50,000 and the location closed till pandemic is over.

Private passenger buses can ply only for emergency services, and at only 50% of the seating capacity, with no standing travellers.

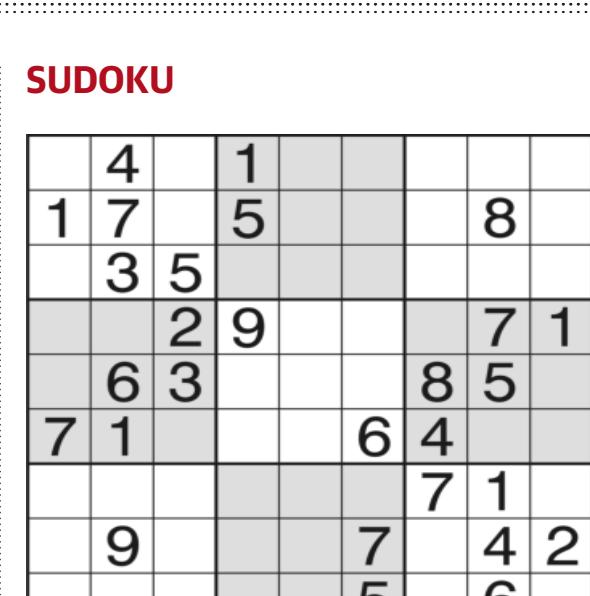
For inter-city or inter-district travel, the bus service operator must restrict halts to a maximum of two in a ci-

ty. Thermal scanners shall be used. Alighting passengers shall have a mark stamped on their hand for 14 days of home quarantine.

For public passenger transport, trains, metro and mono rail services shall be used only by government personnel, and passes, and tickets will be issued based on government identity cards.

Medical personnel and those needing medical treatment are allowed to use public transport.

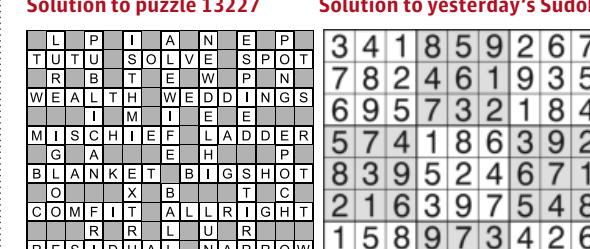
## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

#### Solution to puzzle 13227

#### Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



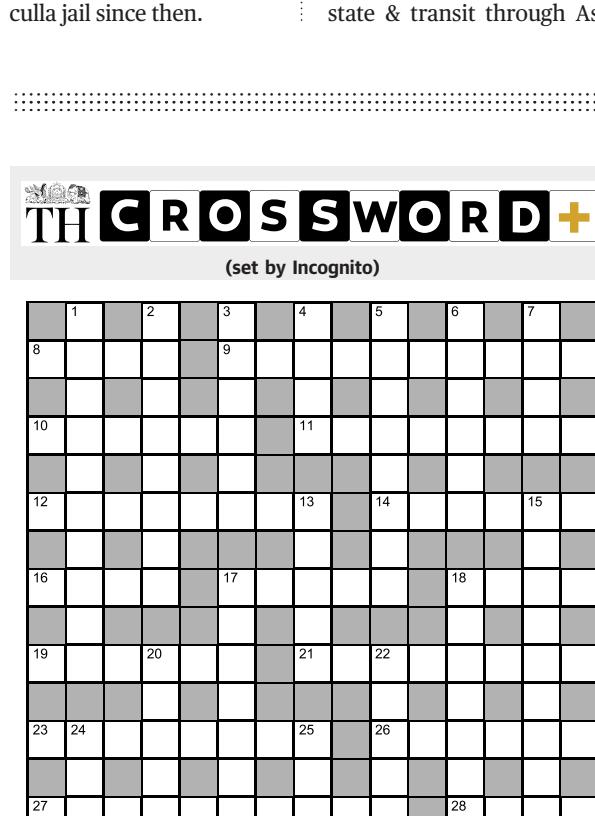
## FAITH

### Greatness of Hastigiri

In his Varadaraja stavam, Kooratazhvan says the Vedas longed to be like Hastigiri, the hill on which Lord Varadaraja of Kanchipuram stands. The Vedas tell us about Brahman – the Supreme One. Hastigiri also shows us the same Brahman, albeit in archa form. Why then should the Vedas want to be like Hastigiri?

The desire of the Vedas implies the superiority of Hastigiri to the Vedas, in showing us Brahman, said Valayapet Ramachariar in a discourse. So, what is this superiority? In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, there is a section known as Moorthaamortha Brahmanam. It talks about Brahman being antaryami, indwelling, in all. The Lord wears a yellow garment, and He is white in colour like pure white wool. He is like a lotus. He sparkles like thousands of fireflies (Indragopa) gathered together in one place. It seems as if He is surrounded by lightning on all sides.

After describing the Supreme One, the Upanishad says “neti,” meaning “not so”. Neti (na iti) does not mean that He is without any qualities. If that interpretation were to be taken, then why did the Upanishad go to the trouble of listing His qualities? It means that these are not the only qualities He has. He has many more, too many, in fact to be laid out fully. In other words, His qualities are infinite. So, clearly, the Vedas admit that He is beyond description. They express their inability to describe His infinite qualities. He is beyond comprehension by our indriyas. But Hastigiri, the hill abode of Lord Varadaraja, puts before our eyes (aparoksham) such a Supreme Brahman. No wonder the Vedas consider this hill to be their superior, for it achieves what the Vedas are unable to. Vedanta Desika says that the 24 tattvas reside in Lord Varadaraja, showing the greatness of Hastigiri.



#### ACROSS

- 8 After morning, doctor makes cartridges, perhaps (4)
- 9 Place for a ring in Superman's change room (5,5)
- 10 Releases mysterious logs about extra-terrestrial (4,2)
- 11 Right from the beginning, put that thing in a container before 10 (2,6)
- 12 Officer commanding police department with ward in the West (8)
- 13 Push belief about heaven at first (6)
- 16 Competent student's hugged by Abraham (4)
- 17 Saw baked dish in the outskirts of Secunderabad (5)
- 18 Damage China's internal peace at first (4)
- 19 Wrongly praise ancient empire (6)
- 20 Exchanges damaged red tins around mid-May (6,2)
- 21 Engineers in US time revolutions (8)
- 22 In the end, Los Angeles street starts to look yellow (6)
- 23 Colourful fish that may lead one on a wild goose chase (3,7)
- 24 Trees in Wilhelmshaven (4)
- 25 Send soprano in (4)

CM YK

A ND-NDE

ESHA MODI

It's been a year since I joined college, and I haven't once stepped into my classroom. I haven't run across the campus, I haven't whiled away afternoons over *samosas* at the canteen, I haven't conspired a mass bunk in the back benches. All my classmates are in tiny boxes on a screen in my lap.

Can you be friends with someone you have never met, but spent over 100 hours talking to? It is a strange idea of friendship, one that us first-year college students have been perplexed by, ever since we enrolled in 2020.

A year into the COVID pandemic, this is the new college experience. What seemed like a stop-gap measure in 2020, online classes have changed the way 17- and 18-year-olds are approaching new friendships.

For many teenagers, college is their first window into adult life. The homogeneity of schools gives way as they meet people from a wider variety of backgrounds. The hours and hours spent together in libraries, hostels and dive bars result in a lifetime of influential alumni networks and friendships.

Could this experience be just the same on a single computer screen? I ask others in the same boat as me.

#### A digital family

In the past year, over group projects, assignments, and Zoom classes, Vedant Dugar found a close bond with his classmates from Mumbai, Gurugram and Kolkata. Often, their days would begin by waking each other up for attendance.

By February 2021, they decided to fly down to Mumbai, even

# I'll see you soon?

There are no shared tiffins or dorms this year. Yet, friendships are blossoming over cross-country Secret Santas, socially distanced walks and Zoom dance parties.

This is the new college experience

though their college was still shut, to finally spend some time in real life.

"It didn't feel like I was meeting them for the first time because I already knew so much about them," says Vedant.

"I didn't expect the first year of college to be like this even in my wildest dreams. But once you find the right people – online or offline, everything works itself out," says Ayushi Jain, an 18-year-old studying Economics at MOP Vaishnav College in Chennai. The girls in her batch, she says, cherish a close bond – surprising, as a majority of them had not met each other despite being in the same city.

"Initially, it was funny knowing your new best friend lives only 15 minutes away and you still can't meet her," says Ayushi of her friend, Chetana Boothra, who like her, lives in T Nagar.

Long calls for work eventually turned into lighter conversation

and fostered deeper, meaningful relationships. But to help break the ice, they first had to move away from the stilted formality of Zoom classes. In after-school icebreaker sessions, party games like '2 truths and 1 lie' helped get them more comfortable.

When they did finally meet, it was at college while submitting their documents. Spotting and recognising mask-covered faces that they had only so far seen on their screens was like a game in itself, says Ayushi.

She and Chetana have now started to coordinate their

morning walks so they can meet each other safely. The girls hope to eventually be able to meet up as a class at least once a month – at cafes, restaurants or the beach. "It's such a tough time but having each other's back through it all helps," she says.

Back in 2020, Salem-based Mitali Surana, a 1st year BBA student had zero expectations from online classes. Making

friends had never been an issue for the self-proclaimed extrovert, but she adds, "I was very sceptical about how genuine virtual friends could even be."

What she did not foresee was that she would be binge-watching romcoms till 2.30 am every other night and practising Chloe Ting workouts in the day, with these very new-found friends. When Mitali came to visit her



## The old Danish road in Bengal

In Serampore, a former Danish colony, old landmarks are being restored back to life, recreating memories brick by brick

PRYADARSHINI PAITANDY

It is snooker night at The Denmark Tavern. Dressed in my weekend best, I wait for the ferry to take me across the Hooghly river. As the motor vessel glides to my destination, I see my friends waving from the grand balcony of the tavern.

The 10,000 square-feet property looks like a large yellow fondant cake. In its elegant new avatar, it houses a restaurant, bar, an outlet of the popular Flurys, and six cosy rooms – all run by The Park.

There are wooden stairs, large green louvered windows, high ceilings and arched doorways. More Danish elements make their presence felt, right from prints in the upholstery, cane headboards and wood carved flowers to distressed white furniture and vintage chandeliers.

It might be 2021, but here, in Serampore it still feels like 1786 at the tavern, started by Englishman James Parr in this area once known as Frederiksnagore (after Danish King Frederik VI).

Over the centuries, the charming Denmark Tavern and a few other

notable buildings – set up between 1755 and 1845, during the years of the Danish Colony in Serampore – fell into obsolescence. All that remained were crumbling vestiges of their thriving past, overrun by creepers.

Fortunately, The Serampore Initiative, founded in 2008 by the National Museum of Denmark, (funded by RealDanica) came up with the idea of documenting and preserving cultural heritage from the Danish period. In 2013, work started on some of these buildings; the first being St Olav's Church. It was a mammoth effort.

"For the first time in West Bengal you saw external funding coming from Denmark, and the State Tourism Department of the Government of West Bengal also chipped in," says conservation architect Manish Chakraborti, who worked on these projects.

"The church also received the UNESCO award for conservation in 2016," says Bente Wolff, associate professor at University of Copenhagen and project director of the Serampore Initiative, adding that INTACH Kolkata Chapter was its

project partner in India for the tavern and other buildings, while the Bishop of Calcutta, CNI (Church of North India) was for the church.

"In the meantime, in 2009 the Government of West Bengal had decided to restore the former Danish Governor House," says Wolff. "Fully ready now, the house is known as the Serampore Information and Culture Centre. It will house, among other things, an exhibition space that will showcase Serampore's history and restoration," she says, pleased with the way these projects have given the area more visibility over the last few years. The church, today, is a vision in yellow and white. From barely existing with a collapsed roof and weak columns, to now living an awe-inspiring life with its majestic spire visible from as far as Barrackpore, it has come a long way. While working on the church, a detailed paint analysis was followed. To ascertain the original colour, the team went through the different layers of paint and found that the last layer of mortar on the external wall was yellow. The restored Governor House also has the same

yellow paint.

In 2016, after the team (comprising Danish architect Flemming Aalund and Indian architects along with Chakraborti) completed work on the church, it rolled up its sleeves and plunged neck deep into Denmark Tavern and the unspeakable quantity of debris that lay around it. Getting access was a project unto itself, laughs Chakraborti, who is delighted with the final outcome. "It has a fantastic presence. To anybody passing by it says, 'I am here. Look at me!'"

"When the decision was taken at the highest level, to restore the whole building, we looked at a lot of documents in India and Copenhagen, Denmark. We didn't get a plan, but we got a lot of sketches," says Chakraborti. Aided by solid documentation and archaeological evidence – that required a lot of exploring – the team, including restoration agency Mascon Kolkata, tried to retain authentic, building walls exactly where they existed earlier. "We are true to the layout of the site," announces Chakraborti.



New old friends (Clockwise from below) The writer when she first met her MOP Vaishnav College friends; students from Stella Maris on a beach hangout, and at a cafe ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



friends in Chennai for the first time, she stayed at her best friend's house, whom she had just met, for two days.

Because, she eventually discovered that as difficult as it is making friends online, the more real is the connection for it requires that much greater time and effort.

Just ask the first-year students of ISDI, Mumbai. In the class of 28 people, everyone is scattered across 22 states including Gujarat, West Bengal, Delhi, Haryana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and more.

That did not stop 13 of them from playing a cross-country Secret Santa last December. In a sisterhood of travelling gifts, everyone couriered their presents to another and on Christmas Eve, unwrapped them to

gether while guessing who it was from. "Whenever it is someone's birthday, or the end of an exam, or a festival, we party online. Everyone grabs some snacks and something to drink. We synchronise our virtual backgrounds and this one friend plays the DJ and makes us dance," says Khushiyaa Taleda from Chennai.

Cross country for you At Chennai's Loyola college, however, the party was not virtual. Before the second surge began, and the situation seemed stable, the first year batch planned an informal fresher's day in March 2021. Of the 26 people that made it, 15 were from Chennai. The rest flew in from Delhi and Kerala, and other parts of Tamil Nadu such as Salem, Coimbatore and Erode.

Hosted at Level Up in Aminjikarai, they met the faces they had only ever seen on Zoom calls, muddling through awkward introductions. A twisted version of Bingo to crown a Mr Fresher soon warmed things up. The boys, joined by their seniors, headed over to a private villa on ECR and stayed up the entire night, talking. When they left the next day, they were unsure if they would ever meet again in person.

Cut to the second wave of the pandemic, and now with Mumbai under a crippling load of positive cases, the ISDI batch can only dream of meeting their friends from other cities. They wonder out loud how they would react when they do. Dramatic gushing? Sprinting? Bear hugs?

"If we meet.. No, wait not 'if', when we meet it's going to be a full Bollywood kind of run and hug," says Khushiyaa, "And I can't wait."

## Spotting the elusive big cat

Photographer Ismail Shariff tells us how to pick out a snow leopard in its natural habitat



PRABALIKA M BORAH

snow leopards. The last time he went was in February 2020, just before the nation went into lockdown. "Unfortunately, my hard disk crashed and the only image that I could salvage was that of the snow leopard drinking water."

A snow leopard expedition conductor for bespoke tour operator Voygr in India and Central Asia, Ismail says that it is an extremely shy animal. "One needs trained eyes to spot it in the snow," he adds. Snow leopards are smaller in size to regular leopards found in the wild, but they appear bigger due to their thick fur. "The thickness of their fur in the stomach can be upto 12 inches, and the tail is as long as its body. The snow leopard uses its bushy tail as a muffler when sleeping curled up," he notes.

It took him several visits to track the animal's movement in the snow. "The photograph resurfacing shows that there are a lot of people who are learning about Indian wildlife." The comments on his viral photo made him wonder if conducting online sessions may help add more awareness on the elusive big cat. "I will conduct sessions for another week," he says.

Ismail started photographing snow leopards in 2014; this particular photograph that has gone viral shows the animal camouflaged in the rocky Himalayan terrain. Ismail is a regular to Spiti Valley; every year he visits to photograph

Danish pastry and Kishore Kumar  
At The Denmark Tavern in Serampore; (bottom) a craftsman at work ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

As an example, he mentions a spiral staircase and the controversy surrounding it. There was ambiguity about where it originally stood: At the rear, or front of the building. After a few excavations they found proof that it actually was at the rear. A portion of the original brick spiral staircase still exists right next to the new steel staircase that people use.

In keeping with the old world charm, the team stuck to materials like lime, *sarkhi*, and brick. "Earlier, all old buildings used to be lime-washed as it is porous and allows breathability, unlike acrylic paint," says Chakraborti.

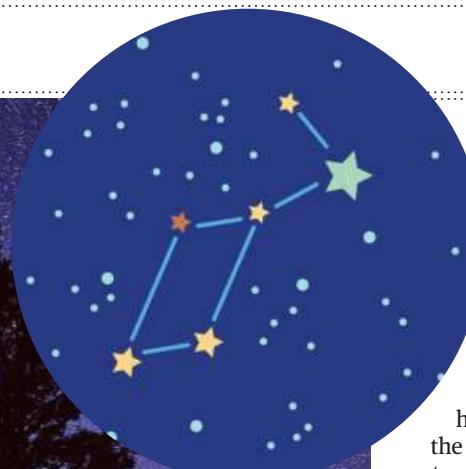
Whenever the team had doubts, it conducted an excavation. "The construction is based on a lot of research and evidence," he explains. The tavern was completed in 2018. The stunning results can be credited to the 100-plus workers from Bengal who toiled on it.

#### Thriving with life

Initially, there was talk of turning the space into a museum. "If you put so much cost into restoring a building, then why convert it into a museum? It is not a money earner," says Chakraborti. In its third year now, the restored tavern is a popular hangout for locals as well as those coming from Kolkata and the surrounding districts. Some take a cab, some cover half the distance by local train, and then there are those who prefer the ferry.

The area is fairly quiet, but by sundown, every other sound gets drowned out by the birds. As night falls, lights come alive and the river glitters like molten gold. The large verandah, overlooking a narrow street and a wide expanse of the river, is filled with the aroma of roast chicken and Danish pastry.

Patrons settle down with their meals and drinks. In the distance, ferries lit in psychedelic lights float past, their passengers singing songs of Kishore Kumar, set to what sounds like orchestral background music. Trees sway, their leaves rustling melodiously, and a cool breeze frolics through the imposing facade, caressing each face and disheveling hair. In that moment, all that matters is being alive and present in the now.



# What the comet left behind

MEGHNA MAJUMDAR

It never hurts to look up at the night sky. Stars explode, comets careen, cosmic miracles take place at an inconceivable scale far beyond our line of sight, and the only indication we get is the lightest of twinkles above our heads.

Every once in a while, however, one of these phenomena deigns to enter our humble fields of vision. And while the Lyrids meteor shower is not the most exciting of them, it is among the first meteor showers of the year – and one of two reasons for us to keep our eyes trained towards the sky this month.

The showers can be seen at their peak tonight (as well as a few days before and after), however their glow might be dimmed by the other phenomenon of the month: a supermoon on April 26.

"What would have happened is that a comet would have broken up, probably centuries ago. We [the Earth] will be passing through the tail of the comet, or through what is left of it. This particular one is what we pass every year, around the third week of April," explains Jayant Murthy, a scientist and professor at the Bengaluru-based Indian Institute of Astrophysics, over the phone. He adds, "The comet itself came by our solar system in the mid-1800s, and won't be coming back for a while."

## MAJOR METEOR SHOWERS THROUGH THE YEAR

January:	Quadrantids
April:	Lyrids
April-May:	eta Aquariids
August:	Perseids
October:	Orionids
December:	Geminids

Neeraj Ladia, head of education organisation SPACE Chennai, explains further: "When the debris is left in space, it has a fixed space in the sky. Due to the Earth's revolution it will cross the debris that lies in the path of its orbit." The parts of debris that encounter our atmosphere begin to burn, creating the spectacle of bright, streaking meteors.

Murthy adds that this particular shower does have a few bright fragments, and can be best viewed after midnight on a dark sky, ideally one not lit up by bright city lights. "It will be brightest between April 21 and 23. Look towards the Lyra constellation to spot it," he suggests.

The constellation, which the meteor shower has been named after, is considered the radiant point of the shower, explains Ladia. In simple terms, as the Earth nears this debris, that constellation is the point from where the

The mild Lyrids meteor shower has been gracing our night sky without fanfare every April, for centuries. This year, it has to tussle with a supermoon for attention



**What a wonderful world** (Clockwise from top) Lyrids meteor shower; an illustration of the Lyra constellation; a supermoon in Chennai in 2016

■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK AND AFP

shower appears to begin, to us.

Ladia calls this radiant point a meteor shower's "address in the sky". Whichever constellation it seems to be coming from, he says, is what the meteor shower is

named after: Lyrids for Lyra, Geminids for Gemini, Perseid for Perseus and so on.

How powerful a meteor shower is, depends on a number of factors, such as how powerful the de-

bris is, the size of each individual particle, its luminosity, and its rate per hour. The standard for measuring that last factor, says Ladia, "is zhr or zenithal hourly rate: how many meteors can one person see per hour on a clear night. It is the measure of the quality of a meteor shower."

Lyrids has a zhr of 15 to 20 on dark skies, adds Ladia: "It isn't very good, it is considered a fairly normal zhr. Geminids [in December] on the other hand has almost 120 zhr. Perseid, which is coming in August, will have around 80 meteors per hour."

He further adds that Lyrids might be even less bright this year, because of its close proximity to the supermoon. "There is already a gibbous moon in the sky, which will only set around 1 am or 2 am each night," he states, adding that post-1 am is the best time to make an attempt if you live close to dark skies.

## Clash of the titans

The biggest danger of the meteor shower being drowned out by luminosity still stems from the supermoon, which also happens to be the first of its kind this year. Supermoons are generally the brightest and largest full moons of the year, and can occur two or three times a year if certain factors fall exactly into place.

Shweta Kulkarni, chief executive officer of Pune-based organisation Astron, which works to spread awareness of astronomy, explains the concept of a supermoon. "The lunar orbit around the Earth is elliptical. So the moon is sometimes very close to the Earth, and sometimes moves further away during its orbit. When it is very close to us and we happen to have a full moon at the same time, we call it a supermoon."

For any satellite, the closest point of orbit to Earth is termed its perigee. According to NASA, both a new moon and a full moon can be termed a supermoon, as long as it is within 90% of perigee.

So what does this mean in visual terms? According to both Kulkarni and Ladia, it is difficult to gauge the difference between a usual full moon and a supermoon unless you put their photographs side by side.

"The difference in size is just about 10% to 14%, so there isn't much to notice once it's up in the sky," adds Ladia, "You can tell it most drastically when the moon is still rising. Closer to the horizon, with buildings, trees or other structures for reference, it can look amazing." Space Chennai is organising a photography contest, as well as a Facebook Live on April 26. "Anyone can join in and enjoy it," adds Ladia.

So you can keep your cameras and telephoto lenses ready, or you can just sit back and watch the sky and all its miracles, letting it provide some of the succour we so desperately need.

# A win for the Partition Museum

As the iconic Amritsar museum wins a prestigious tourism award, Lady Kishwar Desai speaks on the future of history tourism amid the pandemic



**Remember, remember** Partition Museum at Town Hall houses personal artefacts of refugees, among other things ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

As one of the pillars of India's recorded history, the Partition Museum in Amritsar located in the graceful red brick Town Hall has made the country proud, winning the 'Best Wider World Tourism Project' award at the British Guild of Travel Writers International Tourism (BGTW) Awards 2020, held online on April 18 in the United Kingdom.

The museum opened its doors to the public in August 2017 after more than a year of planning and development of what would be the world's first museum and memorial on the Partition. It comprises 14 galleries, all housing audio-visual records, artworks of various mediums (photographs to paintings), as well as numerous refugee artefacts.

During the pandemic, the museum adapted to social distancing by making tours virtual and hosting online film screenings, talks and exhibitions. The museum also teamed up with Google Arts & Culture for virtual interactive showcases like The Railways and Partition. It also collaborated with the District Education Department for an educational programme with audio-visual files to facilitate a virtual tour for schoolchildren.

There will be a second museum on the Partition at the Dara Shikoh Library Building, Old Delhi, which will be ready by August 15, in time for India@75. The adaptive reuse of this historic building has been possible through the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, and the Art, Culture and Language Department, Government of Delhi.

Thrilled at the win, Lady Kishwar Desai, Chair of the Arts and Culture Heritage Trust, speaks of the future of museum tourism amid a difficult year. "What we are experiencing now is a temporary phenomena, perhaps disrupting travel for a year or two which is nothing in the history of civilisation. After all, we still visit Hampi and Khajuraho hundreds of years after these were created," she says. "Museums are modern methods of preserving history and culture and once the pandemic is behind us, people will want to travel again and these museums will hopefully outlast the events of today."



GAUTAM SUNDER

John Stamos describes his Indian trip from seven years ago a "very special" experience.

"I went to Rishikesh where the Maharsi's (Mahesh Yogi) Ashram is. I had heard so many tales from when The Beatles met him, and my friends, The Beach Boys, told me all about their fascinating concert tour with him. But you know what, we couldn't find the place! Still, it was an incredible trip and I loved the people there, who had great hearts and lived life to the fullest really."

Stamos is as handsome, if not more, as he was during his *Full House* days. "Call it good genes, I guess?" grins the 57-year-old actor, as he gets ready to talk about his latest project, the Disney+ dramedy *Big Shot*, which is produced

**Having a ball** John Stamos in *Big Shot* ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

by David E Kelly (the creator of *Ally McBeal*, *Big Little Lies*, *Boston Legal* and several other blockbusters).

By the looks of it, *Big Shot* seems like a strange call to cast Stamos as Marvyn Korn, a disgraced, disgruntled basketball coach who gets sacked by the NCAA for his anger issues, and has to take on a role at the Westbrook School for Girls where he attempts to steer the teens towards success. Moreover, the actor didn't know the first thing about playing basketball.

"I had never shot hoops earlier, and I am just not a sports person at all. I was a band geek back then...I still am," he laughs. "So when I first got the call for a new David E Kelley show, I immediately thought I was going to play a lawyer. Maybe I had a role on *Big Little Lies*? But when I heard it was about basketball, I was like oh no."

Stamos, who has also appeared in other successful shows like *ER* and *Grandfathered*, says *Big Shot* feels like a "show for the times" because of how much it bats for women's equality in sports. "It reiterates that women are just as good as men, if not better. It focuses on the relationship between individuals, and shows how this character of a resentful coach lets go of his preconceived notions, and listens and learns from the teenagers he is mentoring."

The actor is also full of praise for co-actors such as Yvette Nicole Brown and Jessalyn Gilsig and calls them "super-pros". Were they impressed that they were working with Uncle Jesse himself?

"Well, they acted very cool about it in the beginning and all, but eventually, it snuck out that they were fans (*laughs*). They all came to my place once for a socially-distanted screening of a couple of episodes, and were such a hit with my three-year-old!"

## The way forward

Despite the sets shutting down a few times during the pandemic, Stamos is very grateful that they could go back and finish the shooting of *Big Shot*'s first season.

He says he hated being in quarantine though, as it meant being away from his wife and son. "Fatherhood has changed me, and watching my son become his own person – even at the age of three – is magical. There is actually a monologue my character Marvyn has in the show, where he explains why being a dad is all about sacrifice. You put aside what you want for the good of your child. You don't get a banner or trophy for it, but if you do it right, you get a kid who is more loving, more caring, a better version of you. That rings true everyday with my kid."

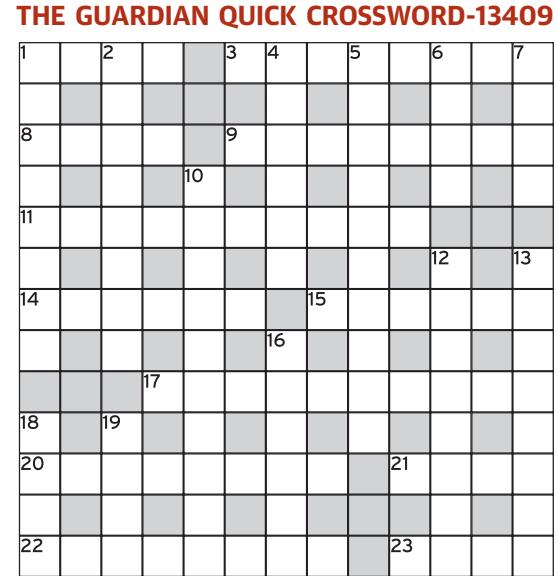
What is next for him? "I have had a nice steady career, stayed under the radar and kept working constantly. There are several highlights, working with other great actors and producers, being mentored by Jack Pugman, and getting into theatre on Broadway, and so on. I was fearless then, much like the young teen actors I have worked with on *Big Shot*. Now? Apart from my career, I love fatherhood so much that I am looking forward to having my second child soon."

The first episode of *Big Shot* is currently streaming on Disney+ Hotstar.

# What's Uncle Jesse got to say?

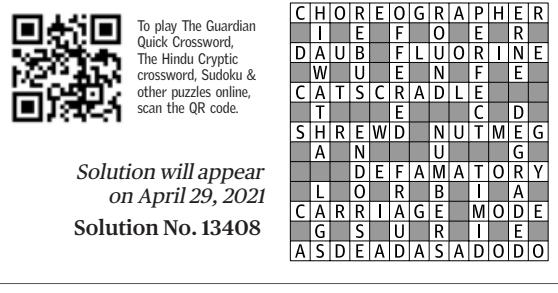
Actor John Stamos talks about his new dramedy, *Big Shot*, in which he plays a disgraced basketball coach, and the legacy of his character from *Full House*

## THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13409



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- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| ■ Across                            | ■ Down  |
| 1 Early American revolver (4)       | 1 Underground cemetery (8)                            |
| 3 Broke through (8)                 | 2 Song writer – it's Cyril (anag) (8)                 |
| 8 Become weary (4)                  | 4 Repeat from memory (6)                              |
| 9 Seafood (8)                       | 5 Nevertheless (3,3,4)                                |
| 11 Fairground attraction (7,3)      | 6 Cowl – violent criminal (slang) (4)                 |
| 14 Square peg in a round hole (6)   | 7 Directional antenna – good-looking woman or man (4) |
| 15 Have ambitious plans for (6)     | 10 Poorly (10)  |
| 17 In a sticky situation? (2,1,3,4) | 12 Severe recurrent headache (8)                      |
| 20 Self-important (8)               | 13 Graveyard (8)                                      |
| 21 Ill-temper (4)                   | 16 Set aside (6)                                      |
| 22 Better balanced (8)              | 18 Loch in the Great Glen (4)                         |
| 23 Reject as false (4)              | 19 Unemployment benefit (4)                           |



To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoko & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

**Solution will appear on April 29, 2021**

**Solution No. I3408**

**CM YK**

# Chauvin convicted of Floyd's murder

The former police officer faces a potential 40-year jail sentence; Biden slams 'systemic racism' in U.S.

**SRIRAM LAKSHMAN**  
WASHINGTON

Former Minneapolis cop Derek Chauvin, 45, was found guilty of murder and manslaughter by a jury on Tuesday, nearly a year after he used his knee to pin the neck of an African American man, George Floyd, to the ground, killing him. Mr. Chauvin, who is white, faces a potential 40-year jail sentence.

Floyd's death sparked 'Black Lives Matter' protests for racial justice across America, the likes of which the country had not seen since the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

Floyd's brother, Philonise Floyd, speaking to CNN, described sitting in the courtroom listening to the verdict as, "a moment I would never be able to re-live, I will always have inside of me." An emotional Mr. Philonise talked about his faith and listed the names of other victims of police violence.

Tuesday's result was announced after a jury of six white and six racial minorities reached a (necessarily) unanimous verdict deliberated for some 10 hours and found Chauvin guilty on counts of second degree unintentional murder, third de-



**Day of reckoning:** Derek Chauvin listening to the verdict before being taken away and people marching in Atlanta. ■ AFP

gree murder and second-degree manslaughter.

Floyd had said, "I can't breathe" repeatedly during the approximately nine-minute encounter with Chauvin on May 25 last year, an encounter that was filmed by bystanders, particularly a teenage girl, whose footage went viral on social media. Witnesses to the incident pleaded with the police to let go of Floyd.

**Others charged**  
Three other officers have been charged with aiding and abetting murder in the second degree.

The trial was televised and

Mr. Chauvin, 45, dressed in a grey suit and wearing a surgical mask, appeared to listen intently, eyes darting from side to side, as the judge read out the verdict for each of three charges brought against him by the State of Minnesota. The judge revoked his bail \$1 million and Chauvin was handcuffed and taken into custody immediately.

While the verdict was welcomed in Washington D.C., the expressions of relief were tempered with reminders that this was a beginning and not an end to systemic racism.

"It was a murder in the full light of day," Mr. Biden said,

polis did the right thing," former U.S. President Barack Obama wrote, saying justice was done in this particular case at least.

"But if we're being honest with ourselves, we know that true justice is about much more than a single verdict in a single trial," Mr. Obama, said.

#### Biden's address

President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris, the first African American woman in her position, addressed the nation on Tuesday night after the verdict was announced.

"America has a long history of systemic racism," she said, adding that Black people – Black men in particular – have been treated as "less than human" throughout the course of history.

"Black men are fathers, and brothers, and sons, and uncles, and grandfathers, and friends, and neighbours. Their lives must be valued in our education system, in our health-care system, in our housing system, in our economic system, in our criminal-justice system, in our nation," Ms. Harris said.

"It was a murder in the full light of day," Mr. Biden said,

calling systemic racism "a stain on the nation's soul." Mr. Biden said he had spoken with the family of Mr. Floyd again – he had spoken with them on Monday.

"I'm praying that the verdict is the right verdict," Mr. Biden had said earlier. It is rare for a sitting President to comment on the outcome of a trial before its conclusion. However, Mr. Biden said he had waited until the jury was sequestered (i.e., without access to the outside world) before calling the family.

"Let's also be clear that such a verdict is also much too rare," Mr. Biden said on Tuesday night. "For so many people, it seems like it took a unique and extraordinary convergence of factors. A brave young woman with a smartphone camera, a crowd who was traumatised... a murder that lasts [sic] almost ten minutes in broad daylight... officers standing up and testifying against a fellow officer instead of just closing ranks... for so many it feels like it took all of that for the judicial system to deliver... just basic accountability."

Chauvin will be sentenced in approximately eight weeks.

Shipping firm didn't obtain prior nod for 'dangerous cargo'

**MEERA SRINIVASAN**  
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka on Tuesday detected radioactive material on a China-bound vessel berthed at the southern Hambantota Port. The vessel has been asked to leave the Port, according to officials, as the shipping company failed to obtain prior clearance for "dangerous cargo", as per Sri Lankan law.

When contacted, Sri Lankan Navy spokesman Captain Indika de Silva confirmed the development.

Officials said a local shipping company, handling the vessel sailing under the flag of Antigua and Barbuda, from Rotterdam in the Netherlands to China, cited a "mechanical emergency" and sought permission from the harbour manager at the China-run Hambantota Port. However, the company did not declare that the cargo was radioactive material, a requirement under Sri Lanka's Atomic Energy Act.

The vessel was found to be carrying uranium hexafluoride, which is classified under "dangerous cargo", according to officials. "Ura-



A file photo of the Hambantota Port. ■ R.K. RADHAKRISHNAN

nium hexachloride is nuclear material that is commonly transported from one country to another. But as per Sri Lankan law, we need any vessel carrying radioactive material to obtain prior permission before berthing at any of our ports. This vessel had not obtained that clearance," H.L. Anil Ranjith, Director General of Sri Lanka Atomic Energy Regulatory Council, told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

**Ordered to leave**

"After consulting the Ministry of Defence, we have asked the vessel to leave the

Port," he said.

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition and the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB or United People's Front) Sajith Premadasa raised the issue in Parliament on Wednesday. The Navy had "not been allowed to board the vessel to carry out an inspection", he said, adding: "The government appears to be under pressure from a diplomatic mission." He did not name the mission. "I am asking the government to examine this... this is a very serious matter, something that can affect the life of our community," Mr. Premadasa said.

# Justice department to probe Minneapolis policing

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
WASHINGTON

The Department of Justice is opening a sweeping investigation into policing practices in Minneapolis after a former officer was convicted in the killing of George Floyd there, Attorney General Merrick Garland announced on Wednesday.

The decision comes a day after former officer Derek Chauvin was found guilty of

murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death last May, setting off a wave of relief across the country.

**Pattern or practice?**  
The new investigation is known as a "pattern or practice" – examining whether there is a pattern or practice of unconstitutional or unlawful policing – and will be a more sweeping probe of the entire police department

and may result in major changes to policing there.

It will examine the use of force by police officers, including force used during protests, and whether the department engages in discriminatory practices. It will also look into the department's handling of misconduct allegations and its treatment of people with behavioural health issues and will assess the department's current systems of accountability, Mr. Garland said.

It's unclear whether the years under investigation will begin when Floyd died or before. Mr. Garland said a public report would be issued, if the department finds a pattern or practice of unconstitutional policing.

The department could also bring a lawsuit against the police department, which in

the past have typically ended in settlement agreements or consent decrees to force changes.

The Minneapolis Police Department is also being investigated by the Minnesota Department of Human Rights, which is looking into the department's policies and practices over the last decade to see if it engaged in systemic discriminatory practices.

The measure, sponsored by Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, Republican Senator Todd Young and others, would also authorise \$10 billion to designate at least 10 technology hubs and create a supply chain crisis response programme.

The Bill, called the "Endless Frontier Act," repre-

sents a significant effort by the government to shore up private sector and university research efforts in advanced technologies with federal funding.

The Senate Commerce Committee is expected to mark up the Bill next week as Mr. Schumer looks to fast-track approval.

# U.S. lawmakers back \$100 bn science push to take on China

**REUTERS**  
WASHINGTON

A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers on Wednesday introduced legislation calling for \$100 billion in government spending over five years on basic and advanced technology research and science in the face of rising pressure from China.

The measure, sponsored by Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, Republican Senator Todd Young and others, would also authorise \$10 billion to designate at least 10 technology hubs and create a supply chain crisis response programme.

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resents a significant effort by the government to shore up private sector and university research efforts in advanced technologies with federal funding.

The Senate Commerce Committee is expected to mark up the Bill next week as Mr. Schumer looks to fast-track approval.

# Sri Lanka marks Easter bombing anniversary

Devotees gather at attacked church; Opposition, Catholic leaders slam government for delay in probe



**Grim memories:** Families of victims of the 2019 Easter attacks at St. Anthony's Church in Colombo on Wednesday. ■ AP

the eastern city of Batticaloa, and three luxury hotels in Colombo, gripping the country in shock a decade after its civil war.

The head of Sri Lanka's Roman Catholic Church Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith said he was "deeply saddened" by the lack of progress in the investigation. "We have to stress that what is happening at the moment is an attitude of 'don't care', where all factors are not properly investigated," he said, speaking at

after the Easter attacks, on the plank of enhanced national security, vowing to bring perpetrators to justice. His victory brought hope to many who were outraged by the security lapses in the former Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe administration ahead of the terror attack, despite receiving prior intelligence, including from India.

Making a special statement in Parliament on Wednesday, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa said all those responsible for the Easter attacks would be brought to justice. His statement came a day after Opposition lawmaker Harin Fernando from the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB, or United People's Front) made serious accusations in Parliament, linking a senior intelligence official with the Easter terror network. Earlier, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) leader and MP Anura Kumara Dissanayake alleged that

the Easter day attacks were "politically motivated", and the "real mastermind" is yet to be identified.

A Parliament Select Committee, set up under the former government, and a commission appointed by President Maithripala Sirisena, which continued its probe after regime change, submitted detailed reports on the incident. However, neither has conclusively established what or who drove the nine suicide bombers who blew up themselves, killing and injuring hundreds.

Although the police have arrested some 200 people since the suicide attacks, no one has yet been charged in connection with the bombings. On the eve of the second anniversary, 16 men among them were charged for allegedly desecrating Buddha statues in December 2018, an incident that investigators consider a precursor to the Easter day attack.

# Slain Chad leader's son takes over reins

Opposition parties call it a 'coup d'état'; rebels threaten to depose Mahamat



Mahamat Idriss Deby

West's anti-jihadist efforts.

Deby's death was announced only a day after provisional results declared him the winner of an April 11 election giving him a sixth term in office.

Allies of the late leader moved swiftly to assure power remained in their hands,

installing Deby's 37-year-old son Mahamat Idriss Deby as President and head of a transitional military council while dissolving Parliament and the government.

**Transition period**  
They tore up Chad's Constitution and established a "Transition Charter" that lays out a new basic law for the country of 16 million people that spans western and central Africa.

The charter issued on Wednesday proclaimed that Mr. Mahamat, a career soldier like his father, will "occupy the functions of the President of the republic" and also serve as head of the armed forces. The transition period is meant to last 18 months and lead to democratic elections, though it can be extended once.

Chad's main opposition parties were unconvinced, denouncing an "institutional coup d'état" in a statement and calling on citizens "not to obey illegitimate decisions".

Rebels have threatened to depose Mr. Mahamat, raising the spectre of a violent power struggle. The rebel group that the military blamed for Deby's killing said on Wednesday that they were giving his family until midnight to bury him. The fighters gave no indication of their positions after saying the day before that they were "heading toward N'Djamena at this very moment".

# Blast in Pak. luxury hotel kills at least 3

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
QUETTA

A powerful bomb exploded in the parking area of a five-star hotel in the southwestern Pakistani city of Quetta on Wednesday, killing at least three people and wounding at least nine others, police said.

It was unclear who was behind the bombing at Sehra Hotel. Police said rescuers were transporting the victims to nearby hospitals. Footage on Pakistani news channels showed burning cars.

Balochistan is the scene of a long-running insurgency by secessionist groups like the Balochistan Liberation Front and the Balochistan Liberation Army.

# Japan PM sends offering to controversial shrine

China, Koreas often slam such moves

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
TOKYO

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on Wednesday donated a religious offering to a Tokyo shrine viewed by China and both Koreas as a symbol of wartime aggression, though he avoided a visit.

Mr. Suga's predecessor, Shinzo Abe, known for revisionism concerning Japan's wartime atrocities, visited the shrine on Wednesday.

Mr. Abe stayed away from the shrine for seven years after his 2013 visit triggered outrage from China and the Koreas. However, he has regularly visited since he resigned as Prime Minister last year.

# ELSEWHERE



## Indonesian submarine missing with 53 aboard

JAKARTA  
Indonesia's military said it was searching for a submarine with 53 crew aboard after losing contact with the vessel during naval exercises off the coast of Bali on Wednesday. The German-built KRI *Nanggala* 402 was scheduled to do live torpedo exercises when it asked for permission to dive early Wednesday morning, authorities said. A helicopter looking for the missing vessel spotted an oil spill in waters where the submarine was thought to have submerged, it added. The Navy said it had narrowed down the search based on the spill. ■ AFP

Farm exports rose 16.9% in April-Feb. FY21

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

India exported agricultural commodities worth ₹2.74 lakh crore till February of the 2020-21 fiscal, a 16.9% increase from ₹2.31 lakh crore in the year earlier, notwithstanding the pandemic, the agriculture ministry said on Wednesday.

Similarly, imports of agriculture and allied commodities increased by 3% to ₹1,41,034 crore during the April-February period of 2020-21 from ₹1,37,014 crore in the year earlier period. Despite COVID-19, balance of trade in agriculture has favourably increased to ₹1,32,579.69 crore from ₹93,907.76 crore in the said period, the ministry said in a statement.

"India has consistently maintained trade surplus in the agricultural products over the years. ...Even during the difficult time of the pandemic, India took care not to disturb the world food supply chain and continued to export," the ministry said.

During April-February of the 2020-21 fiscal, the country exported agri-commodities worth ₹2.74 lakh crore as against ₹2.31 lakh crore in the same period of the previous year. Among agri-commodities exported, wheat shipments rose in terms of value to ₹3,283 crore in April-February, from ₹425 crore in the year-earlier period.

NAFED exported 50,000 tonnes wheat to Afghanistan and 40,000 tonnes to Lebanon under government-to-government arrangement. In the case of non-basmati rice export, the ministry said the shipments increased to ₹30,277 crore in April-February of 2020-21 from ₹13,030 crore in the year-earlier period.

## Exporters fret over delay in rebate rates

The RoDTEP scheme came into effect on Jan. 1 but lack of clarity is hampering sector's ability to price

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Even as exporters fret over an inordinate delay in notification of the rates under a new WTO-compliant scheme for rebating taxes and duties to the export sector, they are also seeking greater clarity from the government on some grey areas in the scheme's functioning, according to tax consultancy firm RSM Astute.

### 'Very near future'

On Tuesday, Commerce Secretary Anup Wadhawan had said that the rates under the RoDTEP (Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products) scheme, which came into effect on January 1, would be notified in the 'very, very near future'.

Exporters have been urg-



**Booster dose:** Due to COVID-19, India's exports may require more stimulus, RSM Astute said. ■ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

ing the government to lift the uncertainty over the benefits that would accrue to them under the scheme, as they are finding it difficult to price fresh global orders in

the absence of the crucial information especially in sectors with thin margins.

"The trade and industry is hopeful that the scheme's operation would be smooth,

and concerns would be addressed in the early stages of operationalisation," RSM Astute noted in a white paper on the scheme. "Due to COVID-19, India's exports may require more stimulus and the exporters hope that RoDTEP would not be an impediment to their business plans," it added.

### Grey areas

The consultancy flagged the power given to Customs officers to suspend the scrips or refund credits or even to bar exporters from utilising these scrips especially as the grounds on which such suspensions could be done have not been spelt out.

As per government statements, the refund of taxes on exports would be credited to exporters' ledger ac-

count with the Customs department, which could be utilised to pay basic customs duty on imported goods. "Clarity would be required whether the refund could be utilised to pay other taxes on imported goods such as IGST and Social Welfare Surcharge," the tax consultant said. Under the MEIS scheme, which RODTEP has replaced, these refund credits could be used to pay customs duty, additional customs duty (with some exceptions) as well as central excise duties.

"With all these steps, we should hope to see a positive change in the way the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic is moving," she said in a meeting with the FICCI national executive.

"I would request the industry to watch the next few days a bit more carefully, and then assess for yourself what this quarter is going to be like," the minister added.

Wait and watch, FM tells industry on second wave

'Govt. with industry in fighting COVID'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Assuring industry of 'full government support', Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said India Inc. must 'wait and watch' as the second wave of COVID-19 plays out. She added that the PM's address and new vaccination norms would add 'a sense of reassurance'.



Nirmala Sitharaman

FICCI president Uday Shankar flagged the need for clarity on the supply of essential and non-essential goods affected by local lockdowns in some parts of the country as also the need to extend support to the micro, small and medium enterprises, which were currently facing difficulties.

## COVID cuts a fifth of ONGC capex in FY21

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

ONGC spent about one-fifth less than its budgeted capex in 2020-21 fiscal after COVID-19-related restrictions delayed projects but fuel marketers such as IOC exceeded targets, a government report showed.

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) had budgeted ₹32,502 crore of capital spending in the fiscal from April 2020 to March 2021 but ended up spending only ₹26,441 crore, according to the report of the Oil Ministry's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell.

A company official said projects' implementation was delayed following the disruption caused to supply chain and labour movement by COVID-19 curbs.

## Oil slips as India's COVID surge dents outlook

Key importer reports record deaths

REUTERS  
LONDON

Oil prices fell for a second day on Wednesday, heading for their biggest daily drop in more than two weeks and weighed down by concerns that surging COVID-19 cases in India will drive down fuel demand in the world's third-biggest oil importer.

Brent crude futures for June declined \$1.14, or 1.7%, to \$65.43 a barrel at 12:50 GMT.

"Demand jitters were thrust back into the spotlight yesterday amid a sharp rise in global coronavirus cases," PVM analysts said. "Nowhere is this more obvious than in India."

India, also the world's third-largest oil user, on Wednesday reported another



er record increase in the daily death toll from COVID-19.

Raising the possibility of further oil supply, Iran and world powers have made headway in talks to save a 2015 nuclear accord.

Still, major oil trading companies are stowing diesel and jet fuel on newly built supertankers in Asia and Africa in anticipation of COVID-19 vaccinations driving prices higher in the months ahead.

## India among top 5 markets for Ericsson

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Swedish telecom gear maker Ericsson, which posted a net sales of SEK49.8 billion in the January-March 2021 quarter, said India figured among the top five countries, accounting for 3% of the net sales.

Other countries in the top five with regard to sales were the U.S. (36%), Japan (8%), Australia (4%) and the U.K. (3%).

The firm said that its currency-adjusted sales increased by 21% year-on-year in southeast Asia, Oceania and India region.

"Sales increased YoY in networks, driven by continued investments in LTE, primarily in India, and by 5G momentum, predominantly in Australia," it said.

## Care Ratings lowers FY22 GDP forecast to 10.2%

Lockdowns to affect GST collections

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

Care Ratings has lowered its India GDP growth forecast to 10.2% for FY22 following fresh lockdowns imposed in parts of the country to control the pandemic.

On March 24, it had projected growth for FY22 to be in the 11-11.2% range based on Gross Value Added (GVA) growth of 10.2%, and on April 5, a day after Maharashtra imposed restrictions, it further lowered its GDP forecast to 10.7-10.9%.

"With conditions changing very swiftly it does become imperative to revisit these numbers more often to get a better sense of the future; and the picture shows a 1% dip from our forecast on March 24, 2021," it added.

'Curbs costing truckers daily ₹1,000 crore'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

Truckers' body AIMTC on Wednesday said the transporters are suffering losses of about ₹1,000 crore per day due to the fresh restrictions and weekly lockdowns in some of the States, and the losses could spike further if certain relief measures are not taken up by the government to mitigate the situation.

On April 12, when restrictions were imposed in Maharashtra, the research unit of the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) had assessed daily loss of about ₹315 crore per day.

According to a fresh assessment, the daily losses have mounted to about ₹1,000 crore per day.

## IN BRIEF



### IndiGo to induct 4 Airbus freighters from 2022

NEW DELHI  
Budget carrier IndiGo said it planned to induct four freighter aircraft starting 2022. The move makes it only the second private passenger airline after SpiceJet to have dedicated cargo planes. The airline would add four A321 CEOs that would be converted to full freighter configuration.

### Car service firm Pitstop to get into EV servicing

MUMBAI  
Pitstop, a tech-enabled, multi-brand car service company, plans to foray into servicing of electric vehicles, mainly 2-wheelers, 3-wheelers and delivery vans. The firm, which operates via 'At-home services Vans' and a network of garages to service internal combustion engine vehicles, will roll out services soon, said founder and CEO Mihir Mohan.

### Swanrose Inc eyes \$5 mn funding for expansion

NEW DELHI  
Swanrose plans to raise \$5 million as it looks to expand in West Asia, and unveil five products this year, said CEO Roshini Sanah Jaiswal – also promoter of whisky-maker Jagatji Industries. With a distillery background, the firm sold alcohol-based sanitisers in India and U.S., clocking \$2 million in revenue within 3 months of starting up last April.

### Tata invests in mail management firm Mailit

MUMBAI  
Mail room management and logistics firm Mailit said it had received investment from Ratan Tata, chairman emeritus, Tata Sons. The firm offers courier, cargo, 3PL, mail-room management, digital solutions and postal services to leading firms and several Tata group companies. It said it would focus on consolidating the entire value chain.

## Fundraising via bonds jumped 14% in FY21

Low rate, liquidity aid private placement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Listed firms mopped up ₹7.72 lakh crore through issuance of bonds on private placement basis in 2020-21, an increase of 14% from the preceding fiscal, supported by low interest rate and surplus liquidity in the system.

This also marks the highest level of fund raising through such a route in a financial year.

Going forward, sustainability of growth trend mainly depends on the trajectory of cost of funds and incremental liquidity in the system, Binod Modi, head-strategy, Reliance Securities, said.

According to data available with markets regulator SEBI, companies listed on the BSE and NSE garnered a total of ₹7.72 lakh crore



through issuance of bonds in the just concluded financial year, much higher than ₹6.75 lakh crore raised in 2019-20.

However, Mr. Modi is of the view that cost of funds is unlikely to remain as low as witnessed in the last two years and therefore, any noticeable growth in fund raising through debt private placement does not look to be on the cards in FY22.

## Hero, Taiwan's Gogoro ally to develop EVs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Two-wheeler maker Hero MotoCorp on Wednesday announced a partnership with Taiwan's Gogoro Inc., a provider of battery swapping platforms, to accelerate the shift to sustainable electric mobility in India.

Under the partnership, the firms would form a joint venture to bring Gogoro's battery-swapping network to India and collaborate on EV development to bring 'Hero-branded, powered-by-Gogoro Network vehicles' to the Indian market.

"This partnership will further extend the work which we are doing at our R&D hubs in Jaipur and Germany," said Pawan Munjal, Chairman and CEO, Hero MotoCorp.

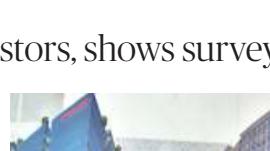
Asked if they offered discounts on property prices to stimulate investor activity, three-fourths (75%) replied in the affirmative.

Of them, more than half (53%) offered discounts within the 0-5% range, while about 40% extended dis-

## Home-buying budgets rise post pandemic'

Discounts drew investors, shows survey

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI



counts that ranged from 5% to 10% of the prices.

A majority (87%) claimed that offering discounts resulted in sales. As many as 85% of those surveyed highlighted millennials (30-40 years) as the most active age group when it came to home buying in 2020.

All the builders expressed satisfaction with the government's steps to bolster demand in the affordable housing segment.

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# Du Plessis, Deepak Chahar help CSK conquer KKR and go top

Opener's 95 n.o. and swing bowler's four-for reduce Kolkata to its knees; free-swinging Russell and Cummins threaten a miracle but 221 proves a bridge too far

## IPL 2021

S. DIPAK RAGAV

Riding on Faf du Plessis' brilliant unbeaten 95 (60b, 9x4, 4x6) and Ruturaj Gaikwad's 64 (42b, 6x4, 4x6), Chennai Super Kings continued its winning momentum, beating Kolkata Knight Riders by 18 runs at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Wednesday.

The openers came together for a 115-run partnership to help CSK post a mammoth score of 220 for three.

However, the three-time champion's third win on the bounce did not come easy.

KKR gave CSK a run for its money despite a disastrous start to its chase. Deepak Chahar ran through the top-order with four wickets in his first three overs. And when Lungi Ngidi had Rahul Tripathi caught behind, KKR was struggling at 31 for five.

Andre Russell, Dinesh Karthik and Pat Cummins then came out all guns blazing, staging a brilliant counter-attack. Russell slammed a 22-ball 54 with six sixes and added 81 in just six overs with Karthik. The West Indian was brutal on Shardul Thakur, hitting him for three sixes and a four in a 24-run over.

However, in the 12th over, Russell inexplicably tried to move away from a back-of-a-length delivery from Sam Curran and was bowled be-



**Smash hit:** du Plessis powered Super Kings to a mammoth total and Deepak Chahar ran through the Knight Riders top-order before Cummins almost pulled it off with a sensational assault. ■ SPORTZPICS/ IPL

hind his legs.

Karthik did his part with a 24-ball 40 before he was trapped leg-before off a slower one from Ngidi.

Just when CSK thought it had things under control, Cummins unleashed his fury on Curran, smashing the left-

armer for 30 in the 16th over, with four sixes and a four.

The Australian did well to shepherd the lower-order by farming the strike and landed some lusty blows in an unbeaten 66 (34b, 4x4, 6x6). He kept his side in the game until the last over but ran out

of partners.

Earlier, du Plessis and Gaikwad started positively, going after Cummins and Varun Chakravarthy to put the pressure on KKR straight away.

Gaikwad stroked some delightful drives through the

off-side and was quick on his feet when challenged with the short ball, playing some well-executed pull shots.

Du Plessis assumed charge of the innings towards its latter half, helped by cameos from Moeen Ali and M.S. Dhoni. The South African

## SCOREBOARD

### CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

Ruturaj Gaikwad c Cummins b Varun 64 (42b, 6x4, 4x6), Faf du Plessis (not out) 95 (60b, 9x4, 4x6), Moeen Ali st. Karthik b Narine 25 (72b, 2x4, 2x6), M.S. Dhoni c Morgan b Russell 17 (8b, 2x4, 1x6), Ravindra Jadeja (not out) 6 (1b, 1x6); Extras w(10, nb-3); Total (for three wkts. in 20 overs): 220.

### FALL OF WICKETS

1-1 (Gill, 0.4), 2-17 (Rana, 2.5), 3-27 (Morgan, 4.3), 4-31 (Narine, 4.6), 5-31 (Tripathi, 5.2), 6-112 (Russell, 11.2), 7-146 (Karthik, 14.6), 8-176 (Nagarkoti, 16.2), 9-200 (Varun, 18.3).

**SUPER KINGS BOWLING**  
1-115 (Ruturaj, 12.2 overs), 2-165 (Moeen, 16.3), 3-201 (Dhoni, 18.6).

**KNIGHT RIDERS BOWLING**  
Varun 4-0-27-1, Cummins 4-0-58-0, Narine 4-0-34-1, Prasidh 4-0-49-0, Russell 2-0-27-1, Nagarkoti 2-0-25-0.

### KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

Nitish Rana c Dhoni b Deepak Chahar 9 (12b, 2x4), Subham Gill c Ngidi b Deepak Chahar 0 (1b), Rahul Tripathi c Dhoni b Ngidi 8 (9b, 1x4), Eoin Morgan c Dhoni b Deepak Chahar 7 (7b, 1x4), Sunil Narine c Jadeja b Deepak Chahar 4 (3b, 1x4), Dinesh Karthik lbw b Ngidi 40 (24b, 4x4, 2x6), Andre Russell b Sam Curran 54 (22b, 3x4, 6x6), Pat Cummins (not out) 66 (34b, 4x4, 6x6), Kamlesh Nagarkoti c du Plessis b Ngidi 0 (2b), Varun Chakravarthy run out 0 (7b),

Prasidh Krishna run out 0 (1b); Extras (b-4, lb-2, w-7, nb-1): 14; Total (in 19.1 overs): 202.

### FALL OF WICKETS

1-1 (Gill, 0.4), 2-17 (Rana, 2.5), 3-27 (Morgan, 4.3), 4-31 (Narine, 4.6), 5-31 (Tripathi, 5.2), 6-112 (Russell, 11.2), 7-146 (Karthik, 14.6), 8-176 (Nagarkoti, 16.2), 9-200 (Varun, 18.3).

**SUPER KINGS BOWLING**  
Deepak Chahar 4-0-29-4, Sam Curran 4-0-58-1, Ngidi 4-0-28-3, Jadeja 4-0-33-0, Shardul 3-0-48-0.

**Toss:** Kolkata Knight Riders.  
**Man-of-the-Match:** du Plessis. Super Kings won by 18 runs.

## Innings scan

CSK	Dots	KKR
39	51	
19	16	
12	14	
54/0	45/5	
11.00	RR	10.53

## Next assignment

**KKR:** April 24 vs. RR, Mumbai, 7.30 p.m.  
**CSK:** April 25 vs. RCB, Mumbai, 3.30 p.m.

## POINTS TABLE

Team	M	W	L	PTS	NRR
Chennai Super Kings	4	3	1	6	1.142
Royal Challengers	3	3	0	6	0.750
Delhi Capitals	4	3	1	6	0.426
Mumbai Indians	4	2	2	4	0.187
Sunrisers Hyderabad	4	1	3	2	-0.228
Kolkata Knight Riders	4	1	3	2	-0.700
Rajasthan Royals	3	1	2	2	-0.719
Punjab Kings	4	1	3	2	-0.824

After the KKR-CSK match on April 21

**C** When you look at the situation from the PowerPlay, only falling around 20 short, it would have been better had we done well at the top

**MORGAN**  
KKR skipper

**FLEMING**  
KKR coach on Ruturaj

# Sunrisers Hyderabad dismantles Punjab Kings, gets off the mark

After bowlers skittle Rahul's men out for 120 on a dry wicket, Bairstow powers Hyderabad to its first win in four games

AYAN ACHARYA

Sunrisers Hyderabad made light work of Punjab Kings' 121-run target, romping home by nine wickets at Chennai's M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Wednesday for its first win of IPL-14.

### Positive start

David Warner and Jonny Bairstow got SRH's chase off to a positive start, racing to 50 for no loss in the six-over PowerPlay, with the latter's two sixes off Fabian Allen and Moises Henriques the highlights. The duo blunted the PBKS attack with some good running and positive strokeplay.

PBKS captain K.L. Rahul would have hoped his spinners would take control through the middle overs and up the asking rate. But the SRH openers kept the scoreboard ticking with occasional big hits while pinching ones and twos.

### Williamson returns

Warner added 73 for the first wicket before holing out for a run-a-ball 37. That didn't deter Bairstow, who hit an unbeaten 63 off 56 balls and in the company of Kane Williamson – who returned after

an elbow niggle – saw the team home with eight balls to spare.

Earlier, electing to bat, PBKS openers Rahul and Mayank Agarwal were suffocated by tight bowling. With the wicket dry and offering turn, left-arm spinner Abhishek Sharma opened the attack and would have dismissed Agarwal in his first over had Rashid Khan held on to a tough chance at deep mid-wicket.

**Rahul goes cheaply**  
SRH, though, didn't have to wait long for its first breakthrough, with Rahul hitting a short-of-a-length delivery from Bhuvneshwar Kumar straight to Kedar Jadhav – one of three changes made by SRH – at short mid-wicket. Warner gave his bowlers one-over spells in the first six except for Bhuvneshwar, who bowled three up front.

Rashid made up for his earlier dropped catch immediately after the PowerPlay when he took a sharp catch at mid-wicket to get rid of Agarwal, and off the first ball of the very next over, Nicholas Pooran, batting at No. 4 for the first time this season, was run out without facing a de-



**The orchestrator:** Bairstow piloted Sunrisers home with an unbeaten 56-ball 63. ■ SPORTZPICS/ IPL

livery. Two balls later, Deepak Hooda would have been caught if Siddarth Kaul had been on the fine-leg boundary instead of being well in-

side it. Then the spinners took over, and PBKS lost its way further. Rashid trapped Chris Gayle in front with a leg-break before Hooda was

## SCOREBOARD

### PUNJAB KINGS

K.L. Rahul c Jadhav b Bhuvneshwar 4 (6b), Mayank Agarwal c Rashid b Khaleel 22 (25b, 2x4), Chris Gayle lbw b Rashid 15 (17b, 2x4), Nicholas Pooran run out 0 (0b), Deepak Hooda lbw b Abhishek 13 (11b, 2x4), Moises Henriques st. Bairstow abhishiek 14 (17b), Shahrukh Khan c Abhishek b Khaleel 22 (17b, 2x4), Fabian Allen c Warner b Khaleel 6 (11b), M. Ashwin c Bairstow b Kaul 9 (10b, 1x4), Mohammed Shami run out 3 (3b), Arshdeep Singh (not out) 1 (2b); Extras (b-9, w-1, nb-1); 11; Total (in 19.4 overs): 121.

### FALL OF WICKETS

1-73 (Warner, 10.1).

### PUNJAB KINGS BOWLING

Shami 2-0-16-0, Allen 4-1-22-1, Arshdeep 3-0-31-0, Henriques 1-0-7-0, M. Ashwin 4-0-22-0, Hooda 4-0-22-0.

**Toss:** PBKS; **MoM:** Bairstow.

**Sunrisers won by nine wickets with eight balls to spare.**

## Innings scan

PBKS	Dots	SRH
48	46	
7	6	
2	4	
32/1	50/0	
6.10	RR	6.48

## Next assignment

**PBKS:** April 23 vs. MI, Chennai, 7.30 p.m.

**SRH:** April 25 vs. DC, Chennai, 7.30 p.m.

# Can RR ground RCB?

Samson's unit will need to bring its best

ASHWIN ACHAL

## TODAY'S MATCH

Royal Challengers Bangalore holds all the aces in its fixture against Rajasthan Royals at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Thursday.

RCB

Played 22 | RCB 10 | RR 10 | NR 2

MUMBAI, 7.30 P.M.

HEAD TO HEAD

Played 22 | RCB 10 | RR 10 | NR 2

IN 2020

Played 2 | RCB 2 | RR 0

STAR SPORTS 1 & SELECT 1 (SD & HD)

done against Chennai Super Kings on Monday. The team depends heavily on Jos Buttler and captain Sanju Samson.

Samson was magnificent in the campaign opener against Punjab Kings, nearly taking his side over the line with a 63-ball 119. The Kerala cricketer, however, has since recorded two

## TV PICKS

**IPL:** Star Sports 1 & SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

**Serie A:** Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 10 p.m. & 12.15 a.m. (Friday)

**Premier League:** SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 12.15 a.m. (Friday)

**South Africa vs Bangladesh:** 1st Test, Sony Six (SD & HD), 9.45 a.m.

## IN BRIEF



Lewandowski back in training

MUNICH  
Robert Lewandowski returned to training with the Bayern Munich team on Wednesday as the Polish striker aims to break a long standing record for most goals in a Bundesliga season. Lewandowski has 35 goals from 25 league games with four matches left in which to break Gerd Muller's record of 40 goals from the 1971-72 season. AP

## ECB removes national selector in shake-up

LONDON  
The national selector of the England men's cricket team was removed as part of a restructuring that made the role redundant after more than a century. Ed Smith is leaving at the end of April after about three years in the role, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said on Tuesday. Overall responsibility for future squad selections will fall on Chris Silverwood, the team's head coach.

## FC Goa loses to Persepolis

MARGAO  
FC Goa put up a spirited fight before going down 2-1 to Group E leader Persepolis FC, bringing to an end the Indian club's unbeaten run in the AFC Champions League here on Tuesday.  
**The results:** Persepolis FC 2 (Mahdi Torabi 18-pen, Seyed Jalal Hosseini 24) bt FC Goa 1 (Edu Bedia 14); Al Wahda 3 bt Al Rayan 2.

## Sathish Kumar pulls out from Asian meet

KOLKATA  
Two-time Commonwealth Games champion S. Sathish Kumar withdrew from the Asian weightlifting championships in Tashkent due to 'an injury'. 'Sathish got injured during the warm-up prior to the competition and had to withdraw from it,' said Indian Weightlifting Federation secretary Sahdev Yadav on Wednesday. Sathish had entered his name in Group B of men's 81kg category.

## Divij loses in doubles quarterfinals

BELGRADE  
Wild card entrants Ivan Sabanov and Matej Sabanov of Croatia beat Aljaz Bedene of Slovenia and Divij Sharan 6-1, 6-3 in the doubles quarterfinals of the €711,800 ATP claycourt tennis tournament here on Wednesday. Divij and his partner collected 45 ATP points and €6,030.

## Sachin in final

## BOXING

## SPORTS BUREAU

KIELCE (POLAND)  
Sachin was the lone Indian man to book a place in the final of the World youth boxing championships here.

Sachin defeated former European junior champion Michele Baldassi of Italy with a 5-0 verdict in a 56kg semifinal bout to set up a title clash with Yerbolat Sabyr of Kazakhstan.

Three other Indian men – Bishwamitra Chongtham lost to Sanzar Tashkenbay (Kaz) 4-1; **56kg:** Sachin bat Michele Baldassi (Ita) 5-0; **64kg:** Ankit Narwal lost to Sabirzhan Akkalykov (Kaz) 4-1; **91kg:** Vishal Gupta lost to Jakub Straszewski (Pol) 5-0.

**The results:** Men: Semifinals: **49kg:** Bishwamitra Chongtham lost to Sanzar Tashkenbay (Kaz) 4-1; **56kg:** Sachin bat Michele Baldassi (Ita) 5-0; **64kg:** Ankit Narwal lost to Sabirzhan Akkalykov (Kaz) 4-1; **91kg:** Vishal Gupta lost to Jakub Straszewski (Pol) 5-0.

## India Open postponement is disheartening'

Kashyap says Saina is nearing full fitness, despite being troubled by niggles

## BADMINTON

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM  
HYDERABAD

The postponement of the India Open, an Olympics qualifying tournament scheduled to be held in New Delhi from May 11, is disheartening and shows that the players' interests are not taken care of, said P. Kashyap, husband of Saina Nehwal.

## Helpless

"It is really upsetting that the Delhi event is postponed. We are helpless."

"We have serious doubts whether anyone cares for the players when they take these decisions," the 34-year-old Kashyap told *The Hindu* here on Wednesday.

Kashyap, who also does the role of a mentor to Saina besides pursuing his own ca-



Ready, but...: Saina Nehwal and P. Kashyap hope that the Malaysian and Singapore Opens would be held as scheduled. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

reer, said the India Open, along with Malaysian and the Singapore Opens, are the last three Olympics qualifying events and now players like Saina and Srikanth are left

with only the last two events.

"Our calculations were that if Saina were to make it to the quarterfinals in two of the three tournaments, her chances of making the Olym-

pics cut were bright," Kash-

yap said.

"Now, it has come to two out of two. It is not going to be easy and I strongly believe no one cares about the

Olympics qualifying events are held," he said.

"But when IPL and tennis can go on, a way should be found out to ensure the Olympics qualifying events are held," he said.

"Now all we can do is to hope that at least the Malaysian and Singapore Opens will be held on schedule."

players getting a fair chance of qualifying for the Games.

"Exactly for this reason, I feel the All England Championships early this year should also have been treated as a qualifying event."

Kashyap added that Saina is nearing full fitness, despite being troubled by niggles which are taking a long time to heal.

## Tough phase

"It has been a very tough last two years for her. Because of the pandemic, the conditions are bad."

"But when IPL and tennis can go on, a way should be found out to ensure the Olympics qualifying events are held," he said.

"Now all we can do is to hope that at least the Malaysian and Singapore Opens will be held on schedule."



Usman Qadir. ■ AFP

Pakistan managed 149 for seven in its 20 overs with in-form wicketkeeper-batsman Rizwan anchoring the innings after the team was sent in to bat.

## Aggressive start

Zimbabwe looked threatening at 77 for two in the 10th over but Qadir (3/29) and pacer Mohammad Hasnain (2/27) kept it to 138 for seven in the allotted 20 overs.

Zimbabwe needed 20 off the last over but fast bowler

Arjun Kalyan is India's 68th GM

## Arjun Kalyan is India's 68th GM



## CHESS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

Arjun Kalyan became the country's 68th Grandmaster in the ongoing GM round robin "Rujna Zora-3 2021" tournament at Arandjelovac in Serbia.

The 18-year-old B. Com. student defeated GM Kosic Dragan of Montenegro in the fifth round to achieve the feat.

"I was 2477 before leaving for Serbia and needed 23 points to become a GM. I am happy that I did that beating Kosic," Arjun told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

Arjun said that he was relieved to achieve the feat as he had come close to becoming a GM quite a few times earlier.

In fact, in the GM round

robin "Rujna Zora-2" last week, Arjun needed a win to become a GM, but he missed it. "Now I just want to keep improving my game and my ratings," he said.

## Chelsea fourth despite goalless draw against Brighton

In Bundesliga, Schalke relegated, Bayern Munich pulls further ahead even as Leipzig loses



Final nail: Arminia Bielefeld's Fabian Klos scores to send Schalke hurtling into the second division. ■ REUTERS

## EURO LEAGUES

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
LONDON

As Chelsea's ownership climbed down from plans to join a breakaway Super League, the team climbed into the top four of the Premier League with a far-from-impressive 0-0 draw against Brighton on Tuesday.

Thomas Tuchel's side was stifled inside Stamford Bridge, barely creating a clear-cut chance against the relegation-threatened visitor.

The point moved Chelsea above West Ham on goal difference and into fourth place.

Schalke was finally relegated – for the first time since 1991 – from the Bundesliga after a dismal season with a 1-0 loss at relegation

rival Arminia Bielefeld on Tuesday.

Fabian Klos' 50th-minute goal was enough for the home side to boost its own chances of survival.

Bayern Munich capitalised on second-place Leipzig's shock 2-1 loss at Cologne by moving 10 points clear at the top with a 2-0 win at home over Bayer Leverkusen.

**The results:** Premier League: Chelsea 0 drew with Brighton 0.

**Serie A:** Hellas Verona 1 (Salcedo Mora 72) lost to Fiorentina 2 (Vlahovic 45+2-pen, Caceres 65).

**Bundesliga:** Cologne 2 (Hector 46, 60) bt RB Leipzig 1 (Haidara 59); Bayern Munich 2 (Choupo Moting 7, Kimmich 13) bt Bayer Leverkusen 0; Arminia Bielefeld 1 (Klos 50) bt Schalke 0; Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Hinteregger 37, Silva 58) bt Augsburg 0.

## Timings were tampered with: Likith

Claims Uzbek officials offered a bribe to not go public with his grievances

## SWIMMING

N. SUDARSHAN

India swimmer S.P. Likith has alleged that organisers at the recently held Uzbekistan Open Swimming Championships (April 13-17) tampered with race timings to suit local athletes.

The competition was a Tokyo 2020 qualification event, where Srihari Nataraj came within 0.22 seconds of making the A-cut in 100m backstroke and Indian swimmers finished with a rich haul of medals.

Likith, who was looking to make the B-cut for Tokyo, secured silver medals in 50m and 100m breaststroke events.

In a YouTube video uploaded on Wednesday, Likith claimed that timings in the 100m freestyle heats on the opening day and the 100m butterfly heats on the final day were fudged and urged FINA, world swim-

ming's governing body, to look into the matter.

## Mark of protest

On the final day of the competition, Likith had refused to dive into the pool in the 200m breaststroke event and just stood on the starting block for over two minutes. He said it was a mark of protest.

"I touched the pad and stopped my own time and asked the officials if it was the new world record to show them that what they were doing was wrong," Likith said. He even claimed that the local officials offered him a bribe so that he doesn't go public with his grievances.

But the Swimming Federa-

tion of India (SFI) said that the issues with the heats timings were corrected before the final in the respective events after Indian coaches and swimmers present at the site flagged them.

Monal Chokshi, SFI secretary also didn't approve of Likith's conduct on the final day of the event in Tashkent.

"He didn't approach us," said Chokshi, about Likith airing his views in public. "On the first day, heats times were a problem and the display was not working."

"So, our coaches brought it to the organisers' attention. Last day too, heats timings were wrong. But the final start lists and the results were fine. That is what our coaches told us."

"He [Likith] cannot protest the way he did. Heats timings were wrong and for even our swimmers they posted faster times! Everything was corrected," Chokshi added.



Causing a flutter: S.P. Likith has urged world body FINA to investigate the alleged fudging. ■ FILE PHOTO

ing's governing body, to look into the matter.

## TENNIS

SPORTS BUREAU

JHAIJAR

Khush Sharma shocked top seed Aditya Nandal 6-3, 6-2 in the boys' pre-quarterfinals of the AITA National series under-18 tournament at the Joygaon Tennis Academy on Wednesday. Second seed Daksh Prasad managed to pull through to a 4-6, 6-4, 7-6(5) victory over Aditya Rathee.

**The results:** Boys: Khush Sharma bt Aditya Nandal 6-3, 6-2; Shivam Kadamb bt Ansh Kundu 7-6(1), 6-4; Dhananjay Athreya bt Sid-

hu Wedwan (654) took third, 12nd and 14th places respectively.

Anikta scored 673 to come second behind Mexican Ana Vazquez (680).

Deepika Kumari (671), Komalika Bari (659) and Madhu-

hu Vedwan (654) took third, 12nd and 14th places respectively.

The Indian men's team placed third (2010) behind USA (2036) and France

(2012). The women's team (1353) was second after USA (1362).

India (2003) was the top-ranked side in the mixed team event.

## Khush shocks top seed Aditya

## TENNIS

SPORTS BUREAU

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