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NEARBY



Delhi cases could hit a new peak, warns Minister

NEW DELHI
Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Wednesday warned that daily COVID-19 cases could reach a new peak in the city and requested people to follow social distancing measures. The Capital reported 5,506 new cases over 24 hours – the highest in over four months.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

EC notice to Mamata on model code violation

NEW DELHI
The Election Commission of India on Wednesday sent a notice to West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee stating that her appeal to minority voters not to divide their votes was a violation of the model code of conduct. The EC asked her to respond within 48 hours.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

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No shortage of vaccines, Oppn. politicising the issue: Vardhan

Minister hits out at Maharashtra for 'covering up' its poor immunisation efforts

JACOB KOSHY

NEW DELHI

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, in a no-holds-barred attack on Maharashtra on Wednesday, accused it of demanding universal vaccination for all adults to cover up its "poor vaccination efforts".

Maharashtra, which has the highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in India, was putting its citizens in danger by allowing them to escape institutional quarantine for the sake of "personal vasuli (extortion)", Dr. Vardhan said. "Overall, as the State has lurched from one crisis to another, it seems as if the State leadership is happily sleeping at the wheel," he said.

Erratic supplies

In recent days, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have complained of erratic vaccine supplies. The Centre has consistently maintained that there are no shortages, that the vaccine strategy has been put in place after consultation with the States, and because "supply is limited", the priority

In the slow lane

India has administered 6,310 doses per 1 lakh population as of April 5, lower than the world average of 8,900 doses. India's vaccination pace is relatively slower than comparable economies



Country	March 1	March 15	April 5
Israel	94,920	1,08,590	1,17,160
Chile	18,360	36,850	59,130
U.K.	31,410	39,040	54,680
U.S.	22,990	32,620	50,410
Brazil	3,980	5,600	10,750
China	3,650	4,510	10,140
World	3,390	4,930	8,900
Russia	3,590	5,280	8,550
India	1,080	2,390	6,310
Sri Lanka	2,380	3,610	4,320
Bangladesh	2,030	2,780	3360

Source: Our World in Data | The numbers represent doses, not persons

has been to vaccinate health-care and frontline workers and groups at risk.

Though several non-NDA ruled States were upbraided, much of Dr. Vardhan's ire was directed at Maharashtra.

"In particular, I have seen statements made by public representatives in Maharashtra about shortage of vac-

cines. This is nothing but an attempt to divert attention from the Maharashtra government's repeated failures to control the spread of the pandemic. The inability of Maharashtra government to act responsibly is beyond comprehension."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

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Attack on MP's car: four BKU members held

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GURUGRAM

The Haryana police on Wednesday arrested four members of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) under various provisions of the Indian Penal Code, including attempt to murder, rioting, unlawful assembly and wrongful restraint, for the alleged attack on the vehicle of Kurukshetra MP Nayab Singh during a protest on Tuesday.

A large number of farmers held a sit-in outside the Shahbad police station in Kurukshetra in protest against the arrests.

Mr. Singh had gone to Majri Mohalla for a personal visit on Tuesday, when BKU members began protesting outside the house. The protesters surrounded his car and showed black flags. A few of them even tried to pull Mr. Singh out of the vehicle the police said. They also smashed the rear windscreen of the car.

While 11 people have been named in the FIR, eight to 10 are unidentified.

'Wearing mask mandatory even if driving alone'

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday ruled that wearing a mask, or face cover, in a vehicle is compulsory even if a person is driving alone.

"A mask is a suraksha kavach for preventing the spread of the coronavirus," Justice Prathiba M. Singh remarked, while dismissing four different pleas challenging the ₹500 challan issued for not wearing masks while travelling alone in private cars.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 10

RBI keeps policy rates unchanged

It retains GDP growth projection for 2021-22 at 10.5%

LALATENDU MISHRA

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted unanimously to leave the policy repo rate unchanged at 4%, Governor Shaktikanta Das announced on Wednesday.

"It also unanimously decided to continue with the accommodative stance as long as necessary to sustain growth on a durable basis and continue to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the economy, while ensuring

that inflation remains within the target going forward," he added.

Observing that the economic prospects for 2021-22 had strengthened with the progress of the vaccination programme, Mr. Das said the recent surge in infections had, however, "imparted greater uncertainty to the outlook and it needs to be closely watched, especially as localised and regional lockdowns could dampen the recent improvement in demand conditions and de-

lay the return of normalcy."

The MPC had, therefore, decided to retain the accommodative policy stance "till the prospects of sustained recovery" were well secured, he added. Mr. Das stressed that the focus must now be on containing the spread of the virus as well as on economic revival by consolidating the gains achieved so far and sustaining the impulses of growth in the new financial year.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

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In biggest single-day spike, India reports 1.26 lakh cases

Country also sees 684 deaths; Maharashtra tops case tally

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

India reported 1,26,227 new

COVID-19 cases as of 11.30 p.m. on Wednesday, the biggest single-day spike in infections since the beginning of the pandemic. As many as 684 deaths were also recorded on the day. This is the second straight day the country reported more than one lakh cases.

The Centre has decided to allow vaccination sessions at private and public workplaces with about 100 eligible/willing beneficiaries. The States and the Union Territories have been asked to prepare for the launch by April 11, a Union Health Ministry official told *The Hindu*, adding that the move was aimed at making the vaccine more accessible.

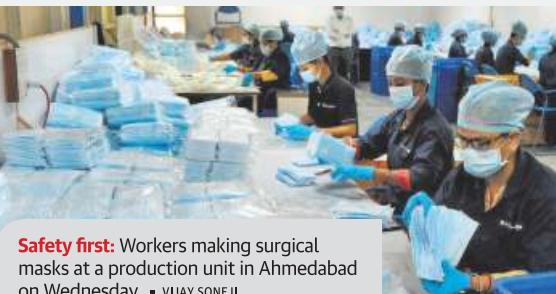
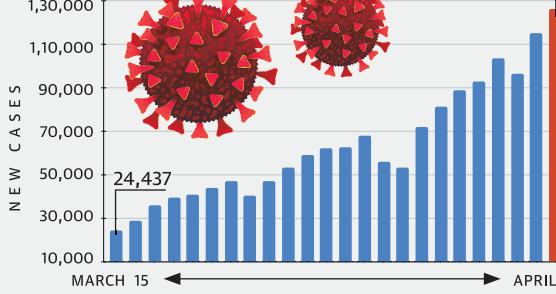
"Only employees aged 45 years and above will be eligible for vaccination at the workplace. No outsider, including eligible family members, will be allowed," the official added.

The Centre said vaccination sessions may be organised at workplaces by tagging these places with the existing COVID-19 vaccination centres.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Unrelenting rise

India recorded more than 1.15 lakh new cases for the second consecutive day on Wednesday. As of 11.30 p.m., the country had registered 1,26,227 new infections



Safety first: Workers making surgical masks at a production unit in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

Maharashtra reported

59,907 infections on Wednesday, accounting for nearly 48% of new cases, followed by Chhattisgarh (10,310) and Karnataka (6,976). Maharashtra also recorded the most casualties (322), followed by Punjab (62)

and Chhattisgarh (53).

The number of vaccine doses administered exceeded the 8.5-crore mark, with 8,70,774 shots given as of 7 p.m. on Wednesday.

PANEL ISSUES CAUTION OVER OXFORD VACCINE ▶ PAGE 10

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'Govt. making false claims about wheat purchase'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Agriculture Minister Gopal Rai said that the Food Corporation of India (FCI) under the Central government has not opened a single counter for wheat procurement in Delhi, but is making false claims of purchasing the crops at Minimum Support Price (MSP) from April 1.

"Despite three letters of plea addressed to the FCI, it has not opened its wheat procurement counters, forcing the farmers to sell their wheat. The Central government determines the MSP and the FCI purchases, but the BJP is falsely accusing the Delhi government of not buying wheat at MSP," Mr. Rai said.

Responding to claims, Delhi BJP's Kisan Morcha president Vinod Sehrawat said that it is "sad" that Mr. Rai is playing "dirty politics" on sensitive issue such as purchase of wheat at MSP in Delhi.

"His statement is totally misleading. The FCI has started purchase of wheat crop at MSP at its Narela gdown from April 5," Mr. Sehrawat said.

Farmers in Delhi have complained a multiple times that their produce is not properly getting the MSP. The AAP and the BJP have been blaming each other for it not happening.

40-bed makeshift hospital at Singhu set to expand services

It currently has a strength of 15 doctors and nurses to treat protesting farmers

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

A 40-bed makeshift hospital has come up behind the main stage at Singhu border to treat the protesting farmers who have been at the site for over four months now.

The makeshift hospital, which became operational on Tuesday, has been built by the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) and is set to expand to a 24/7 facility over time.

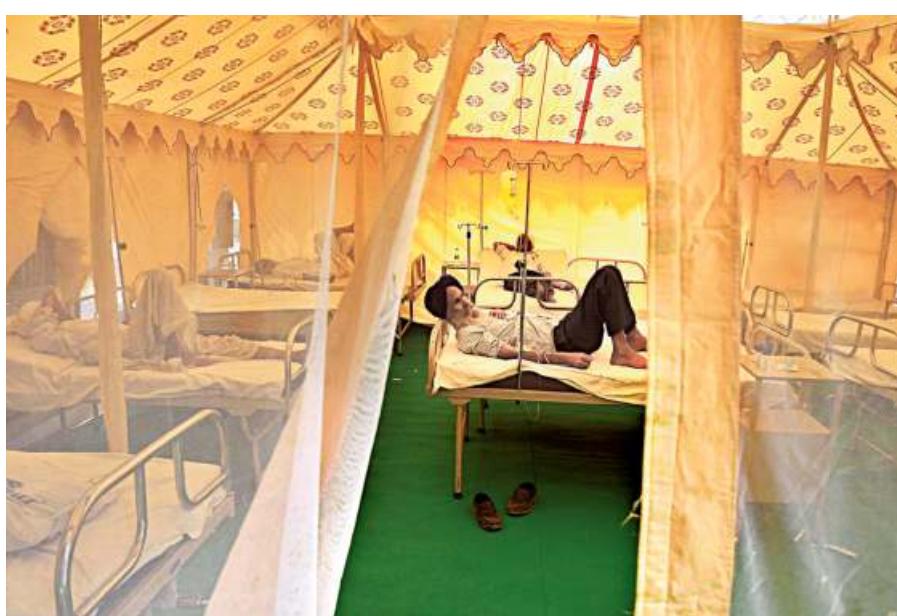
Currently, patients are being treated in the temporary structure and also inside the INLD office at the Singhu border.

Common complaints

Those treating the farmers said that dehydration and fever were the most common complaints from the patients.

Amil Sekhawat, one of those treating the patients, said, "Several patients have complained of fever, body pain, weakness, diarrhoea, cough and cold. While we do not have the required facility for a COVID-19 test to be done, we are getting other tests like those for typhoid and malaria for those complaining of fever."

The hospital, currently has a strength of 15 doctors and nursing staff to monitor the patients throughout the day.



Regaining strength: Farmers recuperating at a makeshift hospital at the Singhu border in Delhi on Wednesday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

"The doctors and nursing staffers are mostly from neighbouring areas like Sonipat and Bhiwani. They are travelling to the protest site on a daily basis. Over time, once we increase the strength, the facility will be made into a 24/7 one. While there were existing hospitals at the protest site, the INLD thought of making another one as the number of patients have increased. In the first two days we have already seen 8-10 patients visit us," said Dr. Sekhawat.

Same ailments were found to be the common complaints at another makeshift hospital which was set up by the Life Care Foundation, a non-profit organisation, in the initial days of the protest.

Om Prakash, who has been treating farmers at the hospital over the past few days said, "We admit around 20-25 people throughout the day, mostly those who complain of dehydration. At the OPD, on an average, we have been treating around 200-250 patients, most of whom come with fever and other

problems. Even though we are not testing for COVID-19, if we find someone with symptoms, we ask them to visit hospitals in Narela or elsewhere."

Avtar Singh, who started the Foundation, added that several locals have also visited the makeshift hospital over the past few weeks.

"Recently we have seen local patients visiting us daily to get physiotherapy sessions. Some have even recovered from ailments which they had for several years," said Mr. Singh.

IIT-D researchers develop device to diagnose dengue within an hour

It has been successfully tested on clinical blood samples

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology here have developed a handheld Surface Enhanced Raman Spectroscopy (SERS)-based platform for early diagnosis of dengue and also gives dengue test results within one hour (rapid diagnosis).

HIV detection

The institute said that the handheld device has been successfully tested on the clinical blood samples collected from hundreds of individuals in collaboration

with ICMR-National Institute of Malaria Research (NIMR), New Delhi, and also helps in rapid detection of HIV.

Conventional tools

"Early diagnosis of dengue is the key to prevent deterioration of a patient's health. However, conventional diagnostic tools like nucleic acid detection using Reverse Transcriptase Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) is a time-taking process and it also requires expensive equipment and reagents for the diagnosis of dengue," the institute said outlining the

need for the device.

Speaking of the handheld device, the project's principal investigator, J.P. Singh, professor at IIT-Delhi said, "This ultrasensitive and handy device has wide range of applications in the early stage onsite detection of viral diseases and can produce the final report of investigation within an hour."

The research work was funded by IMPRINT India programme of the Ministry of Education with New Age Instruments and Materials Pvt Ltd as the industry partner.

Man in police net for duping father, daughter of ₹4 lakh over updating KYC

Accused introduced himself as bank executive: complainant

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 31-year-old man was arrested from Bihar for allegedly cheating a father-daughter duo on the pretext of validating their Know Your Customer details and siphoning off ₹4 lakh from their bank accounts, the police said on Wednesday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Atul Thakur said that the accused has been identified as Santosh Kumar from Bihar's Bhagalpur.

The police said that a woman lodged a complaint stating that her father, with whom she holds a joint bank account, received a message on March 3 asking for updating their KYC details.

Net banking password

When they called on the mobile number mentioned in the message, a person introduced himself as a bank executive and offered to help with the KYC updation, the complainant alleged. As soon as the woman's father

shared his details, he received a message that his net banking password had been changed, the police said.

The complainant rushed to the bank but four transactions had already been made from the account. A total of ₹4 lakh had been siphoned off, the police said.

It was revealed that the accused learnt to cheat people using banking credentials from a person identified as Ramu and efforts are being made to arrest him.

'Submit unredacted statements of witnesses'

HC order to trial court comes on bail plea by JMI student accused in riots case

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed a local court to place before it the unredacted statements of protected witnesses in a sealed cover in a case related to the north-east Delhi riots last year in which Jamia Millia Islamia student Asif Iqbal Tanha is facing prosecution.

A Bench of Justice Siddharth Mridul and Justice Anup Jairam Bhambhani asked the local court to place the statements before April 14, the next date of hearing.

Tanha bail plea

The High Court had on March 18 reserved its order on Mr. Tanha's plea seeking bail in the case. It had also asked the police to file written submissions, unredacted copies of witnesses statements and other relevant documents.

The Special Public Prosec-



A vandalised school at Shiv Vihar in north-east Delhi in February last year. ■ FILE PHOTO

utor (SSP), representing the police, had said that the unredacted copies are with the trial court. The SSP said when the investigating officer had applied for protection of witnesses, the statements were signed and sealed by the trial court judge and redacted copies were given to the investigating officer.

Mr. Tanha was arrested in May last year for allegedly

being part of a "premeditated conspiracy" in the riots. He has been charged under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. He has challenged a trial court's October 26, 2020 order dismissing his bail application.

His bail plea was, however, opposed by the Delhi police on the grounds of the riots being "premeditated" and a conspiracy was

being part of a "premeditated conspiracy" in the riots.

He has been charged under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. He has challenged a trial court's October 26, 2020 order dismissing his bail application.

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Timings
DELHI

THURSDAY, APR. 08	RISE 06:04 SET 18:43
	RISE 04:12 SET 15:26
FRIDAY, APR. 09	
	RISE 06:03 SET 18:44
	RISE 04:46 SET 16:22
SATURDAY, APR. 10	
	RISE 06:02 SET 18:44
	RISE 05:17 SET 17:16

Delhi Weather	max min
Delhi City	35 22
Safdarjung	35 22
Palam	37 23

Delhi Palam Today
36°C Surface wind speed would remain moderate. Drop in day and night temperature likely. A very warm day with few cloudy sky.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
36°C Morning temperature would drop. A pleasant morning and warm day would prevail with mainly sunny sky.

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AAP protests Centre's move to export vaccine

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday protested near the BJP HQ against the Centre's decision to export COVID-19 vaccine and demanded that the drug should be first made available free of cost to all Indian citizens.

"The COVID-19 vaccine was not created in BJP HQ. This vaccine has been made by Indian scientists. Today, the number of cases in India is among the highest in the world due to which we are being defamed. People are losing their jobs and lives, and what exactly is our government doing? They are planning to export the vaccine to 68 countries only for the Prime Minister to gain applause," AAP leader Saubh Bharadwaj said.

The party said that AAP workers were stopped before reaching the BJP HQ by Delhi police. "Citizens 18-45 years old, people like me, who have to leave their homes daily, have to travel for work using different modes of transport to earn a living, our economy is running due to the contribution of each of us, we go out every single day, meet different people, come back home and may pose a threat to them as spreaders," he added.

Health Minister warns daily cases could hit a new peak

Delhi reports 5,506 new cases, 20 deaths in 24 hours; active cases near 20K mark

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Wednesday warned that daily COVID-19 cases could reach a new peak in the city and requested people to wear masks and follow social distancing measures.

"Cases have increased a lot in Delhi in the past few days. Everyone knows that the best way to beat the virus is to wear masks and follow social distancing. Please wear masks. I appeal to everyone," Mr. Jain said.

"Daily cases have gone above 5,000. The way cases are increasing, it could break the old record [of cases]," the Minister added.

Meanwhile, the surge in COVID-19 cases continued in the national capital with 5,506 new cases being reported in the last 24 hours – the highest in more than four months. The total number of cases stood at 6,90,568, according to a



Senior citizens wait to get the jab at the Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital in Delhi on Wednesday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

health bulletin released by the Delhi government.

The last time more cases were reported was on November 24, when 6,224 cases were reported in a day.

Twenty deaths were also reported in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of deaths to 11,133. A total of 90,201 tests were done in a day, the bulletin said. Of the total cases, 6,59,980 people have recovered and there are 19,455 active cases.

The highest number of

had received reports that a lot of parties were happening. "At parties, people come into close contact and we want to avoid it," he said.

He said that Delhi's positivity rate is still lower than other States and the government is focusing on containing it further.

New trend

"The new trend shows that people between 20 and 45 years are getting infected as they are more mobile. It seems that they are not heavily affected but the chances of the virus spreading increases when they go home, as their parents and other family members are exposed to risk. Therefore, we said that the vaccination should be rolled out to everyone barring age, as soon as possible," Mr. Jain said.

A total of 41,412 beneficiaries took the COVID-19 vaccination in the city till 6 p.m. on Wednesday.

Night curfew not to impact new Parliament project work

Workers' shifts will align with curfew timings: Tata Projects

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The night curfew imposed by the Delhi government from Tuesday till April 30 will have no impact on the construction of the new Parliament building, with workers' shifts being moved around to adhere to the 10 p.m. to 5 p.m. curfew timings, a spokesperson for the company carrying out the project said on Wednesday.

The project will be completed ahead of the November 2022 deadline, said Naren Sharma, spokesperson for Tata Projects Ltd., which is constructing the new Parliament building adjacent to the existing Parliament.

Construction on the new building, which is part of the larger Central Vista redevelopment project of the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, started in January and is going on in three shifts.

Starting from Tuesday night, the Delhi government ordered a curfew till April 30



Work on the Central Vista redevelopment project in progress at Rajpath.

due to the rise in COVID-19 cases in the Capital.

"The project will not be affected by the night curfew as there are adequate arrangements on site, and we also had a vaccination camp on site for workers. Also, a bus is being arranged, subject to permissions, to help commute before curfew hours. Work shifts are also being modified to align with night curfew times," Mr. Sharma told *The Hindu*.

On Tuesday night, however,

some workers were left waiting for transport back to their residential camp at Sarai Kale Khan.

Some workers stranded

Activist Sunil Kumar Aledia of the Centre for Holistic Development, said a group of workers had been stranded outside Parliament site at 10 p.m. "I reached there at 11 p.m. and saw that police were asking the workers to go back inside or face ₹2,000 fine for violating curfew," Mr. Aledia said.

In a tweet with photos of the workers outside the work site, Mr. Aledia said that while the workers were constructing the new Parliament on one hand, on the other, they were being threatened by the police.

Mr. Sharma, however, said the police had been helpful to the workers and offered to drop them off at the camp in PCR vehicles while they waited for the arranged transport.

Officials demarcate loading zones in redeveloped stretch

It was a major demand of stakeholders in Chandni Chowk

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

Three to four loading and unloading zones will become operational on a pilot basis at Chandni Chowk ahead of the April 17 inauguration of the area's redevelopment project, government officials said on Wednesday.

Nine such zones have been demarcated along the 1.3-km pedestrianised stretch between Red Fort and Fatehpuri Masjid, said officials.

The zones are among the most significant components of the project given the mixed residential and commercial nature of the area as well as the presence of wholesale heritage markets in and around its vicinity. Local shopkeepers too had been demanding clear delineation of such points.

The stretch between Red Fort and Fatehpuri Masjid is being turned into a vehicle-free zone - no vehicles will be allowed between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. - though non-motorised vehicles will be allowed. There will be tree-lined footpaths on either side of the road as well as a wide central verge.

Barriers are being installed to prevent motor veh-



The 1.3-km pedestrianised stretch in Chandni Chowk.

■ FILE PHOTO: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

icles from entering the pedestrianised area in addition to the installation of CCTV cameras to regulate such vehicles.

Manual rickshaws

Only manual rickshaws will be allowed on the redeveloped stretch which will be marked, regularised, and colour-coded. Their operators will be given badges so that unauthorised rickshaws cannot enter the area.

Shopkeepers will be allowed to move goods only on these rickshaws which, however, will not be allowed to overtake each other.

Meanwhile, government officials said the Public Works Department (PWD) has been directed to ensure

that the redeveloped stretch, due to its proximity to the Red Fort, a World Heritage site, is maintained along similar lines post inauguration.

The PWD will not only maintain the stretch on its own but also appoint a company for security, horticultural and sanitation services. The company engaged by the PWD for the purpose will be responsible for the upkeep of toilets, mechanical sweeping of the stretch cleaning of dustbins, the security of installations and care of tree avenues.

Phase II of the project, revolving mainly around facade restoration of buildings on either side of the road, will get underway soon.

BJP: probe civil defence volunteers' appointment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday wrote to Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal demanding an inquiry into the appointment and deployment of civil defence volunteers by the Delhi government.

Alleging that many complaints of harassment of citizens in the garb of issuing fines for non-compliance of COVID-appropriate behaviour by such volunteers were coming in, Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor, said their khaki colour uniforms should be done away with.

"It has come to my knowledge that the process of enrolment of civil defence volunteers is neither based on guidelines nor is transparent despite the fact that they are being paid and have been given authority to challan people," Mr. Kapoor alleged.

"I have been told that these volunteers are being hired unofficially through agencies, which earlier recruited volunteers for the implementation of the Odd Even Transport Scheme. It is widely believed that a large part of them are cadre of the ruling AAP," Mr. Kapoor also alleged.

Over 200 booked for violating night curfew

842 penalised for not wearing mask

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Over 200 people were booked in the Capital for allegedly violating the night curfew imposed in the wake of rising COVID-19 cases, police said on Wednesday.

He said that Delhi's positivity rate is still lower than other States and the government is focusing on containing it further.

According to data shared by the police, a total of 220 cases were registered.

A senior police officer added that another 534 people were booked under preventive sections of the CrPC.

A total of 842 challans were also issued to people for not wearing a mask.

West Delhi district lodged five FIRs and issued 31 challans during the night curfew.

A total of 49 people were prosecuted in Outer district and one in New Delhi district, the police said.

South and South-East districts filed 13 and 118 cases respectively. In North-West district, 59 people were booked for violating the rules, officials said. Two persons were booked under Section 188 of the IPC, six

vehicles were impounded under the Delhi Police Act and 32 challans were issued in East district.

No case has been registered at Shahdara district.

The Delhi government on Tuesday imposed a night curfew, from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., till April 30. People of certain professions are exempt from the curfew.

The authorities, however,

Serpentine lines form at railway station

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A day after night curfew was imposed in the city, travellers lined up in serpentine queues at the New Delhi railway station on Wednesday in a rewind to scenes last year when thousands of daily wage workers and others left for their homes in villages and towns across the country.

The authorities, however, maintained that the rush was "usual" during this time of the year due to the wedding season and wheat harvesting in different parts of the country.

"There is no surge (in travel)... Only bona fide passengers with reserved tickets are getting in the station. We see such crowds at regular periods," said Indian Railways spokesperson D.J. Narain.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Railways) Harendra K. Singh said: "Police personnel are cautioning, guiding and making public announcements regarding COVID-19 protocols."

Gurugram tightens COVID-19 protocols

Residents of group housing societies should collect deliveries from main gate

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

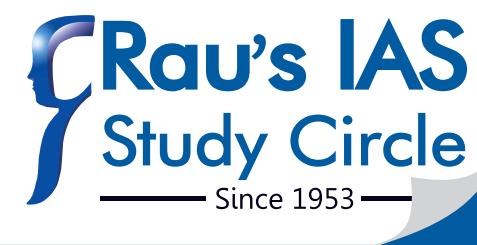
The deliveries to the group housing societies should be left at the entrance and those returning from abroad must observe two weeks self-quarantine, said an order by the district administration on Wednesday in view of the surge in COVID-19 cases.

In separate orders, District Magistrate Yash Garg issued guidelines for the Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs) and the management of shopping malls and commercial establishments to take pre-emptive measures to contain the surge.

In a 13-point order for the RWAs, the administration directed that residents should be asked to collect their parcels from the gate to reduce the number of outsiders entering the premises of group housing societies. Besides, those returning from abroad must self-quarantine for 14

days and also get themselves tested in case of any COVID-19 like symptom. They should also inform their RWAs about their return.

Visitors' record
The RWAs have also been directed to keep record of visitors and ensure compulsory wearing of masks, promote use of Aarogya Setu app, make regular announcements through public address system to adhere to social distancing norms, hold sensitisation programme for staff and place sanitisers.



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Assam writer arrested on sedition charge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWAHATI

Assam writer Sikha Sarma was arrested on the charge of sedition and sent to judicial custody on Wednesday for her alleged comment in the social media on security personnel massacred by Maoists in Chhattisgarh, police said.

Facebook post

Ms. Sarma had on April 5, two days after the brutal killing of the security personnel, allegedly posted on Facebook "Salaried people cannot be termed martyrs if they die during duty. In that case, an electricity department employee will also be a martyr if he dies due to electrocution. Media do not make the people emotional." The post had stirred controversy with over 11,000 comments and at least 1,600 shares in Facebook.

CM extends night curfew to entire Punjab

He also slams Kejriwal, Badal for their 'irresponsible conduct' in attending rallies without virus protocol

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Wednesday announced extension of night curfew to the entire State and a ban on political gatherings till April 30, while slamming his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal and SAD's Sukhbir Badal for their "irresponsible conduct" in attending rallies without following COVID-19 protocol.

Making it clear that those violating the ban on political gatherings, including leaders, will be booked under the Disaster Management Act and the Epidemic Diseases Act, Capt. Amarinder said he has been forced to order the ban on political gatherings as his pleas to parties to refrain from organising such events had been ignored.

The Chief Minister said he was surprised at the behaviour of certain political leaders, including Kejriwal



Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh. ■ FILE PHOTO: PTI

and Badal, who had been attending political rallies without following safety protocols".

He said "such irresponsible conduct doesn't behove them".

He also directed Punjab DGP, Dinkar Gupta, to ensure strict implementation of the night curfew. As part of the fresh curbs, the number of people who can attend funerals and weddings has been reduced to 50 peo-

ple indoors and 100 for outdoors.

Wearing masks has been made mandatory for all government employees while in office, an official statement said here while detailing the fresh set of restrictions imposed as the number of COVID-19 cases continued to remain high in the State.

These restrictions, coupled with the ones imposed earlier, which include closure of schools and educa-

tional institutions, shall remain effective till April 30.

However, there was some respite for shop owners in malls, as the Chief Minister allowed entry of 10 people per shop at any given time, as against the earlier order of not allowing more than 100 people in the entire mall at one time. This would imply that 200 people will be allowed in a mall with 20 shops at any given time, said the statement.

62 COVID-19 deaths

Punjab had on Tuesday reported 62 more fatalities due to COVID-19, pushing the toll to 7,216 while the State had witnessed 2,924 more cases, taking the infection tally to 2,57,057.

The Chief Minister, in his weekly review of the COVID-19 situation, expressed concern at the high positivity and mortality rates in the State.

Vaccination target set at 2 lakh per day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Wednesday set a vaccination target of two lakh shots per day.

While directing the Health Department to further increase the vaccination drive, Capt. Amarinder also asked officials to increase the sampling to 50,000 per day and vigorously pursue contact tracing to 30 people per positive patient.

He directed Chief Secretary Vini Mahajan to undertake a massive public awareness campaign to motivate people to approach hospitals at early stages, an official statement said.

Police use water cannon to disperse farmers in Sirsa

They raised slogans against MLA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SIRSA (HARYANA)

Police used a water cannon on Wednesday to disperse a group of farmers, who allegedly tried to go past barricades when local MLA Gopal Kanda arrived to cast his vote for the municipal council chairman's post in this Haryana district.

The farmers, protesting against the Centre's new farm laws, gathered near the spot where the police had put up barricades and raised slogans against Mr. Kanda, the president of the Haryana Lokhit Party.

Mr. Kanda had voted against a no-confidence motion brought against the Manohar Lal government in the State Assembly by the main opposition Congress last month.

Farmer leaders had earlier said they would continue with their "peaceful social

boycott" of the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies.

Sirsa Deputy Superintendent of Police Aryan Chaudhary said the protesters attempted to go past the barricades when the police tried to stop them.

Haryana Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Gurnam Singh Chaduni said the farmers will continue with their social boycott of the leaders of the BJP and its allies.

Mr. Chaduni claimed that leaders of the BJP and its allies have stepped up their public visits in recent days, despite knowing that they will face a boycott.

He alleged that if there is violence, lathicharge and any disturbance of law and order, "such a scenario suits the government" and it will then try to use force to evict the farmers protesting at Delhi's borders.

Age relaxation for EWS candidates in Rajasthan

CM Gehlot had made provision in State budget

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAIPUR

The Rajasthan government on Wednesday approved a proposal to give relaxation in the maximum age limit to the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) similar to other reserved classes for ap-

pointment to state services. Several other important decisions were taken in the State Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, including amendment in various service rules and approval of the proposal to allot land to NTPC for setting up a solar power plant, an official statement said.

The Cabinet has approved the proposal to give relaxa-

tion in the maximum age limit to the EWS candidates like other reserved categories.

Benefit for jobs

Candidates of this category who have crossed the age limit prescribed in the service rules for appointment in State services will also get the benefit of age relaxation like the candidates of other reserved classes.

According to the statement, with this decision, the male candidates of EWS category will be given five years relaxation in the maximum age limit and 10 years for women candidates like other reserved classes.

It is to be noted that CM Gehlot had made the announcement in the State budget 2021-22 with a view to give relief to the candidates of EWS category.

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DEATH
OBITUARY

SHRI. R. RAGHAVAN
DOB: 15.04.1948
Former General Manager at GMMCO / HINDUSTAN MOTORS
Passed away peacefully in Chennai on 7th April 2021.
Final rites on 8th April 2021 around 10.30 am at Flat No.69, No.18, Jaya Krishna Apts, Old township office road, Venkatapuram, Ambattur, Chennai - 600053
Deeply Mourned by
Prasanna & Family (Son)
Kalpana & Family (Daughter)
Kanchan & Family (Daughter)
Grand children, Relatives & Close friends.
Phone: 91766 44221

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D. A. SUNDARAMURTHY
07 Mar 1956 - 08 Apr 2016
Quos valde amas nunquam vere moriuntur
Fondly Remembered by Kanchana, Durgaprasad, Friends, Family & Colleagues

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SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

A team of researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology-Guwahati has developed a technique of boosting the performance of rechargeable lithium-ion batteries used in electric vehicles (EVs). The advanced technique can precisely estimate the state of charge (SOC), one of the most important internal aspects of a battery, the team from the institute's Department of Electronics and Electrical Engineering said.

The research by Professor Somanath Majhi, Associate Professor Sisir Kumar Nayak and research scholar Gautam Sethia was published in IEEE Transactions on Circuit and System I: Regular Papers, a scientific journal.

The SOC indicates the remaining charge that can be withdrawn from a battery before it gets fully discharged. "The knowledge of remaining

capacity helps optimise a battery's capacity utilisation, prevent its overcharging and undercharging, increase its lifespan, reduce cost, and ensure the safety of the battery and its surroundings," Prof. Majhi said.

Widely used batteries

Lithium-ion batteries are preferred in cellphones and laptops for their low carbon emission, high energy density, low self-discharge rate, and

low maintenance cost. They are also being widely used in EVs and microgrids of renewable energy sources.

"The EVs are becoming the most suitable alternatives to the conventional fossil fuel-based vehicles. The battery acts as the prime energy source of electric vehicles.

The precise estimation of SOC that cannot be directly measured by any sensor plays a vital role for their efficient operation," Prof. Majhi said.

THE HINDU
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WESTERN RAILWAY

Various Works

Divisional Railway Manager (WA), Western Railway, 6th floor, Engg. Deptt, Mumbai Central Mumbai -400 008, invites E-Tender as per details given as follows:

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Name of the work : Joravaran-Surat Sec.: Replacement of corroded steel girders of span upto 9.15m by Precast RCC/PSC slabs on Br No. 434, 373, 420, 445 Total Span = 12 in connection of Virar - Surat Sec.: Replacement of corroded steel girders of span upto 9.15m by Precast RCC/PSC slabs for Br No. 88, 90, 91, 161, 164, 344, 373, 420, 445 Total Span = 54. Approx. cost of work in Rs.: Rs.28,234,072.07. 2. Tender No: BCT/21-22/02 Dated : 05-04-2021 Name of the work : Virar - Surat Sec. Replacement of corroded steel girders from 9.15m to 12.20m by precast RCC/PSC Slabs for Bridge No. 344, 360, 369, 370, 372, 445L 1/2 Total Span = 30 Nos. Approx. cost of work in Rs.: Rs. 83,656,728.55 Note: Executive : DEN (Central) BCT EMD Rs. 0.00 Date & Time of submission: On 30-04-2021 till 15.00 hrs. Date & Time of Opening: On 30-04-2021 till 15.30 hrs. Regarding detailed nature of work, containing cost of tender document (non refundable), EMD, eligibility, criteria, similar nature of work, detailed tender conditions please visit www.reps.gov.in.

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A N D E

CM YK

IN BRIEF



No 'Sarva darshan' at Tirumala from April 12

TIRUMALA
The Sarva darshan at the temple of Lord Venkateswara here will be temporarily suspended from April 12 in view of the spike in COVID-19 cases across the country. However, tokens will be issued till April 11 evening for the benefit of those who have already planned their pilgrimage.

4 labourers electrocuted while putting up pandal

BENGALURU
Four workers were electrocuted while putting up a pandal for a stone-laying ceremony for an apartment at Indalbele, in Anekal, on the city outskirts on Wednesday. The police suspect that they were holding an iron pole, which touched a live electric wire. The victims hail from Kalaburagi, Chamarajanagar and Jharkhand.

Kerala HC seeks reasons for postponing RS polls

KOCHI
The Kerala High Court on Wednesday directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to file a statement disclosing the reasons for postponing the elections to the three Rajya Sabha seats from the State, which will fall vacant on April 21. The petitioners had said the ECI decision lacked transparency.

Dalit sarpanch 'stopped' from entering office

ANANTAPUR
Fakkeeramma, a Dalit sarpanch of Kallumadi panchayat here in Telangana, alleged that she was not allowed to enter the village secretariat office on Wednesday and that it was locked allegedly by followers of the former YSRCP sarpanch Saubhagymma. Ms. Fakkeeramma staged a dharna, with some villagers joining in.

Karnataka, Telangana see massive spike

The two States together add 8,890 cases; 35 deaths in Karnataka

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Karnataka on Wednesday reported 6,976 new COVID-19 cases, 4,991 from Bengaluru Urban district alone. On September 22 last year the State reported 6,974 cases and Bengaluru Urban, 5,012 cases on October 6. There were 35 fresh deaths.

The test positivity rate (TPR) stood at 5.56% on Wednesday.

COVID-19

Vaccinations stood at 49,81,533 so far, including 5,69,728 healthcare workers and 2,47,730 frontline workers for the first dose and 3,50,977 healthcare workers

and 96,109 frontline workers for the second dose.

Telangana on Tuesday registered a massive jump with 1,914 new infections. Five more patients succumbed to the virus. The highest number of 393 cases was from Greater Hyderabad.

Covaxin stock low

Scores of people opting for immunisation wanted Covaxin, but vaccination centres set up at government and corporate hospitals were low on stock. Health department officials said stocks of the vaccine were lower than those of Covishield. After the immunisation programme was launched on January 16, demand for Covishield was high, but de-



Safety cover: Registration for COVID-19 vaccination under way at Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. ■ K. R. DEEPAK

mand for Covaxin later spiked. Sources in corporate hospitals said they had run out of Covaxin.

Kerala reported 3,502 new cases on Wednesday, testing 60,554 samples with TPR of

5.78%. Continuing the listing of COVID-19 fatalities, the State added 16 recent deaths. Kozhikode reported four deaths, Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam three each, Malappuram two while one

death each was reported from Alappuzha, Kottayam, Idukki and Ernakulam. Kozhikode district reported the maximum new cases at 550.

Andhra Pradesh reported 11 deaths and 2,331 new infections on Wednesday morning, the toll being the highest in a day since December 6. Chittoor with the highest number of deaths reported four more, Kurnool reported two and Anantapur, East Godavari, Krishna, Nellore and Visakhapatnam reported one death each.

Tamil Nadu reported close to 4,000 fresh cases on Wednesday. A total of 3,986 persons tested positive and 17 persons died. The State's tally of active cases stood at 27,743.

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

Gastroenteritis claims 1 life in Kurnool; 40 hospitalised

Medical camp set up, sanitation drive launched

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KURNool

One woman died of gastroenteritis in Arun Jyothi Nagar Colony of Adoni Municipality in Andhra Pradesh's Kurnool district on Wednesday morning.

Fifteen cases of gastroenteritis have been reported from that colony where Marrema Durgamma Devara, a religious festival, was organised in the past two days.

A similar outbreak has also been reported from Gorakkalu in Nandyal mandal, where 30 cases have been identified in the past two days.

Even as three deaths have



A doctor checking a child at the Arun Jyothi Nagar Colony in Kurnool on Wednesday. ■ U. SUBRAMANYAM

been reported from there so far, District Medical and Health Officer Rama Giddaiah has denied reports that they died of gastroenteritis. "The three people who died in Gorakkalu are a 35-year-old man who had issues of chronic alcoholism

and diarrhoea, a 56-year-old man with renal failure and a 80-year-old woman who suffered from age-related diseases," said Mr. Giddaiah.

Adoni Revenue Divisional Officer Ramakrishna Reddy visited Arun Jyothi Nagar Colony. "A sanitation drive is under way and a medical camp has been set up and 35 more people with symptoms of diarrhoea have been identified. Of them, 30 patients are being treated at the health camp. Five cases have been referred to the district hospital at Nandyal. Three more patients have been admitted to the same hospital. Two others are being treated in private hospitals," he said.

Water supplied to the colony was being treated with chlorine and tests were being done, he said.

Muslim Youth League worker murdered

11 accused identified: Kannur police

STAFF REPORTER
KANNUR

Eleven accused have been identified for the murder of a Muslim Youth League activist, district police chief (Kannur city) R. Elango has said.

Mansoor, 22, a resident of Chokli Pullukkara, was killed in a clash around 8 p.m. on Tuesday, the election day. He was attacked by a group of more than a dozen people, who also hurled bombs, the police said.

"We are investigating whether there was a conspiracy in the murder. A special team will be formed to investigate the case," Mr. Elango said. CPI(M) activist Shinos, a neighbour of Mr. Mansoor, has been taken in

to custody.

Though Mr. Mansoor was rushed to a hospital in Thalassery and later to a hospital in Kozhikode, he succumbed to his injuries around midnight. Police said the post-mortem report attributed the youth's death to injuries sustained in bomb blast. His brother Muhsin was also injured in the attack and is undergoing treatment in a Kozhikode hospital.

Mr. Muhsin said the gang intended to assault him. It carried out the attack after confirming his name. He said the gang comprised DYFI members and he knew the attackers. Mr. Muhsin said his brother was hacked when he came to his rescue.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP; METEOSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 14.30 HRS)

Forecast for Thursday: Thunderstorm with lightning/hail/squall/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Sikkim, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Kerala. Heat wave conditions likely in isolated pockets over east Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	35.4	23.4	Kozhikode	—	35.6	27.4
Ahmedabad	—	40.4	24.7	Kurnool	—	40.7	26.7
Aizawl	—	28.2	15.4	Lucknow	—	39.4	24.6
Allahabad	—	41.6	23.8	Madurai	—	37.8	25.1
Bengaluru	—	35.6	20.8	Mangaluru	—	36.4	27.2
Bhopal	—	40.5	21.4	Mumbai	—	34.8	24.0
Bhubaneswar	—	36.4	25.2	Mysuru	—	37.0	21.0
Chandigarh	3.2	35.7	18.0	New Delhi	—	36.5	21.7
Chennai	—	34.2	24.6	Patna	—	36.6	23.6
Coimbatore	—	37.0	24.4	Port Blair	—	32.7	25.4
Dehradun	1.7	33.8	19.6	Puducherry	—	34.1	24.2
Gangtok	—	20.7	13.7	Pune	—	40.0	22.3
Goa	—	34.0	27.5	Raipur	—	41.2	24.5
Guwahati	—	34.8	19.4	Ranchi	—	38.5	21.8
Hubballi	—	37.0	23.0	Shillong	0.4	23.7	14.5
Hyderabad	—	38.3	24.6	Shimla	7.4	22.0	8.6
Imphal	—	30.6	14.1	Srinagar	—	14.9	4.2
Jaipur	—	37.0	24.6	Thiruvananthapuram	—	34.5	25.8
Kochi	—	33.6	26.2	Tiruchi	—	38.4	24.3
Kohima	—	24.4	12.0	Vijayawada	—	38.2	25.0
Kolkata	—	35.6	25.8	Visakhapatnam	—	32.5	26.8

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m. Singrauli, Mysuru and Port Blair recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 372 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir recorded a healthy AQI score of 36

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Only 3 days of vaccine stock left in Maharashtra: Tope

Health Minister urges Centre to expedite delivery as State's inoculation rate is fastest; Fadnavis refutes vaccine shortage claim

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

Warning that Maharashtra had only three days' vaccine stock left, Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Wednesday urged the Centre to expedite the delivery of urgently needed vaccine doses to the State.

Speaking to reporters in Mumbai, Mr. Tope said that the State's daily vaccination rate was the fastest in the country and that Maharashtra needed a stable supply of at least 40 lakh doses of COVID-19 vaccines each week.

"At present, we just have 14 lakh vaccine doses, which will get over in the next three days. We have asked for 40 lakh more vaccine doses per week. At the moment, Maharashtra is reeling under a severe shortage with many districts and vaccination centres reporting that they have no doses to administer,"



Virus protection: A man receives COVID-19 jab at a vaccination centre in Mumbai on Wednesday. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

the Health Minister said.

Mr. Tope also spoke of the various demands he made to Union Health Minister Harsh

Vardhan during a two-hour videoconferencing with the health ministers of nine States on Tuesday evening.

In a jibe at Union Minister Prakash Javadekar's earlier remarks that Maharashtra was not utilising the vaccines given by the Centre, Mr. Tope said that the State government had risen to the "challenge" evident in the minister's provocative statements.

"We have taken up this challenge. Each day, we are carrying out an average 4.5 lakh vaccinations and propose to take this figure to 6 lakh. Today, we are forced to shut vaccination centres and are compelled to tell health workers to go home because we do not have sufficient doses," Mr. Tope said.

At the same time, he clarified that while the Centre was not opposed to sending vaccines to Maharashtra, the speed of delivery was very slow. "I would like to say that Dr. Vardhan is a soft-spoken and helpful person. I have urged him to pay attention to Maharashtra and expedite delivery of vaccine doses," Mr. Fadnavis said.

Given the Centre's claims against Deshmukh, Sena minister Parab

demanded ₹2 crore from him to continue his service in the Mumbai Police and alleged that Mr. Parab had asked him to collect money from some contractors in Mumbai.

Mr. Parab rubbishied Mr. Vaze's claim. Mr. Vaze, who was reinstated in the police service last year, made the sensational claim in a letter which he tried to submit before a special NIA court.

However, special judge P.R. Sitre refused to take his letter on record and asked him to follow the required procedure. The suspended assistant police inspector, an accused in the explosives case and the subsequent death of businessman Mansukh Hiren, is currently in the NIA custody.

"I duly was reinstated in service on June 6, 2020. That soon after my reinstatement there were certain agitators (people, who wanted) to reverse the reinstatement. Apparently, then it was ordered by (NCP president) Sharad Pawar to again place me under suspension. That, at that time the then Home Minister sir (Mr. Deshmukh) also told me that he would convince Pawar saheb and for that purpose he (Mr. Deshmukh) asked me to pay ₹2 crore,"

Sachin Vaze drops 'letter bomb'; CBI to quiz him





Staying accommodative

The RBI cannot afford to drop its guard on price stability while in search of growth

Armed with a renewed mandate to contain inflation within a 2 percentage point range of the target 4%, and mindful of the pandemic's latest wave, the RBI's monetary policy committee has opted to reaffirm its growth-supportive "accommodative stance" and keep interest rates unchanged. The MPC, which met for the first time in the new financial year, also maintained its projection for GDP expansion in the current fiscal at 10.5%, notwithstanding the risks to the forecast from the current upsurge in novel coronavirus cases and associated localised lockdowns. Explaining the rationale for its policy stance of being prepared to stay accommodative for 'as long as necessary' to ensure that economic growth becomes 'durable', the committee was unambiguous that its actions were born of the need to stay supportive at a time when there was a real threat that "the renewed jump in COVID-19 infections... could dampen the demand for contact-intensive services, restrain growth impulses and prolong the return to normalcy". That consumer confidence has dipped, as the MPC noted, is a clear sign that uncertainty clouds the outlook for growth. Add to this the fact that IHS Markit's Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) survey for March revealed that business sentiment had slid to a seven-month low, even as the research firm's subsequent India Services PMI report showed both manufacturers and services companies continued to shed jobs for a thirteenth month. With jobs and incomes remaining under stress for millions, and uncertainty over the efficacy and safety of the vaccines persisting even as authorities seek to ramp up the immunisation drive, it is hard to foresee consumption demand rebounding to pre-COVID levels any time soon.

The MPC's central remit on inflation also remains a concern. Core inflation, the panel observed, had hardened across the board and increased by 50 basis points to touch 6% in February. The RBI is cognisant of the fact that there are both upside and downside pressures that may impact the trajectory of retail inflation. Governor Shaktikanta Das has flagged the critical significance that this year's monsoon rains will have on food prices, which have been recent source of upward pressure on price stability. And both Mr. Das and the broader committee have stressed the vital need for the Centre and States to initiate some coordinated action to ease the tax burden on petroleum products, given the ripple 'second-round' effects that the high costs of transport fuels have on overall inflation. High international commodity prices and logistics costs are also threatening to push up input costs across the manufacturing and services sectors, posing a real challenge to policymakers, given that it is far harder to influence these variables. With the RBI's own March survey on inflation expectations showing that urban households expect prices to accelerate over a one-year horizon, monetary authorities can ill afford to drop their guard on price stability. For, at stake is their hard-earned credibility.

Falling short

India must ensure there is no vaccine shortage and move to accelerate universal access

Easter has not brought good tidings to India. The number of daily new cases has risen by over a 100,000 – twice in three days. Delhi and Maharashtra have imposed night curfews, an idea, that is so shorn of evidence as being a deterrent to transmission that it only signifies panic. There is unalloyed acknowledgment at the Centre that India is in the midst of deep crisis and the blame has been squarely laid on the people who are not following 'COVID-appropriate behaviour'. In January, India rushed through two vaccines and sought to give the impression that it was the vaccine manufacturing hub of the world and could provide for its own vast population as well as for the world outside. However, with the national second wave that began in March and growing public clamour for making the vaccine available to all adult Indians, the government is singing a different tune: that vaccines were not to be given by want but to be dispensed by need. Those who are most vulnerable to the disease: health-care workers, frontline workers, the elderly and those with comorbidities surely have the first right to protect themselves against the disease. The Serum Institute of India, unlike India's public sector vaccine companies that have largely shut down, is a private contractor for whom India is just another buyer. It can manufacture no more than 65 million doses a month and there is only a vague assurance that "most" of it would be for Indians. Covaxin constitutes less than 10% of India's vaccine portfolio and in March the Centre had ordered only 20 million doses more. Both firms have demanded that the government provide additional funds to expand manufacturing to enable more vaccines to Indians and the SII has also demanded a higher per vaccine price to guarantee prioritised supply.

India has hit a record of administering 4 million doses a day – a significant number by global standards – and were this to increase given the widening public anxiety over the second wave, there is a need to replenish stocks every 10 days. Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have been complaining of vaccine shortages though the Centre is adamant that there isn't one. While it is true that most countries have prioritised their health-care workers, they have also moved to rapidly expand access without barriers within. Several states in the United States, and Israel have unfettered access and the U.K. too has said it will prioritise its own needs before exporting. Therefore, the government must realistically clarify on its supply line and endeavour to accelerate universal vaccine access.

Deconstructing declarations of carbon-neutrality

India should not join this game as it has to stay focused on development as its immediate need and aspirational goal



T. JAYARAMAN &
TEJAL KANITKAR

At the latest count by the non-profit Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU), at the beginning of April, 32 countries had declared, in some documented form (<https://bit.ly/3ungBAu>), their proposed intention to achieve carbon neutral status by mid-century or thereabouts. Of these, only eight have any firm status, the rest being in the form of proposed legislation or mentions in policy documents. Since some months ago, the UN Secretary General has taken the lead in sparking off an international chorus, led by global civil society organisations based in the developed countries and encouraged by their governments, that is urging all countries, especially India, to make explicit declarations.

Temperature goal

The impetus for such declarations arises from Article 4.1 of the Paris Agreement (<https://bit.ly/3wzicF4>) that states that "In order to achieve the long-term temperature goal set out in Article 2, Parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, recognizing that peaking will take longer for developing country Parties, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century, on the basis of equity, and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty".

The temperature goal referred to is the much better known declaration of intent of the Paris Agreement, of limiting temperature rise to well below 2°C and further pursuing efforts to restrict it to 1.5°C

above pre-industrial levels.

It is evident that the balance of emissions and removal of greenhouse gases is not sought on a country-wise basis but for the world as a whole. Though both developed country governments and civil society outfits commonly state this as an individual commitment by all countries, the text of the Paris Agreement clearly indicates, based on considerations of equity and differentiation, that this is a global goal.

However, there are two, related and more critical, issues that are often ignored. The first is the compatibility of the intent of Article 4.1 and Article 2. Is the achievement of carbon neutrality compatible with achieving the 1.5°C or 2°C goal? And whether the mid-century carbon neutrality goals of developed countries are compatible with Article 2.2 that declares that the Paris Agreement "will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances".

Current pledges fall short

The hard scientific reality is that such a three-way compatibility between temperature goals, carbon neutrality, and equity is not only not guaranteed, but cannot be achieved for the 1.5°C temperature goal at all. And even for the 2°C goal, the current pledges are highly inadequate. This harsh conclusion follows from straightforward scientific considerations, based on the global carbon budget, which indicates the limits on global cumulative emissions, from the pre-industrial era to the time when net emissions cease, that correspond to definite levels of global temperature rise.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5° warming (<https://bit.ly/39Sag8p>), what remains of this global carbon budget from 2018 onwards, for a 50% probability of restricting temperature rise to less than 1.5°C, is 480 Giga-tonnes (billion tonnes) of carbon

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dioxide equivalent (GtCO₂eq). At the current rate of emissions of about 42 GtCO₂eq per year, this budget would be consumed in 12 years. To keep within the 480 Gt budget, at a steady linear rate of decline, global carbon neutrality must be reached by 2039. While this is quite clearly infeasible, other pathways that either frontload or backlog the period of most rapid decline have even greater barriers to realisation.

For a 50% probability of restricting temperature rise to below 2°C, the budget is considerably more generous, amounting to about 1,400 GtCO₂eq, that provides considerably greater room for manoeuvre.

Emissions in the West

But the hollowness of nation-level carbon neutrality declarations by developed countries is brought out more starkly when we consider the details, as in the case of the United States and the European Union. Emissions in the U.S. (not considering land use and land use change and forest related emissions) (LULUCF), peaked in 2005 and have declined at an average rate of 1.1% from then till 2017, with a maximum annual reduction of 6.3% in 2009, at the height of a recession. Even if it did reach net-zero by 2050 at a steady linear rate of reduction, which is unprecedented, its cumulative emissions between 2018 and 2050 would be 106 GtCO₂, which is 22% of the total remaining carbon budget for the whole world – so high, that unless others reduced emissions at even faster rates, the world would most certainly cross 1.5°C warming.

Indeed, if the U.S. has to stay within its fair share of the remaining carbon budget, it would have to reach net zero emissions (with linear reduction) by 2025. It would still owe a carbon debt of 470 GtCO₂ to the rest of the world for having used more than its fair share of carbon space in the past. At a very moderate carbon price of \$30 per tonne of CO₂, this translates to a carbon debt of over \$14 trillion, that the U.S. owes the world.

Similarly, the European Union, to keep to its fair share of the remaining carbon budget would have to reach net zero by 2033, with a constant annual reduction in emissions. Individual countries will have different dates for a fair net zero – Germany's is 2030. If the EU reaches net zero only by 2050 it would consume at least 71 GtCO₂, well above its fair share. Either way, the EU owes the world a carbon debt of about \$9.3 trillion (at the same price of \$30/tCO₂) for past emissions.

Regrettably, a section of the climate policy modelling literature has promoted the illusion that this three-way compatibility is feasible through speculative "negative emissions", ostensibly through dramatic expansion of carbon capture, primarily by the biosphere. They have also been promoting the other illusion that not resorting to any serious emissions increase at all is the means to guarantee the successful development of the Third World.

India has no carbon debt

India clearly should not join this game of carbon neutrality declarations, for a number of reasons. For one, India has to stay focused on development – both as its immediate need as well as its aspirational goal. While sustainability is desirable, the question of how low India's future low-carbon development can be is highly uncertain. India's current low carbon footprint is a consequence of the utter poverty and deprivation of a majority of its population, and not by virtue of sustainability.

Second, India does not owe a

carbon debt to the world. India's emissions (non-LULUCF) are no more than 3.5% of global cumulative emissions prior to 1990 and about 5% since till 2018. Nor are India's current annual emissions such as to seriously dent the emissions gap between what the world needs and the current level of mitigation effort, even as India's mitigation efforts are quite compatible with a 2°C target. Any self-sacrificial declaration of carbon neutrality today in the current international scenario would be a wasted gesture reducing the burden of the developed world and transferring it to the backs of the Indian people.

Much of the argument for India declaring a target year for net-zero derives unfortunately from some form of climate hubris, accompanied by the hype that India risks being "left out" of some imagined global convergence in the climate arena. One variant of the hubris sees India taking the lead in some global ecological alternative driven by frugality, minimal consumption and little technological advance. Another imagines that India will somehow, in very short order, emerge as a global leader of green manufacturing and industry. While the latter is belied by the character of India's overall growth trajectory, the former is clearly socio-politically infeasible and morally unacceptable.

India's twin burden of low-carbon development and adaptation to climate impacts, is onerous and no doubt requires serious, concerted action.

India's approach to eventual net-zero emissions is contingent on deep first world emissions reductions and an adequate and unambiguous global carbon budget. Meanwhile, India must reject any attempt to restrict its options and be led into a low-development trap, based on pseudo-scientific narratives.

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Abortion is a woman's right to decide

The amendment to the abortion laws retains the notion that the state must intervene in what is a woman's absolute right



COLIN GONSALVES &
SNEHA MUKHERJEE

Given the phenomenal expansion in feminist jurisprudence over the last decade, particularly on the issue of a woman's right to choose to have an abortion, it now appears quite plain that the central government's amendment to the abortion laws not only retains the traditional notion that the state must intervene and decide for women as to when and in what circumstances abortions may be carried out, but even the pathetic measures set out in the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act 2021 are too little and have come too late.

After much stonewalling

This government seems to be incompetent in understanding a woman's right over her own body. The government's conduct is particularly appalling since it comes after over a decade of procrastination and obstruction where indigenous women in difficult circumstances tried to have abortions done and were stonewalled by government officials and prosecutors. The passing of this Act marks a new phase of the struggle to assert the absolute right of a woman over her body. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 (MTP) may have been considered progressive

Explanation 1 dealt with rape cases where it was to be presumed that the anguish caused would constitute a grave injury to the mental health of the woman. Explanation 2 laid down that any pregnancy occurring as a result of failure of contraception would likewise be presumed to constitute a grave injury. Account needed to be taken of the pregnant woman's actual or reasonably foreseeable environment. Section 5 created an exception to the 20 week limit whenever such an abortion was immediately necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman.

The 1971 Act was based on "The Report of the Shantilal H. Shah Committee to Study the Question of Legislation of Abortion" 1967, which set out the limitations of technology which made it hazardous for women to have abortions done after the 20th week. This limitation disappeared with the phe-



nomenal improvement in technology and processes rendering it possible to carry out abortions safely right up to full term. Thus the excuse of "safety of the woman" was no longer tenable to be used for restricting women's rights.

The after-effect

The central government has been criminally negligent in allowing the law to stand as it has for five decades. It has pushed women seeking abortions underground where terminations are carried out in unhygienic and dangerous places, and in horrific situations. Even today about 800,000 illegal and unsafe abortions are performed every year in India, many of them resulting in morbidities and death. The government has not cared. Political parties of all hues had one thing in common; women dying do not matter.

The decision of the Bombay High Court in *Nikita Mehta vs State of Maharashtra*, saying that it was not open for the courts to double guess the statutory restrictions, sparked the debate around the right to abortion in India. From 2008 onwards, over 300 petitions were filed in the Supreme Court and the High Courts. Given the gruesome context from which

these petitions sprung the Supreme Court generally responded well by ignoring the statutory provisions as it was patent that not allowing abortions to take place would have caused grave injustice to the woman. The Court then routinely allowed abortions way past the 20 week limit. In *Murugan Nayakar vs Union of India & Ors*, the abortion was permitted at 31 weeks, very close to full term.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act 2021 fails miserably on the main count while introducing few collateral progressive measures. First, the Act fails to recognise the absolute right of a woman over her body in taking decisions regarding abortions and reproductive health. It still reserves to the state the right to dictate to the woman that she cannot have an abortion at will. Second, even though the limit has been pushed back from 20 to 24 weeks, this comes with the same state conditionalities as before. Third, 24 weeks is not rational given today's technology where abortions can be done safely up to full term.

Medical boards are obstacles

By far the biggest failure of the government lies in enacting section 3(2C) which requires the pregnant woman to approach a medical board in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities and where she has crossed the 24 week limit. These boards impose insurmountable obstacles to the woman seeking late abortions. First, what used to be an exchange between the pregnant woman and her gynaecologist that the abortion can be performed safely. This is the trend worldwide and in the courts. The Indian government needs to wake up and educate itself on women's emancipation worldwide.

Colin Gonsalves is the Founder of Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), a leading public interest law group, and has written and edited articles and books on human rights law issues. Sneha Mukherjee is an advocate practising in the Supreme Court of India and is also Director of the Women's Rights Initiative at Human Rights Law Network

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.

Poll results
Excepting West Bengal, the Assembly elections have been conducted and completed in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry on April 6. Why the counting of votes cannot be done immediately is a legitimate troubling the minds of millions of voters here. Is it so difficult a task in this hi-tech world? The ECI

must take a pragmatic approach.

MANOHARAN MUTHUSWAMY,
Chennai

Electoral system
The editorial, "Special no longer: On Hong Kong" (*The Hindu*, April 2) seemed to reflect some misunderstandings, which I would like to clarify. It is imperative to understand how the amendments improve the

electoral system of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), thereby establishing a political structure that upholds the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, reflects the actual situation of Hong Kong and ensures "patriots administering Hong Kong". Safeguarding the right for Hong Kong permanent residents to vote and to stand for election is clearly

stated in the Decision. Adjustments to the size of the Election Committee and Legislative Council (LegCo) by increasing the number of members by some 25% and 28% respectively, and to their composition, will broaden the representation of different sectors of Hong Kong society. A candidate eligibility review committee shall be established for the different elections of the HKSAR to

provide a robust systemic safeguard for implementing the principle of "patriots administering Hong Kong". It is natural and essential to require people vested with governing powers to be patriotic, which is also part and parcel of basic political ethics that applies everywhere in the world. District Councils have become politics-driven platforms in recent years and been turned into anti-

government bridgeheads, hampering the governance of the HKSAR. The non-inclusion of members of the District Councils from the LegCo and the Election Committee is aimed to plug the loopholes in the system. WONG CHUN TO,
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For Lok Adalats, speed overrides quality

The system must look beyond swift disposal of cases and focus on just and fair outcomes



FAIZAN MUSTAFA & UTKARSH LEO

Justice delayed is justice denied. Access to justice for the poor is a constitutional mandate to ensure fair treatment under our legal system. Hence, Lok Adalats (literally, 'People's Court') were established to make justice accessible and affordable to all. It was a forum to address the problems of crowded case dockets outside the formal adjudicatory system.

The first National Lok Adalat (NLA) of 2021 will be held on April 10. As of now, Lok Adalats have been functioning for 38 years, but have they performed efficiently? Do they empower the poor or coerce them to accept unjust compromises? Do they trade justice off for high settlement numbers and speed, ignoring the old dictum that justice hurried is justice buried? Have we tailored a dual system of justice dispensation, where the formal legal system, i.e., the court, is meant only for the rich and powerful, as was recently stated by former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi? These questions are worth consideration.

Lok Adalats had existed even before the concept received statutory recognition. In 1949, Harivallabh Parikh, a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, popularised them in Rangpur, Gujarat. The Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976, inserted Article 39A to ensure "equal justice and free legal aid". To this end, the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, was enacted by Parliament and it came into force in 1995 "to provide free and competent legal services to weaker sections of the society" and to "organise Lok Adalats to secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity".

A dispute resolution avenue
As an alternative dispute resolution tool, Lok Adalats are regularly organised to help parties reach a compromise. Motor-accident claims, disputes related to public-utility services, cases related to dishonour of cheques, and land, labour and matrimonial disputes (except divorce)



are usually taken up by Lok Adalats.

The State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs) have been organising Lok Adalats on a daily, fortnightly and monthly basis. Data from the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) show that Lok Adalats organised across the country from 2016 to 2020 disposed of 52,46,415 cases. Similarly, National Lok Adalats (NLAs) organised under the aegis of NALSA settle a huge number of cases across the country in a single day. For instance, NLAs conducted on February 8, 2020, disposed of 11,99,575 cases. From 2016 to 2020, NLAs have disposed of a total of 2,93,19,675 cases.

The Indian judicial system is often lambasted, perhaps justifiably, for its endemic delays and excessive backlog. As per the National Judicial Data Grid, 16.9% of all cases in district and taluka courts are three to five years old; for High Courts, 20.4% of all cases are five to 10 years old, and over 17% are 10-20 years old. Furthermore, over 66,000 cases are pending before the Supreme Court, over 57 lakh cases before various HCs, and over 3 crore cases are pending before various district and subordinate courts. Justice V.V.S. Rao, former judge of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, calculated a few years ago that it will take around 320 years to clear the existing backlog of cases.

As a result, litigants are forced to approach Lok Adalats mainly because it is a party-driven process, allowing them to reach an amicable settlement. When compared to litigation, and even other dispute resolution devices, such as arbitration and mediation, Lok Adalats offer parties speed of settlement, as cases are disposed of in a single day; procedural flexibility, as there is no strict application of procedural laws such as the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872; eco-

nomic affordability, as there are no court fees for placing matters before the Lok Adalat; finality of awards, as no further appeal is allowed. This prevents delays in settlement of disputes. More importantly, the award issued by a Lok Adalat, after the filing of a joint compromise petition, has the status of a civil court decree.

As per data from NALSA, subject matter-specific NLAs were organised in 2015 and 2016 on a monthly basis. Therefore, each NLA dealt with a specific type of dispute on a single day, each month. However, from 2017, this practice was discontinued. Thereafter, each NLA has been handling all types of cases on a single day. This was done to reduce the costs of organising the NLAs, and more importantly, to allow parties more negotiation time. But this, in turn, led to a significant drop in the number of cases settled. In 2015 and 2016, ten NLAs were held each year that disposed of 1,83,09,401 and 1,04,98,453 cases respectively. In 2017 and 2018, the number of NLAs dropped to five, with 54,05,867 and 58,79,691 cases settled respectively. In 2019, four NLAs were organised, and they disposed of 52,93,273 cases.

In 2015, the average number of cases settled per NLA was 18,30,940, which came down to 10,81,174 in 2017, but rose to 11,75,939 in 2018, and 13,23,319 cases in 2019. This throws up questions about the efficiency of NLAs. The data show that the average number of cases disposed of per NLA since 2017 has gone up even when the number of NLAs organised each year has reduced. This proves that on average, the system is certainly efficient.

To overcome the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, e-Lok Adalats were organised at both national and State level. However, the first national e-Lok Adalat was con-

ducted both physically and virtually using videoconferencing tools, and it disposed of 10,42,816 cases. But this was less than the average of settled cases in 2017, 2018, and 2019. This suggests that the performance of the NeLA was less efficient than physical National Lok Adalats organised in 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, who chairs the SC's e-Committee, recently published the draft of phase three of the e-Courts project. Once implemented, it may prove to be a game-changer in improving the efficiency of the adjudicatory process.

Conciliatory role

However, besides efficiency and speed, Lok Adalats both online and offline should focus on the quality of justice delivered. The Supreme Court, in *State of Punjab vs Jallur Singh* (2008), held that a Lok Adalat is purely conciliatory and it has no adjudicatory or judicial function. As compromise is its central idea, there is a concern, and perhaps a valid one, that in the endeavour for speedy disposal of cases, it undermines the idea of justice. In a majority of cases, litigants are pitted against entities with deep pockets, such as insurance companies, banks, electricity boards, among others. In many cases, compromises are imposed on the poor who often have no choice but to accept them. In most cases, such litigants have to accept discounted future values of their claims instead of their just entitlements, or small compensations, just to bring a long-pending legal process to an end. Similarly, poor women under the so-called 'harmony ideology' of the state are virtually dictated by family courts to compromise matrimonial disputes under a romanticised view of marriage. Even a disaster like the Bhopal gas tragedy was coercively settled for a paltry sum, with real justice still eluding thousands of victims.

A just outcome of a legal process is far more important than expeditious disposal. With Justice N.V. Ramana's elevation as the new Chief Justice of India, it is hoped that he would take some concrete and innovative steps in improving the quality of justice rendered by National Lok Adalats.

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The art of regulation

G.V. Ramakrishna, the late chairman of SEBI, achieved a fine balance between discipline and adaptability



M. DAMODARAN

The passing away of G.V. Ramakrishna (GVR), the first Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in its statutory avatar, is not an occasion to mourn, but to celebrate a life of public service that was exemplary in its sweep and its incisiveness. It is also a good occasion to reflect on regulatory philosophy and temperament.

At the outset, it is necessary to look at the objective of regulation. In an unregulated space, physical, intellectual or financial muscle often enables stronger elements to claim a disproportionately large territory of activity and influence. The level playing field that regulators are tasked to maintain is the best enabler that an ordinary person has.

It is important for regulatory organisations to understand ground-level realities, and to respect the view that they are, at best, important supporting actors in the theatre of wealth creation and distribution. Provisions that exist in law and regulations must be enforced in an appropriate manner and at an appropriate time to send out signals to the rest of the regulated universe that transgressions will not be tolerated.

At this juncture, it is useful to reflect on GVR's approach. In its early days, SEBI did not have the powers that are now vested in it. At the same time, GVR had to get the brokering universe to behave in a manner that did not disrupt markets but discouraged rogue elements. It is widely believed that he persuaded brokers to believe that SEBI had powers that it actually did not have, and the fear that he would be exercising these (non-existent) powers kept them largely within the confines of good conduct and behaviour. It follows that good intentions can be enforced, even when legislative backing does not exist.

Fast forward to the period between 2005 and 2007 – SEBI, though fully conscious that it did not have express powers of disgorgement, ordered the disgorgement of ill-gotten gains on the principle that a regulator should not countenance the existence of unjust enrichment. Similarly, in the absence of any specific provision in law, the regulator introduced the 'consent' scheme, based on the 'settlement' scheme in the United States, to clear the pipeline of relatively minor and often technical violations, so that the manpower and expertise available within the organi-

sation could focus on systemically important large cases. Underlying this approach was the firm belief that between what is prescribed and what is proscribed, there is a wide space within which well-intended persons can intervene.

Fear and respect

Persons in regulatory organisations are often in the position of judges, having to decide on matters on the basis of evidence produced before them. In this exercise, natural justice as manifested in the *audi alteram partem* (hear the other side) principle is a non-negotiable requirement. SEBI, over the years, has passed orders suspending persons from participating in the market with immediate effect. The penalty kicks in before a person who has been found guilty has had an opportunity to appeal against the impugned order. One such case, which came to the notice of the then Chairman, was the order passed by SEBI in the IPO scam matter of 2003-05. That order, running into more than 100 pages, was shown to the Chairman before it was put up on the website. Two material corrections were made after reading only the last (operative) part of the order. In one correction, the direction to "change the management of the depository" was reworded as "revamp the management". The second, and more important change, was to build into the order an immediate post-decisional hearing by giving the affected party the opportunity to appeal within 15 days of the order. This led to a few review applications, and SEBI itself overturning the order, in regard to those cases, in a matter of a few days, thus avoiding severe punishment such as suspension from the market to persons who were not in default.

It is normal for a regulator at the commencement of their term to seek to evoke fear in the community, so that it is clear whose writ runs in the market. Over time, the attempts to balance conflicts in public interest and find appropriate solutions should move the response from fear to respect. When persons heading regulatory organisations leave, the affection that they carry with them is the proverbial icing on the cake.

When looking for persons to head senior positions in regulatory organisations, the essential attributes should be impartiality, objectivity, autonomy (as distinct from independence), and the ability to operate without fear or favour. G.V. Ramakrishna must have walked out of SEBI decades ago knowing that the icing on the cake would not melt for several years.

The author is Chairperson, Excellence Enablers, and former Chairman, SEBI

A way forward for trans persons

The induction of 13 members of the community into the Chhattisgarh police is an encouraging feat

R.K. VIJ

No less than 13 members of the transgender community have been selected recently as constables under the Chhattisgarh police. This is truly historic and thrilling for a community that had no legal recognition till the Supreme Court in *NALSA vs. Union of India* (2014) ruled that transgender persons have the right to decide their self-identified gender.

The binary notion of gender, which denied equal protection of law to transgenders, was rejected and the required relief was provided by the top court. The transgenders, now in khaki, will be the first responders in handling law and order situations and others' grievances.

Though each of the selected persons has their own painful stories of abuse, discrimination and abandonment, their induction into the police force is a vital message to people that they are as physically and mentally competent as others. This is more significant in the backdrop of the fact that there was no reservation for the transgender community as a separate category. This may, hence, help in changing the perception of people who think of them as a fearful entity with a stigma of identity, disability, criminality, or untouchability. Earlier, a few transgenders were inducted into the Tamil Nadu police too.

The journey of transgender people has indeed been a long struggle. However, soon after the 2014 Supreme Court judgment, the Chhattisgarh government constituted the Third Gender Welfare Board to take up various welfare measures in favour of trans people. Instructions were issued to all departments to include 'third gender' as an option (along with male and female) in official documents that require mentioning the gender or sex of a person.

District-level committees were constituted to identify members of the transgender community so that welfare schemes could be implemented for their benefit. Sensitisation workshops were organised at State and district levels by the police department and police officers were apprised about the Central law and the Supreme Court's ruling on transgenders. Training capsules were pre-

pared for police training institutes with the help of transgender members of the Welfare Board.

Further, after the announcement of vacancies, the police not only permitted the use of their sports ground for practice, but also helped them in preparing for the written examination. However, ultimately, it was the hard work of the transgender people themselves which ensured their success and marked their presence in the department.

International conventions

The recently enacted Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which paved the way for issuing a certificate of transgender identity, is in spirit with international conventions, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, and the Yogyakarta Principles, 2006. The Act recognises that transgender persons have a legal right to self-perceived gender identity in accordance with the principle of the "Psychological Test" instead of the "Biological Test". According to law, transgender persons cannot be discriminated against in any matter relating to employment by any establishment.

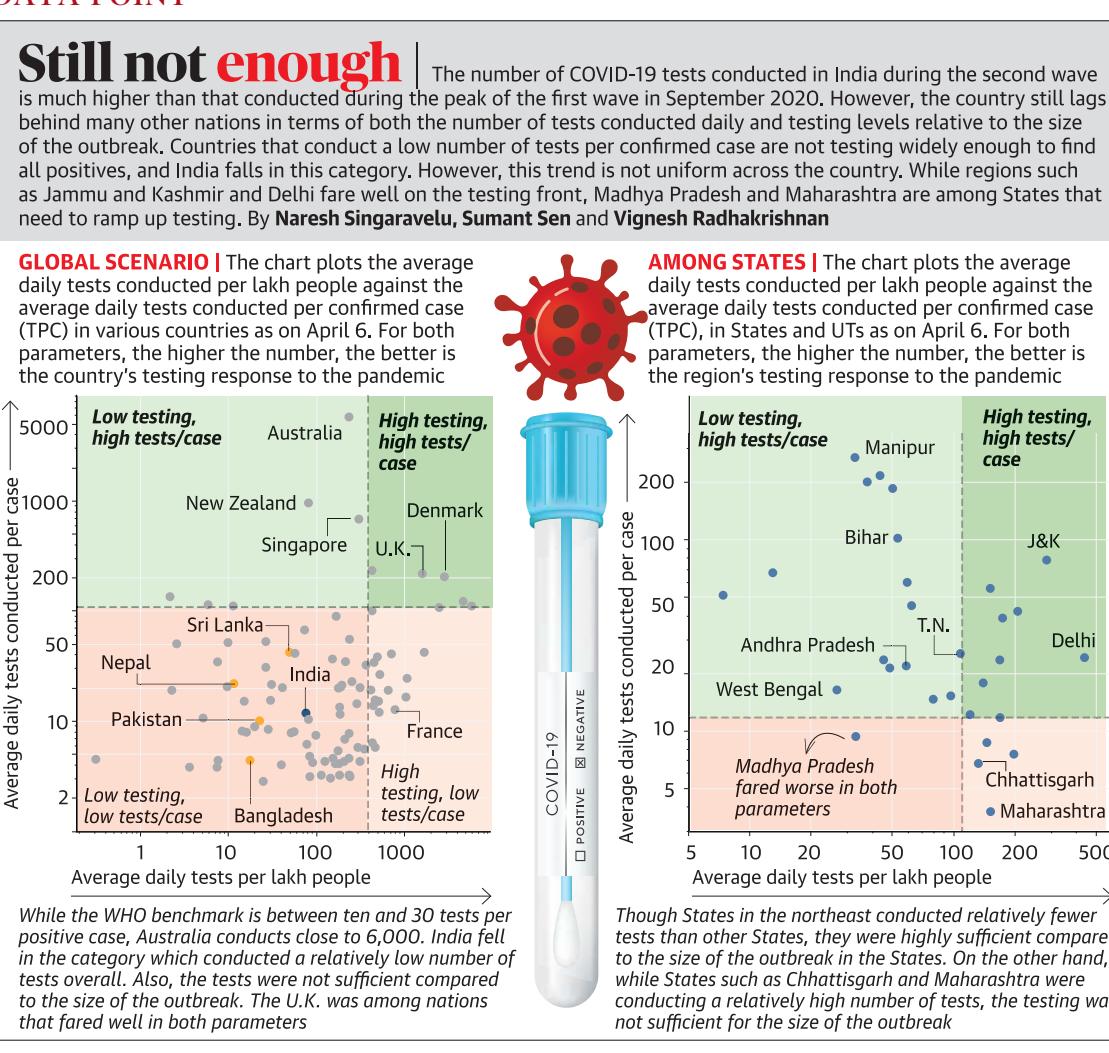
In another recent judgment, the Kerala High Court allowed a petition moved by a transwoman seeking admission into the National Cadet Corps based on her self-claimed gender identity. The court held that the provisions of the NCC Act cannot preclude the operation of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act. Thus, this new protective Central legislation has given a new lease of life to the whole community.

The selected trans recruits are excited to start their new innings of life with novel challenges, but a lot more needs to be done to bring about changes in the perception of people towards this marginalised community. The law must be implemented in letter and spirit to fulfil its objective. At the same time, society needs to erase its biases and accept transgender people as equal human beings with humility.

The author is a senior IPS officer in Chhattisgarh



DATA POINT



FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 8, 1971

India rejects China's protest

[New Delhi, April 7] India to-day rejected China's charge of "interference" in Pakistan's internal affairs and "connivance at provocation" against the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi. A New China News Agency broadcast heard in Tokyo to-day said the Chinese Embassy in India filed a strong protest with the Indian Government yesterday on the Indian action. The Chinese note said, "while flagrantly interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan, the Indian Government has gone so far as to connive at the wilful trouble-making by Indians in front of the Chinese Embassy." Peking's official stand against India on the turmoil in East Pakistan followed an appeal by the Soviet President, Mr. Nikolai Podgorny, on Saturday night to the Pakistan President Gen. Yahya Khan, urging him to "stop bloodshed and the repression of the populace of East Pakistan".

The Chinese note dated April 6 said in the afternoon of March 29, several hundred Indians frantically shouted slogans against Chinese leaders in front of the Chinese Embassy and posted a 'protest' on the Embassy gate and plate "slander China as aiding Pakistan Government in its war on the freedom-loving people of East Bengal".

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 8, 1921

Salvation Army officer attacked

[Tinnevelly, April 7] Details are to hand of an unpleasant episode that occurred a few days ago at Suchindram, a populous village in South Travancore, which is the seat of an important Hindu shrine. While a European officer of the Salvation Army staff, Captain Eden (Devapriyan) with a European lady named Mrs. L.B. Clarke in the side-car was motor-cycling through the public street in front of the local temple, a number of persons deliberately obstructed their passage with a barricade of country carts and severely assaulted the officer, and, it is said, also maltreated the lady. Major Richardson, Commander of the Salvation Army, reported the matter to the Dewan of Travancore who directed the District Magistrate and Divisional Magistrate to proceed to the scene and hold an enquiry. The officers have taken a deposition from the complainant and it is understood and is said that nearly fifty persons are concerned in the assault. The public version of the incident is that the officer in question, contrary to custom and despite public protest, persisted in riding through the street in front of the temple and he took along with him some outcaste converts.

FROM PAGE ONE

No shortage of vaccines, says Health Minister

To spread panic among the people is to compound the folly further. Vaccine supplies are being monitored on a real-time basis, and State governments are being apprised regularly about it. Allegations of vaccine shortage are utterly baseless," his letter noted.

He marked out the three States – all led by non-NDA governments – to argue that they were coming up short compared with several other States in vaccinating healthcare and frontline workers, and those above 45 years, and trying to "politicise" the pandemic.

He also picked on Chhattisgarh for "petty politicking" and said the State's overarching reliance on rapid antigen tests and its early refusal to use Covaxin gave it the "dubious distinction of being the only government in the world to incite vaccine hesitancy".

He said there were 10 States that had inoculated more than 90% of their healthcare workers, when Maharashtra had managed "only 86%", while Punjab and Delhi had carried out 64% and 72%, respectively. "Among frontline workers, Maharashtra has vaccinated only 73% with first dose. Equivalent numbers for Delhi and Punjab are 71% and 65%. There are five Indian States/UTs that have already done more than 85%. When it comes to senior citizens, Maharashtra has vaccinated just 25%, Delhi has vaccinated 30% and Punjab only 13%. There are four States/UTs that have already vaccinated more than 50%. Doesn't it seem evident that

these States are trying to divert attention from their poor vaccination efforts by just continuously shifting the goal-posts?"

Amid a second wave, which is now seeing more than 1,00,000 new cases being added everyday, there has been a clamour for opening up vaccines for all adults. However, Serum Institute of India (SII) has said that its production lines have been stretched, and that India must provide it with ₹3,000 crore to boost production capacity.

Adar Poonawala, CEO, SII, told NDTV that it was unable to export vaccines (which it sells at a higher price) because of restrictions placed by India and this was curtailing profits necessary for larger manufacturing capacity investments. The company produced about 65 million vaccine doses a month and "most of it" was for India. However, with India now administering over 2.4 million doses a day, the supply could quickly dry up.

Mr. Poonawala said his company had been sent legal notices by AstraZeneca over delays in supplying Covishield, and a ban by the United States on exporting the raw material necessary for making another forthcoming vaccine called Novavax meant the SII's ability to make it had halved.

The Centre has also ordered 20 million doses of Covaxin by Bharat Biotech though there are again concerns over how quickly the company can ramp up production for the projected 120 million doses.

Vaccination at workplaces from April 11

The Ministry has also prepared guidelines to support the States/UTs to help organise these sessions. "COVID-19 vaccination was extended to all citizens aged 45 years and above from April 1 and a substantial proportion of this population is in the organised sector of the economy. The move then is aimed at making the vaccine more accessible," a communication from Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said.

The sessions will still require beneficiaries to register on the Co-WIN portal prior to vaccination, and the workplace management will designate one of its senior staff members to be the nodal officer for coordinating with the district health authorities/private COVID-19 vaccination centres and support

vaccination activities.

"The schedule of vaccination session can be made up 15 days in advance and intimated to the workplace so that maximum attendance is ensured on the day of the vaccination. In most of the workplaces vaccination schedule may, however, be completed in less than 15 days," the guidelines said.

The guidelines added that one fully trained vaccination team should be assigned to vaccinate 100 beneficiaries at the workplace. Private CVCs will deploy the vaccination team at private workplaces. "The workplace CVCs staff engaged in COVID-19 vaccination will follow existing SOPs for vaccination and reporting adverse events following vaccination," the guidelines said.

RBI keeps policy rates unchanged

"A key aspect of this strategy will be to strengthen the bedrock of macroeconomic stability that has anchored India's revival from the pandemic. This will help stakeholders in taking efficient spending decisions over longer horizons, thereby improving the investment climate," he said.

Mr. Das said the RBI is optimistic about a pick-up in demand and expansion of business activity this year.

"Rural demand remains buoyant and record agricultural production in 2020-21 bodes well for its resilience. Urban demand has gained traction and should get a fillip with the ongoing vaccination drive," he added.

Taking various factors into consideration, the projection of real GDP growth for 2021-22 has been retained at 10.5% consisting of 26.2% in Q1; 8.3% in Q2; 5.4% in Q3; and 6.2% in Q4, Mr. Das said.

The RBI Governor said that while headline inflation at 5.0% in February 2021 remained within the tolerance band, some underlying con-

stituents were testing the upper tolerance level.

Taking into consideration various factors, the RBI had revised the projection for CPI inflation to 5.0% in Q4 of 2020-21; 5.2% in Q1 of 2021-22; 5.2% in Q2; 4.4% in Q3; and 5.1% in Q4, with risks broadly balanced, he said.

Based on its experience last year, the RBI had also decided to put in place a secondary market G-sec acquisition programme or G-SAP 1.0, whereby the central bank would commit upfront to a specific amount of open market purchases of government securities with a view to enabling a stable and orderly evolution of the yield curve amid comfortable liquidity conditions. "The endeavour will be to ensure congenial financial conditions for the recovery to gain traction," Mr. Das said.

For Q1, it had been decided to announce a G-SAP of ₹1 lakh crore. The first purchase of government securities for an aggregate amount of ₹25,000 crore under G-SAP 1.0 would be conducted on April 15, he said.

The petition filed by advocates Neha Kapoor and Mohit Bhadu said that many of the songs and music videos contained obscene or vulgar content.

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Cooch Behar, Alipurduar set for crucial battles

Of the 44 seats, 14 are in the two districts and an equal number are spread across two districts in northern part of Bengal

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

KOLKATA

Marginalised people from remote areas will exercise their right to franchise as 14 seats in Cooch Behar and Alipurduar districts of the northern part of West Bengal go to the polls in the fourth phase of the West Bengal Assembly election on April 10. The areas stretch from erstwhile enclaves bordering Bangladesh to the hills near Bhutan, where a particularly vulnerable primitive tribe, Toto, lives. In all, the electorate of 44 Assembly constituencies will vote in the fourth phase on April 10.

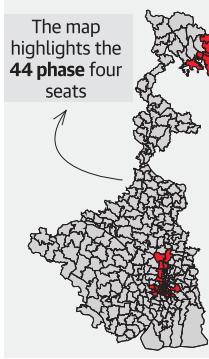
Of the 44 seats, 14 are spread across two districts of north Bengal, nine are in Cooch Behar and five in Alipurduar district. The fact that the Trinamool Congress lost both the Cooch Behar and Alipurduar seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha election makes it an important contest for the ruling party.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has campaigned extensively in the districts, emphasising that she has established peace and stability in the region and was upset that she lost the seats in the 2019 election.

Cooch Behar used to be

Fourth leg

West Bengal Assembly election. A demographic and socio-economic profile:



2016 PERFORMANCE

Party	Vote %	Seats won
AITC	46.0%	39
CPI(M)	19.7%	2
BJP	12.1%	1
INC	6.7%	1
AIFB	6.2%	1

RURAL/URBAN POPULATION SHARE

Phase 4	Rural %	Urban %
All	68.1	31.9

SC/ST POPULATION SHARE

Seats	ST (%)	SC (%)
Phase 4	7.2%	32.30%
All	5.8	23.5

SHARE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH MAIN INCOME FROM CULTIVATION	Seats	%
All	32.61	19.94

SHARE OF LITERATES	Seats	%
All	68.60%	76.3

SOURCE | LOKDHABA, DEVADALAB

the capital of the erstwhile Koch Kings, and both the Trinamool Congress and the BJP have been wooing the Rajbanshi population.

Separatist movement

The region saw a violent separatist movement in the first decade of the century. The BJP leadership has promised a Narayani Sena on the lines of other paramilitary forces in the country, if elected, while the Trinamool Congress is promising a Narayani police battalion. Both parties refer to Panchanan Barma, a Rajbanshi icon.

The Mekhliganj, Sitalkuchi, Sitai and Dinhata constitu-

encies in Cooch Behar share a porous border with Bangladesh.

For a district with a minority population of over 25%, the BJP has been raising the issue of infiltration, with Union Home Minister Amit Shah saying that if the party wins, not a bird will allowed to fly from across the border.

Issue of enclaves
Both the BJP and the Trinamool take credit for settling the long-drawn issue of enclaves. In 2015, after the historic Land Boundary Agreement, 51 Bangladeshi enclaves located deep inside the Indian territory became

part of India and 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh were merged with the territory of the neighbouring country.

Over 900 people from the Indian enclaves in Bangladesh, who were settled in camps in Cooch Behar district, feel that there is a gap between what was promised and delivered.

"No leaders come here any more, not even during elections. Six months ago, we were shifted from the camps to small flats. The free rations which the State government was giving have been stopped. We are a forgotten lot," said Osman Gani, a resident of the Dinhata set-

tlement camp.

Dinhata, which has been witnessing violence over the past several weeks, is all set for an electoral contest between Nisith Pramanik, who was elected as BJP MP from Cooch Behar, and Udayan Guha of the Trinamool Congress.

As in many seats across the State, the BJP has fielded Trinamool turncoats. Mihir Goswami, MLA, who joined the party months ago, is contesting the Natabari Assembly seat against Minister for North Bengal Development Rabindranath Ghosh.

Cooch Behar district used to be a Forward Bloc bastion and in seats such as Cooch Behar Uttar, the Samyukta Morcha candidate can play a key role.

Tribal population

In the adjoining Alipurduar district, with a significant tribal population adjoining the Buxa Tiger Reserve, the economy depends on tea gardens.

Leos Hasapuri, a senior union leader of the tea gardens from the Madarhat constituency, explained the plight of tea workers. "On paper, the wages for the tea garden workers are ₹202 a day, but most of the workers are brought on contract from other tea gardens and get much less. Most of the tea gardens were started before the country got Independence. But we are struggling to get minimum wages," he said, referring to six closed tea gardens.

The EC asked the Chief Minister to respond within 48 hours

vide the minority votes after listening to the *shaista* [devil] person who had taken money from the BJP (sic)," the EC quoted Ms. Banerjee as saying.

EC notice to Mamata on code violation

CM asked to respond within 48 hours

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India (EC) on Wednesday sent a notice to West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee stating that her appeal to minority voters not to divide their votes was a violation of the model code of conduct.



Mamata Banerjee

vide the minority votes after listening to the *shaista* [devil] person who had taken money from the BJP (sic)," the EC quoted Ms. Banerjee as saying.

The EC asked the Chief Minister to respond within 48 hours, failing which it would take a decision without any further reference to her.

BJP delegation

The notice said a BJP delegation led by Union Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi had met the EC and complained about Ms. Banerjee's speech during a campaign event in Tarakeswar on April 3 appealing to Muslim voters not to let their votes get divided among political parties.

"I am requesting my minority brothers and sisters with folded hands don't di-

Change chairman, and the former Director-General of Police, Uttar Pradesh. Polling in Kerala, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry is over, while that in West Bengal will be completed on April 29. Advocate Virag Gupta, appearing for Mr. Singh, said he mentioned the plea for an urgent hearing, which the court accepted.

The plea stated that campaigning was going on without any regard for COVID-19 regulations.

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has agreed to hear on Thursday a petition seeking directions to the Election Commission of India to take action against leaders, campaigners and candidates for not following the mandatory use of face masks in the ongoing Assembly elections in various States.

The application was filed by Vikram Singh, Centre for Accountability and Systemic

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- a) Master's degree in Computer Engineering / Information Technology / Computer Science/Computer Applications/ Electronics and Communication Engineering / Electrical Engineering or equivalent area with a minimum Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of either 6.0 in a 10-point scale or 60% of marks in appropriate branch. OR
- b) Four-year Bachelor's degree in Computer Engineering / Information Technology/ Electronics and Communication Engineering/Electrical Engineering from any IIT's, IIT's MITS, Other Institutions of National Importance with a minimum CGPA of either 7.0 or equivalent in a 10-point scale or 70% of marks. Such students will be awarded both MS and PhD degree on completion of PhD Programme without any exit option during the programme.

Mode of Application: Only online applications are acceptable. For detailed advertisement and submission of online application, please visit https://www.iiitkottayam.ac.in/#/phd_home.
Last Date of Application: 15th May 2021 [17.00 IST]
Adt No: PHD/II/CS-EE/2021

(Dr M Radhakrishnan)
Registrar

BJP's rivals include 3 NDA constituents in Assam

One of the youngest candidates was fielded by RPI (Athawale) against State BJP chief Ranjeet K. Dass



Democratic process: People waiting in line to cast their votes in Guwahati on Tuesday. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR

include the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, the Bharat Vikas Morcha, the Jan Congress Party and the Rashtriya Pragati Party. Some better-known parties such as the Shiv Sena and the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) were missing in action too. Their spaces were filled by some unfamiliar names such as the Asom Jatiya Parishad-Rajor Dal – is expected to be on three NDA constituents that went alone, even against the BJP.

The Janata Dal(U) contested 33 seats, the most among the three allies of the BJP, followed by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad A. Sangma's National People's Party with 11 and Union Minister Ramdas Athawale's Republican Party of India (Athawale) with seven.

Among the seven that the RPI (Athawale) fielded was Krishnamani Das, one of the youngest candidates this time at 26 years. Her key opponent for the Patarcharkuchi seat is State BJP president Ranjeet Kumar Dass.

The focus beyond the three primary alliances – the

led *Mahajot* or grand alliance.

The total count of parties in the 2016 election was 36. Some of the registered unrecognised parties that contested the 2016 poll skipped the mandate in 2021. These

included a combering operation in south Bastar on April 2.

The region is said to be a stronghold of the Maoists and one of the worst affected areas. On April 3, when the troops were returning, the last group was attacked by Maoists, killing 22 security personnel and injuring 31. The Maoists also took away 14 weapons, over 2,000 rounds of ammunition, and other items belonging to the security personnel.

The April 6 statement signed by "Vikal", spokesperson of the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee of the Maoists, said that four People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) cadres had been killed in the encounter at Tarrem on April 3.

Asked by the media during the briefing on Cabinet decisions of whether the government would get the CRPF jawan released, Mr. Javadekar declined to comment, requesting the press to maintain "discipline" and stick to questions on the Cabinet meeting of the day.

A joint team of Chhattisgarh Police comprising the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Special Task Force (STF), along with various teams of the CRPF, pro-

ceeded for a combering operation in south Bastar on April 2.

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Police establish contact with Maoists

Abductors release a photograph of the CRPF commando in their custody

VIJAYA SINGH

NEW DELHI

The police have been able to establish contact with the group of Maoists who abducted a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) commando after the April 3 encounter at Tarrem in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh.

A day ago, the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) released a statement demanding that the State government name a mediator for the release of the commando.

Refusing to divulge details on the negotiation, a senior police official said the commando would be brought back soon.

The abducted commando, identified as Rakeshwar Singh Minhas, belongs to the CoBRA unit of the CRPF.



Rakeshwar Singh Minhas belongs to the CoBRA unit of the CRPF.

Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) unit of the CRPF, which is specially trained for operations in areas affected by left-wing extremism.

On Wednesday, the Maoists released a photograph of Mr. Minhas where

he is seen sitting under the shade of a hut in his combat clothes.

"There are positive developments and the commando has been located. We cannot launch an operation as it would risk his life," the official said.

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A

One pyre for 8 who died of COVID-19

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AURANGABAD

Eight bodies of COVID-19 victims were cremated on one pyre following a shortage of space at a makeshift crematorium in Beed district of Maharashtra, a civic official said on Wednesday.

Since residents had opposed the cremation of COVID-19 patients at crematoriums in Ambajogai town, local authorities had to identify another place away from there to perform the last rites, he said.

"As residents objected to the cremation of COVID-19 victims in the crematoriums which we currently have, we identified a separate space on Mandwa Road, nearly two km from the town," Ambajogai municipal council's chief officer Ashok Sabale said.

The new makeshift facility had limited space, he said.

"As a result, we had to set up one large pyre and cremate eight bodies on Tuesday. It was a big pyre and the bodies were kept at a certain distance from each other," the official said.

Every Indian deserves a chance to safe life: Rahul

'Debate on COVID-19 vaccine ridiculous'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said it was ridiculous to have a debate on "need versus want" with regard to the COVID-19 vaccination and every Indian deserved the chance to a safe life.

Mr. Gandhi's tweet was in response to Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan's comment at a press conference on Tuesday where he had said the government's aim was "to vaccinate all those who need and not all those who want the vaccine".

Mr. Bhushan said the vaccination drive was aimed at curbing deaths by targeting groups that were most vulnerable.

"It's ridiculous to debate needs & wants. Every Indian deserves the chance to a safe life," Mr. Gandhi said on Twitter. In another tweet, the former Congress chief also shared a video of the police mercilessly beating up a person in Indore for not wearing a mask.

"In the name of enforcing rules, such shameful inhumanity is unacceptable to the country. Where will the people go if the police, instead of protecting people, start torturing?" he asked.

Lok Sabha member Manish Tewari tweeted to ask Health Minister Harsh Vardhan to ensure young people

Wearing mask mandatory even if driving alone, says Delhi HC

Court says mask is a *suraksha kavach* during the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday ruled that wearing a mask, or face cover, is compulsory in a vehicle even if a person is driving alone.

"A mask is a *suraksha kavach* for preventing the spread of the coronavirus," Justice Prathiba M. Singh remarked, while dismissing four different pleas challenging the ₹500 challan issued for not wearing masks while travelling alone in private cars.

"A vehicle which is moving across the city, even if occupied at a given point in time by one person, would be a public place owing to the immediate risk of exposure to other persons under varying circumstances," the court said.

Lawyer's case

In one of the four cases, a lawyer, who was driving his car alone to his chambers at the Tis Hazari Courts on August 9, 2020, was stopped near Aruna Asaf Ali Hospital,



Cracking the whip: A commuter being intercepted by a policeman in East Delhi. ■ PTI

Rajpur Road, Civil Lines, by the police.

He was travelling alone, with his mask hanging on his face from one of his ears. His case is that since he was in the car alone, he had not put on the mask properly and that he had intended to wear it as soon as he stepped out of the car.

He said the four windows of his car were closed. When the police official stopped his car, he was informed that not wearing a mask was a violation of the Delhi Epi-

demic Diseases (Management of COVID-19) Regulations, 2020, and a sum of ₹500 was imposed on him as fine.

The lawyer had sought to declare that privately owned cars were private places for the purpose of the regulations. Apart from the refund of the ₹500, he sought a ₹5 lakh compensation.

The High Court clarified that authorised persons under the regulations would include a District Magistrate, a Sub-Divisional Magistrate or

any officer of the Health Department who may be authorised or the State government. They include officials who hold the position of a sub-inspector or above in the Delhi Police.

Exposure possible

Justice Singh highlighted that a person travelling in a vehicle or car, even if he was alone, could be exposed to the virus in various ways. "The person may have visited a market, or workplace, or hospital or a busy street, prior to entering the car or vehicle. Such a person may be required to keep windows open for the purposes of ventilation."

"The vehicle may also be required to be stopped at a traffic signal and the person could purchase any product by rolling down the window. The person may thus be exposed to a streetside vendor. Thus, it cannot be said that merely because the person is travelling alone in a car, the car would not be a public place," he said.

U.K. vaccine panel issues caution on Oxford shot

'Preferable to offer an alternative for those under 30'

REUTERS
LONDON

Britain should not give Oxford/AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine to under 30s where possible, Britain's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) said on Wednesday, in the wake of a very rare side effect of blood clots in the brain.



Risks involved: The Oxford vaccine has displayed a very rare side effect of blood clots in the brain. ■ FILE PHOTO

Wei Shen Lim, COVID-19 Chair for JCVI, said that based on the available data and evidence, the committee had advised that it was preferable for people aged under 30 with no underlying conditions to be offered an alternative to the AstraZeneca vaccine where available.

Matter of caution

He said for younger people, for whom chances of hospitalisation were much lower, the risk/benefit calculation of the Oxford/AstraZeneca shot meant other vaccines were preferable.

"We are not advising a stop to any vaccination for any individual in any age

group. We are advising a preference for one vaccine over another vaccine for a particular age group, really out of the utmost caution, rather than because we have any serious safety concerns," Mr. Lim said at a briefing.

He said people should go ahead and take the second dose of the AstraZeneca shot if they had received a first dose.

Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) chief executive June



MLA Mukhtar Ansari shifted to U.P. prison

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh MLA Mukhtar Ansari was on Wednesday lodged in a jail in Uttar Pradesh's Banda after being transferred from Ropar prison in Punjab, officials said.

Escorted by a security team of the U.P. police, Mr. Ansari was then put through a series of checks and no illegal item was found on him, said the State Prison Department.

A team of doctors from Government Medical College, Banda, examined him and concluded that he had no immediate health problems, said a spokesman for the Prison Department. The legislator will also be tested for COVID-19.

In Banda jail, he will be lodged in a barracks that will be under round-the-clock surveillance. "The jail administration has taken adequate measures for Mukhtar Ansari's security," said the spokesperson.

The MLA has 16 pending cases against him.

COVID-19 curbs won't stop us, say farmers

'We have altered our schedules to ensure we travel during the day and avoid curfew hours'

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

Despite a spike in COVID-19 cases and imposition of curbs across many States, protesting farmers at the Singhu border said they were determined to continue with their movement.

Several protesters who have been camping at the borders for over four months now said on Wednesday that farmers had overcome the fear of the virus and they had altered their rotation schedules to ensure they travelled during the day and avoided the curfew hours.

"We will continue our movement at the same pace," said Sukhjeet Singh Sidhu, a farmer from Pun-



Overcoming fear: Farmers sitting in protest over the farm laws at Singhu border, Delhi on Wednesday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

jab's Patiala district. "Neither the night curfew nor the ban on political gatherings will have any effect on our movement. We will continue

with the rotation system that we have evolved and nothing can stop us from continuing our protest at this point."

Manjeet Singh, another

farmer from Patiala, said the Punjab government had stood by the farmers. "Our State government has supported us earlier as well and authorities are not really bothering farmers who are on their way to the Singhu border."

Curfew not violated

"People are ensuring that they reach their respective destinations – be it the border or the villages – in time. Our vehicles leave in the morning itself to ensure that curfew hours are not violated. However, we have not faced any difficulties till now from the authorities. As for the virus, we have been lucky that there has been no outbreak at the protest site

itself. So we are not worried," Mr. Singh said.

Sukhwinder Singh, a farmer from Punjab's Roopnagar district, said the announcements of restrictions and curbs had only strengthened the farmers' resolve.

"This is the government's ploy to stop the protest and once the elections are over, they will impose similar curbs across the country. But that will not affect our movement one bit. Even now schools and colleges are shut and we have seen an increase in participation from the youth. Several have reached the Singhu border in the past few days. No matter what curbs are imposed on us, our movement continues," said Mr. Singh.

BJP MLA says police officer assaulted him

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

A BJP MLA in Uttar Pradesh alleged on Wednesday that the district police chief of Pratapgarh, an IPS officer, assaulted him and tore his clothes when he was in the District Magistrate's office to raise the issue of missing names in the voter list for the upcoming panchayat election.

PM to launch vessel for the Seychelles

Part of first interaction with Wavel Ramkalawan after his win last election

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hand over a fast patrol vessel to the Seychelles Coast Guard on Thursday.

The handing over will be part of a high-level virtual interaction between the Indian leader and the President of the Seychelles, Wavel Ramkalawan.

This is the first interaction between the two leaders

since Mr. Ramkalawan won the October 2020 election in the Seychelles. The African archipelago nation has been a steady part of India's policy for the Indian Ocean region and Mr. Modi visited the country in 2015. India gifted similar vessels to the Seychelles in 2005, 2014 and 2016.

During the event, the leaders will inaugurate a 1 MW solar power plant, and

the Magistrates' Court building project in Mahe, the largest island in the archipelago. The Magistrates' Court will help the Seychelles in centralising the legal and administrative processes that are spread over different regions of the nation.

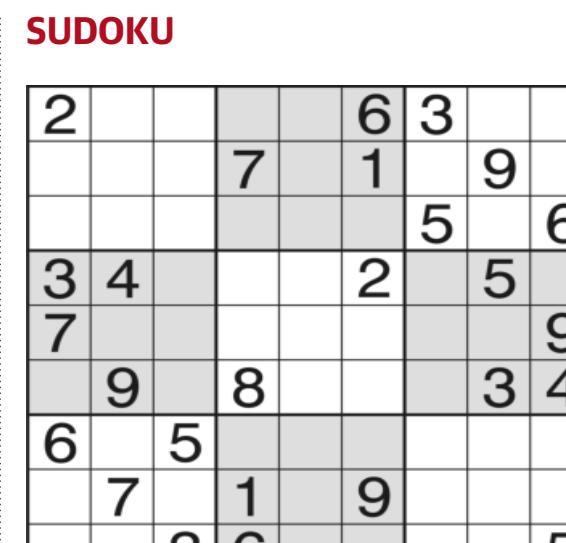
Anti-piracy operations

The fast patrol vessel PS Zoroaster will help the Seychelles in carrying out anti-

piracy operations. The vessel, built by the Kolkata-based Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Limited, was delivered to Seychelles on March 16 and will be dedicated to the Seychelles Coast Guard by Prime Minister Modi during the virtual interaction.

The virtual interaction comes weeks after India gifted 50,000 doses of the Covishield vaccine to Seychelles.

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 13215

M	U	S	C	A	T	E	H	I	S	S	S
O	T	S	T	H	N	P	W				
U	B	O	A	B	U	F	A	C			
S	P	O	G	T	H	C	E				
S	U	L	T	R	I	E	S				
T	I	M	R	U	F	P					
I	G	N	T	E	R	O					
S	T	B	A	K	S	E	M				
S	A	T	O	M	T	E	G				
E	A	G	L	E	P	A	R				
S	R	A	H	C	L	O	P				
S	P	O	T	C	E	B	U				
E	V	U	R	E	C	N	U				
S	L	E	P	Y	A	D	D				

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

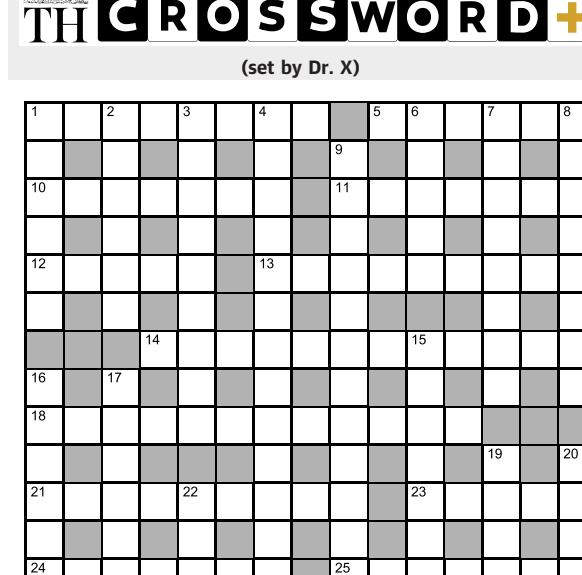
FAITH

The three gunas

Uddhava wonders why a person behaves differently at different times. Lord Krishna explains that this is due to the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas, said P.T. Seshadri in a discourse. Each of these gunas results in certain traits in a person. Fifteen qualities result from sattva. They are sama, dama, titiksha, eeksha, tapa, satya, daya, smrti, tushti, tyaga, asprta, sraddha, hree, dayaadi and svanivrtti.

Sama means control over the mind. Dama means control over the indriyas. Titiksha means patience. Eeksha means the quality of analysing to find out what is good and what is bad. Tapah means observing one's dharma. Satya is speaking the truth. Daya means mercy. Smrti is thinking of the Lord's mercy. Tushti is being content with what one has. Tyaga is surrendering all one's actions at the Lord's feet. Asprta means having vairagya, that is being unattached to anything that is worldly. Sraddha is dedication. Hree is being ashamed to sin. Dayaadi is giving dana. Svanivrtti is being simple.

A person with sattva guna believes in dharma anushtha. A person with rajas is pleasure seeking. A person with tamas is interested only in wealth. A combination of the three gunas in a person results in his behaving differently at different times. His behaviour depends upon which of the gunas is dominant at that moment. How can we infer that a person has all three gunas? The same man does rituals to gain an advantage; he leads the life of a grihastha, and observes his dharma, while earning to run his family. One who does his karmas and submits the fruits to the Lord has sattva guna. One who expects certain fruits from his actions has rajas. One who troubles others has the quality of tamas. One with sattva guna knows that the body and atma are different.



ACROSS

PRIYadarshini Paitandy

The villas are alive with the sound of laughter... and the clack of keyboards. Once weekend getaways and Saturday night party destinations, these sprawling homes are now occupied through the week as families and WFH professionals discover the perks of taking 'villacations'.

"We have doubled with respect to occupancy level and demand," says Amit Damani, co-founder of Vista Rooms, a boutique brand for villa rentals in India. "What we clicked in Fiscal Year 20 (in terms of business), we were able to accomplish in six months (October to March) of FY 21, after zero revenues in the first two quarters. That is the kind of demand we have seen," he says, adding that people are now ready to pay 20% more.

Devendra Parulekar is matter-of-fact when he says, "We increased the price because of demand."

The founder of SaffronStays (a micro hospitality collective that operates 150-plus holiday homes pan India) says that since September 2020, the pandemic notwithstanding, he has seen enormous traffic on his portal. Villas that were priced at ₹40,000 for a night are now selling out even at ₹50,000-60,000 per night.

The need to escape

As lockdown was lifted in phases last year, people wanted to escape the confines of their city apartments and relocate to large vacation homes, says Devendra. Tired of being stuck within four walls, in addition to cooking, washing, cleaning, mopping, they needed a getaway.

"Since WFH had become the norm they realised it didn't matter if they worked out of Alibaug in Maharashtra or Naukuchiatal in Uttarakhand. This is how we suddenly saw an uptake," he adds. Some of his patrons have



The working #villacation

done as many as six to seven stays over the last three months.

While privacy, exclusivity, change of pace and absence of other people are primary appeals of the villa life, large open spaces, manicured lawns and private pools are additional perks.

Not to mention these spaces look great on social media (#villacation). From St Barths to Shimla, this life has caught the fancy of celebrities and working professionals alike. Palm-fringed contemporary villas, white-washed Greek style homes, stone mansions... the style of architecture varies to suit one's mood.

Feeling like British royalty today? No worries: You can choose between

Parsi Manor in Matheran, The Mansion in Kasauli, Milton Abbott Estate in Udhagamandalam and Alpinia in Coonoor... The settings are diverse: enveloping strawberry farms in Panchgani, vineyards in Nashik, apple orchards in Shimla and mountain tops in Malavali. Prefer views of water? Try the oceanside villas on the ECR, Chennai, or the riverside homes in Kamshet.

The duration of the stay varies anywhere between three nights to a fortnight and sometimes longer. Saurabh Garg of NoBroker (a property rental/sale website in India) says professionals in cities like Mumbai and Bengaluru have taken the idea of villa-cation a little too seriously: moving in-

to villas in the outskirts of their respective cities for three to six months. The duration depends on negotiations with the landlords.

"Our website has seen a surge in searches for villas," says Saurabh, adding that the practice of work from home has pushed this cause further. Explaining the economics, Saurabh says, "A person staying in Koramangala or Indiranagar (Bengaluru) will end up paying ₹50,000 to ₹60,000 a month for a three BHK. But now that they don't have to go to work, they say 'okay, I will stay close to the airport or Electronic City for a few months and get a villa at similar price. This way they get a bigger house, more space and more greenery."

Saurabh says NoBroker's overall property listing of villas has increased over the last six months: 103% from January to February this year and 117% from February to March. Devendra and Amit agree. "Lot of people started using their second home and ended up staying there for three months. They realised that while this was great, they should rent the place out so they can maximise their yield on it," says Amit, adding that in the last

In dire need of a change of pace, holidaymakers are opting for the villa life to work and play

six months he has added 100 new homes to VistaRooms' portfolio, taking the total tally of properties to 400.

The number of people reaching out to Devendra, to list their villas on his website, has dramatically increased as well. "Not just that, people who had been sitting on land parcels have decided to build villas and get in touch with us," says Devendra.

To the hills we go

Small groups of friends, working professionals and families who are compatible, as well as comfortable with each other's hygiene (a requisite perhaps more vital than sense of humour or honesty, in a pandemic) have been renting out a space together, and splitting the cost. Prices can start at around ₹12,000 per night and go up to a couple of lakhs.

"A section of high net worth individuals who missed out on their international holiday this year don't mind spending around three lakhs a month on a villacation," says Amit. Sometimes corporates book them for their offsites.

A selection of villas also comes with private butlers and house keeping staff. "People are crazy about home-cooked meals. It doesn't have to be butter chicken, all they sometimes want is simple dal chawal," says Devendra. Often, vegetables are grown in the kitchen garden and guests can lend a hand with gardening. "In Alibaug, we introduce them to the poopi style where the meal is cooked in earthen pots, over a slow fire underground," he says.

Villa? Won't ya? (Top)
Barbecue and music night at SaffronStays
Fiesta in Nashik and
Vista Room's Baag E
Fursat in Chandigarh

■ SAE BHURKE AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Villas in Goa, Alibaug and homes in the hills like Udhagamandalam, Kasauli, Coonoor, and Coorg are the most popular. People prefer driving to destinations that are around three to five hours from their base city. Devendra observes that in the pre-Covid days bookings at Udhagamandalam were by clients from Delhi and Mumbai. But now, it is entirely by people from Chennai and Bengaluru.

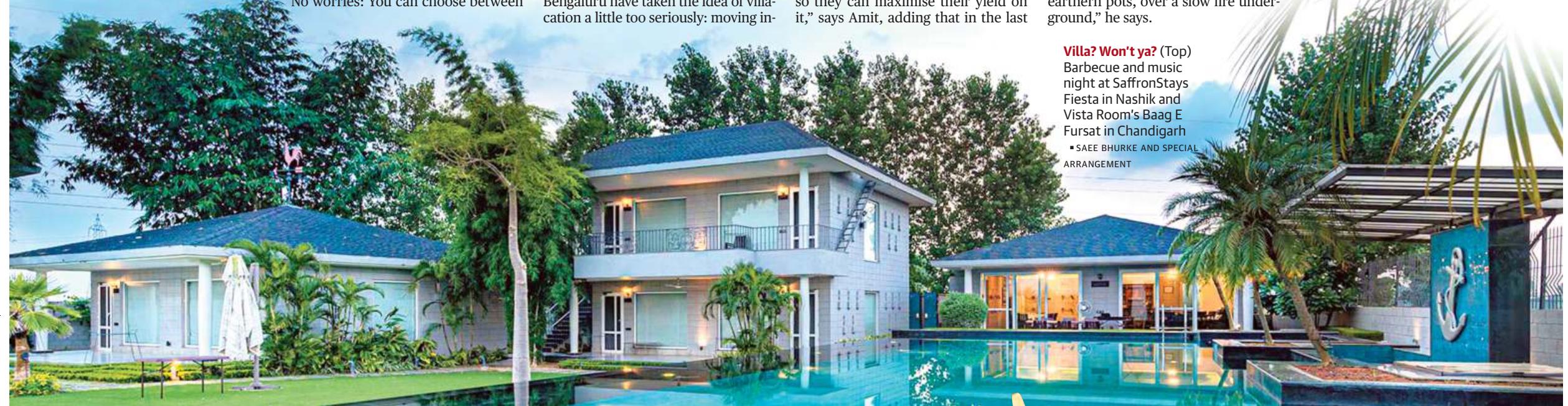
adds Devendra, with a laugh, "A lot of these clients were patrons of luxury hotels. But after a taste of the villa life there has been a shift in their vacation pattern."

Deven Thuppali is one such convert, as he admits gleefully. The resident of Anna Nagar West in Chennai, moved to a four-bedroom villa in Thiruvananthapuram on ECR when the lockdown began last year. Along with his family and two dogs, he stayed there for a month.

The only qualities he was looking for in an alternative home was a tranquil space, free of pollution and traffic. Around the same time, a few of his friends too made the same move. "I moved into Villa Elysium and then came back again when the second lockdown started, this time for two weeks," he says.

He paid a rent of nearly ₹60,000 for a month. Moving here opened him to a new world that he was alien to in his earlier congested surroundings. "I started cycling and jogging. And it was pleasant to see the kind of greenery that's all around," he says.

He enjoyed the villa life so much that he recently bought one there and moved in. "Everything is available here: grocery, hospital and great fish which I buy straight off the fishermen's boats," says a gleeful Dev. His pooches are just as delighted: running around the expanse and rolling on the lawn while the family sets up a moonlit barbecue.



Newer hues Co-Optex encourages weavers to weave jamakkalam in pastel colours and innovative designs; (below) Jamakkalam weavers of Bhavani region. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

From innovative designs to playful fabric blends, the age-old, GI-tagged Bhavani jamakkalam is undergoing a makeover



CHITRADEEPAN ANANTHARAM

Jamakkalam 2.0

Do you remember waiting for guests to arrive before rolling out a Bhavani jamakkalam, that thick, rugged, traditional carpets? High on everyday utility value, these traditional carpets of Tamil Nadu were woven in various sizes to suit different requirements – puja mats for one person to sit on, dining mats for a short row of guests and so on. For weddings and other social gatherings, jamakkalam would be custom-woven to the dimensions required.

With changing lifestyles, the Bhavani jamakkalam are now on the verge of vanishing completely. "I was saddened to know that in the Bhavani region of Tamil Nadu, where these jamakkalam are hand-woven, there are just a handful of weavers left who still weave them. All of them are over 60 years of age, and unable to train the next generation of weavers as no one is showing interest in this art," says Amar Ramesh, who

made a documentary on Bhavani jamakkalam recently.

"Bhavani jamakkalam is a GI-tagged product and the pride of the State, and it is reserved only for handloom weaving," says Mythili Rajendran, Managing Director, Tamil Nadu Handloom Weavers' Cooperative Society Co-optex, Chennai. The society has taken the initiative to revive jamakkalam of Bhavani by encouraging weavers in Kumarpalayam, Mahendranchavadi, Erode and Salem regions of Tamil Nadu to also weave these products of heritage value. "We procure the Korval pattern of these hand-woven jamakkalam, through additional incentive. Then we market them to our customers," she adds.

"Traditionally, these carpets are woven with coarse yarn and strictly adhere to six standard colours: red, blue,

green, white, orange, and yellow. But with our design intervention, we have introduced pastel shades, other colour combinations and design patterns, which would make them suitable for home decor," Mythili says. Co-optex also launched table mats, bags, coasters and other products using this technique.

"Our jamakkalam carpets are of two categories: one is for everyday usage using cotton yarn, and the other is woven with artificial silk, to be used as wedding mats for newly married couples traditionally. We are trying to make customers understand that these carpets are best suited for our weather conditions, easy to wash and maintain," adds Mythili.

Poongodi B, assistant professor at Kumaraguru Institutions, has a decade's experience working with

handloom weavers in Pollachi. "I conducted the research among 17 weavers living in 11 villages, and studied the various aspects of jamakkalam weaving. Based on that I had come up with certain innovations. For example, we provided them with a jacquard box that can be integrated in the pit loom to weave designs in the carpets, moving away from the standard stripes," says Poongodi.

P Sakthivelu, a 64-year-old jamakkalam weaver from Periyamalapalayam, says, "Two weavers are required to weave one standard-size jamakkalam in a day, in the kuzhi thari [pit loom]. It fetches us ₹250 per head per day. Unless the wages are doubled, no one will show interest in this work, which also involves physical drudgery."

"People still use these jamakkalam, but the main issue is powerlooms duplicating these outside the State and passing them off as Bhavani jamakkalam," he says. Producing it on power looms violates the Handloom (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985.

Last year, Amar had organised a dinner meet between the jamakkalam weavers and young weavers from other weaving traditions, at Aappakudal village in Erode. "Some of the young weavers came forward to learn and save the weave; the jamakkalam weavers agreed to teach them," he says.

Harnam Kaur, Una (Himachal Pradesh)

Every weekend in Una, 28-year-old Harnam Kaur gathers a few of her girl friends to play cricket in their neighbourhood. What is special, you might ask.

They all wear bright yellow Chennai Super Kings T-shirts with 'Dhoni' written on it. This sales officer at a PSU has been a Dhoni fan for 15 years now. Some of her friends have even saved her name as 'Mahi' on their phones.

Harnam's biggest regret is

that she has not yet met her

cricketing hero in person, but

there is a memory she will hold

on to for life. "When he played

for the Pune team [in IPL], I

went to watch a match of his in

Delhi. When he walked in to

play, the entire stadium was

chanting 'Mahi, Mahi' and I was

shown on the big screen. That

will be one of my most happy

moments."



Jay Soni, Navsari (Gujarat)

At Jay Soni's tattoo studio in Navsari, cricket is always playing on TV. In the months of April and May, regular patrons know that Jay will be unavailable for appointments in the evenings: he would be busy watching the IPL matches, especially the ones that feature Dhoni's CSK. Jay's childhood dream was to become a cricketer, but he veered into becoming a freelance tattoo artist in 2010, and set up his own studio in Navsari in 2015, with branches in Bardoli and Surat. Tattoo designs might occupy most of his mindspace now, but that takes a backseat when Dhoni is playing a cricket match. Jay has 20 tattoos on his body, but his most memorable is the one on his back: featuring his sporting icon. "I first got my parents' portrait done, and in 2016, I wanted to do a tattoo on my back of something memorable. I thought hard, as I wanted it to be someone or something I will never regret for life... and I chose Dhoni. With him on my back, I firmly believe, 'Mere peechhe Dhoni hai.'"

Watch IPL 2021 Live from tomorrow on Star Sports Network and Disney+ Hotstar VIP

MY HERO, MY 'THALA'

SRINIVASA RAMANUJAM

Earlier this week, Chennai Super Kings' Instagram handle posted a video of MS Dhoni belting out sixes during a practice session with the caption 'Thala Paraak..', borrowing a Rajinikanth line from Petta. Dhoni and his Yellow Army are much-loved all over India. We chat with fans who spell out their IPL mantra for the upcoming season:

R Gopikrishnan, Cuddalore (Tamil Nadu)

If you want to visit R Gopikrishnan in Arangur (Cuddalore district), you do not need Google Maps to help you. All you need is to ask locals the way to 'Dhoni veedu'. This die-hard fan has painted his entire house yellow, with the logo of CSK and a picture of Dhoni. Since last year, when he

undertook this exercise, the house has become popular in the neighbourhood with everyone calling it 'Dhoni house'. The idea was a result of Gopikrishnan's urge to do something last year, when he was far from live cricketing action (the IPL was staged in the United Arab Emirates in 2020 due to the pandemic). He also wanted to spread positivity among fans. "My family knows that I am mad about Dhoni. I pitched them this idea, and thankfully, they gave me a go ahead," recalls the 31-year-old, who is into Forex trading business. And so, in three days' time, Gopikrishnan got his house coloured in CSK yellow. Someone shot a video, and the clip went viral; it reached Dhoni himself, who posted a reaction video to me." I still cannot believe that he took time off to record a message for me."



now, but that takes a backseat when Dhoni is playing a cricket match. Jay has 20 tattoos on his body, but his most memorable is the one on his back: featuring his sporting icon. "I first got my parents' portrait done, and in 2016, I wanted to do a tattoo on my back of something memorable. I thought hard, as I wanted it to be someone or something I will never regret for life... and I chose Dhoni. With him on my back, I firmly believe, 'Mere peechhe Dhoni hai.'"

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AN-ND-E



A star is born
(Clockwise from left)
Kangana Ranaut and Arvind Swami in a still from *Thalaivi*; Kangana as J Jayalalithaa; and Neeta Lulla on the film set
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Destination Beijing Arif Khan hopes to make the cut in the nick of time
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

An uphill battle

Skier Arif Khan is determined to make the most of what could be his last chance of realising his dream – participating in the Winter Olympics

PRAVEEN SUDEVAN

The Winter Olympics in Beijing will begin on February 4, 2022. Which gives Arif Khan just 10 more months. A slalom and giant slalom skier's prime years, he says, are between the ages of 25 and 32. He is 31. This could be his last shot at realising a longtime dream: representing India at the Winter Olympics.

Arif almost made it the last time. He had to average 140 points from five slalom races for the 2018 Winter Games in Pyeongchang. He was on track after good performances in Turkey, Bulgaria, Norway, and Sweden. One more good race in Iran would have given him the ticket to the 2018 Games. Then, it was cancelled due to bad weather.

However, the door was still not shut. Arif had a chance to compete in a race in Switzerland before the deadline. But, he needed ₹1.5 lakh to get there. He had exhausted the money he had borrowed from friends and family. There was neither Government backing nor private sponsorship for a hardly known sport in the country (there still isn't). He could not go to Switzerland, and so he waited for four more years.

Now, Arif is in a similar situation. He needs to score at least 160 points each from five races. There are 10 months to go for the 2022 Games and over 100 races to choose from for qualification. But, Arif, for the next four months, will need about ₹40,000 (about ₹34 lakh) for training and travel. Although he has started a crowdfunding campaign, the response, so far, has been lukewarm.

Nevertheless, he trains seven hours every day to be in the best possible shape, with a singular focus on getting to Beijing.

In slalom skiing, in which Arif is attempting an Olympic berth, the skier has to ski (usually in excess of 90 miles per hour) between poles that are spaced closely together. It is faster than the

other skiing races, like giant slalom or downhill, and hence has less margin for error. But Arif is confident. "I already feel good to go for the races but I feel I can up the level of training before competition," he says over the phone from his training base in Austria.

"I am looking at racing in Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, and Chile from August or September this year."

Childhood lessons
It is tempting to think that Arif was destined to be a skier. His father was a ski guide and owned a ski shop.

The place where he was born, Gulmarg in Kashmir, is among India's primary skiing destinations. Prolonged snowfall meant he could not play other sports, like cricket or volleyball, for six months. It was not hard for him to fall in love with skiing.

Arif recalls his first lesson. "It was in 1994. I was four. We had to walk about 500 meters to the ski shop. And, there was thick snow. My father had groomed a small ski slope just outside the shop. We started at around 9.30 am; and went on till 12.30."

His father took out the smallest pair of skis. "It was red Atomic [the brand] skis," he recalls. Once he taught him how to wear it, his father held him as he slid back and forth the little slope. "I was slipping."

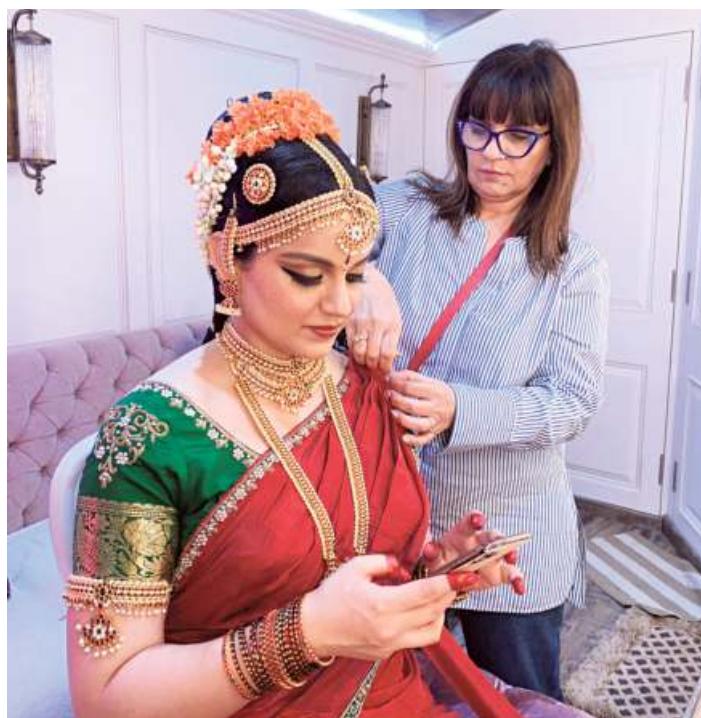
With all these difficulties, has the thought of hanging up his skis ever crossed his mind?

"Yes, every day," he laughs before turning serious. "But I want to put my country on the skiing map. If I can achieve something, the global skiing community will take note of where I am from. It might make them see India as a potential top skiing destination."



Recreating a legacy

National Award-winning costume designer Neeta Lulla on what it took to recreate late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa's wardrobe for the Kangana Ranaut-starrer *Thalaivi*



PRIVYADARSHINI PAITANDY

In the busy streets of Chennai, the familiar silhouette of a lady emerges from a car. An elderly woman watching from close quarters gasps in surprise. It is her hero, the late J Jayalalithaa. Running over, she falls at her feet and cries, "Amma! Amma!"

Except, it wasn't the real 'Amma', but actor Kangana Ranaut who was dressed for her part as the lead in the upcoming film *Thalaivi*, directed by AL Vijay, based on the life of the late Tamil Nadu Chief Minister.

Designer Neeta Lulla – who painstakingly put together Kangana as well as Arvind Swami's looks (as MGR) for the film – says that every time she recounts this incident she gets goosebumps. Work on the biopic started in 2019. Over the course of the year that followed, Neeta found herself immersed in all things Jayalalithaa. She read about the former cine icon,

watched her movies and interviews, observed her attire, and listened to her songs.

She sings a line from 'Enna Poortham', one of her current favourites. "I have watched each of her songs at least 16 times. Every time I saw them, a new detail cropped up," says Neeta, over phone from Hyderabad.

Giving the example of a particular sari, she says, the first time it appeared to be blue in colour. Then it looked aqua. "And then we found it had embroidery on it. We sketched out the details and on a closer look found that the embroidery also had flowers that did not show initially. And after that, we saw a certain colour and pearls in it. It was freaking us out. I wanted to add every single detail every single time," she laughs.

Technicalities matter

Research continued on a day-to-day basis. And as more facts and details surfaced, costumes had to be tweaked accordingly. It took a lot of effort to create the inner structuring – made with layers of sponge and Lycra – that helped Kangana attain the same body specifics as Jayalalithaa. Neeta did not want to use silicone as that would add weight and was not conducive to the hot temperatures they shot at in Chennai, Hyderabad and Mysuru.

For the measurements of the inner structuring, she got in touch with the tailor who used to stitch Jayalalithaa's garments. The whole process involved a lot of technicalities.

"That is why I call myself a technician, not a costume designer. It is imperative to make the characters look believable. You have to understand figure types and work on a subject holistically," she remarks. The prosthetics, however, were created by a team in the US.

There were various aspects of the former politician's lifespan that

C I call myself a technician, not a costume designer. It is imperative to make the characters look believable.
NEETA LULLA
Costume designer



had to be looked into, and with each detail that was unearthed the style changed. "Jaya *amma* as a child, entering films at the age of 16, followed by the stage where she entered politics, and eventually becoming a Chief Minister. I had to look at her real life costumes and recreate those," says Neeta.

This process involved a lot of buying as well as borrowing, she laughs. Vintage saris for the '70s look were sourced from friends' grandmothers. Trips were made to numerous sari shops in and around the city and to Kancheepuram. They then had to be printed to get the desired look. The cheapest saris were the ones we borrowed, she laughs.

Neeta is currently occupied with *Shaakuntalam*, starring Samantha Akkineni.

Known for doing costumes for magnum opus productions such as *Jodhaa Akbar*, *Panipat* and *Devdas*, where each character had an elaborate wardrobe and ornate jewellery to match, *Thalaivi*, in comparison, was a contrast especially in terms of grandeur. And yet it was far from easy. "Characters from books, and kings and queens don't really have photographs. With this film since everything was documented, I have to say this has been the most challenging film of my career," says Neeta, adding, "I have tried to recreate the look to the best of my ability. The rest is for the audience to decide."

Chennai-based start-up Torus Robotics is building Unmanned Ground Vehicles for the Indian Army

SWETA AKUNDI

"You think of 'unmanned', and you think of drones, in the sky," says 25-year-old Vibhakar Senthil. In Chennai's Ambattur – widely regarded as the Detroit of India – his start-up Torus Robotics is set to change that, by making Unmanned Ground Vehicles (UGVs) for the Indian Army.

At the Aero India 2021 in Bengaluru, attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Torus Robotics signed an MOU with the Government, on the joint development of UGVs for the armed forces with BEML Limited.

"With BEML, we are now developing a high-altitude Logistics UGV with 750 kilograms payload. It will be an all-terrain vehicle to supply to and from bases [without the need of human presence] in bad weather conditions, for the Northern Command," says Vibhakar.

At university in SRM, Kattankulathur, Chennai, Vibhakar, with his classmates, M Vignesh



All terrain
The Torus Robotics team with its UGV prototype
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Chennai UGVs march along

and K Abхи Vignesh, spent time researching the robotics industry in India. A combination of patriotism – Vibhakar says he had hoped to join the Indian Army once – and passion for robotics, led them to focus on the defence sector.

"We researched the issues our *jawans* faced during border patrol because of infiltration, heavy burden, high altitudes and lack of oxygen, and the corresponding mental health issues. We

were wondering if robotics could solve that issue of logistics," says Vibhakar, adding, "The idea is not to replace *jawans*, but to aid them."

When Torus Robotics was officially established in 2019, it was with the help of someone who knew the in and out of the armed forces. Lieutenant General CA Krishnan (retired) mentored the three on the needs of the sector. "He was in the Army Design Bureau and we will be officially incor-

porating him in the company in June," Vibhakar adds.

Why the focus on UGVs
UGVs in the defence sector are mainly used for surveillance (border patrol), reconnaissance (scouting and collecting information), combat (like tanks, but smaller), and logistics (ferrying supplies from one base to another, where regular vehicles have trouble going) – the fourth is currently their highest priority.

"You can also adapt UGVs for supplementary activities by making them amphibious or nocturnal and so on," says Vibhakar.

In July 2019, Torus Robotics finished its first project for Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), manufacturing and assembling a UGV. It has been put to use by the Indian Army, which had further tests and research done on it.

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13407

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

- | | |
|--|---|
| ■ Across | 21 Hit a ball in a high arc (3) |
| 1 Blenheim | 17 Advantageous (6) |
| Orange, for example (6,5) | 19 Talons (5) |
| 9 Generally (2,3,4) | 23 Boring instrument (3) |
| 10 Farewell! (informal) (3) | ■ Down |
| 11 Flash of reflected light (5) | 2 Legislation (3) |
| 13 Hold dear – he's rich (anag) (7) | 3 Cold drink (4,3) |
| 14 Source of extreme provocation (3,3) | 4 Look quickly at – cricket stroke (6) |
| 15 Cutting tool (6) | 5 Copper (5) |
| 18 Special aptitudes (7) | 6 Substance used to reduce friction (9) |
| 20 Unit of length (5) | 7 Digital |
| | 8 Unshaven (11) |
| | 12 Cannot be removed (9) |
| | 16 Bone (which sounds funny) (7) |
- The solution will appear on April 15, 2021
- Solution No. 13406**
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| A C R O B A T | B E F I R E A N E S T |
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| S H E D O R E N | S H E N N U |
| P D A R S O G G Y | L O W B R O W B R I |
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| H D D L I K E N E D | H I D D I L I K E N E D |

ACROSS

1 Blenheim

3 Cold drink

4 Look quickly at

5 Copper

6 Substance used to reduce friction

7 Digital

8 Unshaven

12 Cannot be removed

16 Bone

17 Advantageous

19 Talons

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24 Non-stop

25 Generally

26 Substantive

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29 Cannot be removed

30 Bone

31 Hit a ball in a high arc

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33 Non-stop

34 Generally

35 Substantive

36 Digital

37 Unshaven

38 Cannot be removed

39 Bone

40 Hit a ball in a high arc

41 Enrage

42 Non-stop

43 Generally

44 Substantive

Russia to supply military gear to Pakistan

Lavrov says both countries will boost ties in the fight against terror, hold joint military exercises

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ISLAMABAD

Russia's Foreign Minister on Wednesday said Moscow and Islamabad would boost ties in the fight against terrorism, with Russia providing unspecified military equipment to Pakistan and the two holding joint exercises at sea and in the mountains.

Sergey Lavrov spoke on the second day of a two-day trip to Pakistan. It's the first visit by a Russian Foreign Minister in nine years, part of an effort to improve ties. It comes as Moscow seeks to increase its stature in the region, particularly in Afghanistan. There, it has sought to inject itself as a key player in efforts to find a peaceful end to decades of war.

"We stand ready to strengthen the anti-terrorist potential of Pakistan, including by supplying Pakistan with special military equipment," Mr. Lavrov said, without going



Warming ties: Russian and Pakistani Foreign Ministers Sergey Lavrov, left, and Shah Mahmood Qureshi in Islamabad. ■ REUTERS

into detail about the equipment.

Washington is reviewing an agreement it signed more than a year ago with the Taliban as it rethinks a May 1 withdrawal of its soldiers.

Meanwhile, Moscow has stepped up its involvement in Afghanistan, emerging as a significant player. Last month, it hosted talks between the Taliban and senior government officials, and Mr. Lavrov suggested another high-level meeting could again be held in Moscow.

Mr. Lavrov arrived in Pakistan on Tuesday from neighbouring India, with whom Moscow has had a long and solid relationship. The apparent reset in Pakistani-Russian relations, ho-

wever, is by contrast a recent phenomena. In the 1980s, Pakistan was a staging arena for anti-communist Afghan rebels who were aided by the U.S. to oust the former Soviet Union, which negotiated an end to a 10-year occupation in 1989.

Gas pipeline

Russia is also building a gas pipeline between the southern port city of Karachi and eastern Lahore. Pakistan's Foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said Islamabad will also buy 5 million doses of the Russian made COVID-19 Sputnik V vaccine, and expressed a desire to eventually manufacture it in Pakistan. He said Pakistan also wanted Russian expertise to modernise its antiquated railway system as well as its energy sector.

The visit underlines the waning influence of the U.S. in the region, while Russian

and Chinese clout grows, says Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the U.S.-based Wilson Center.

"There's a good reason why this is the first Russian Foreign Minister visit to Islamabad for nearly a decade: Russia-Pakistan relations are on the ascent," he said. He also noted a new 25-year development agreement between Iran and China.

Pakistan also is a key player in China's Belt and Road Initiative – a massive, cross-continental infrastructure development project aimed at expanding China's commercial connections globally.

"America will soon be ceding important real estate to its top rivals," said Mr. Kugelman. "That's the cost of an impending U.S. withdrawal from the region. But with the U.S. intent on pulling back, it is seemingly a cost it is willing to bear."

Backlash after Pakistan PM links rape to dress of women

He had advised them to cover up to prevent 'temptation'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan rights campaigners have accused Prime Minister Imran Khan of "baffling ignorance" after the former cricketer blamed how women dress for a rise in rape cases.

In a weekend interview, Mr. Khan said an increase in rapes indicated the "consequences in any society where vulgarity is on the rise". "The incidents of rape of women... (have) actually very rapidly increased in society," he said.

He advised women to cov-

er up to prevent temptation.

"This entire concept of purdah is to avoid temptation, not everyone has the willpower to avoid it," he said, using a term that can refer to modest dress or the segregation of the sexes.

Hundreds of people signed a statement circulating online on Wednesday, calling Mr. Khan's comments "factually incorrect, insensitive and dangerous". "Fault rests solely with the rapist and the system that enables the rapist, including a culture fostered by statements such as those made by

(Khan)," the statement said.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, an independent rights watchdog, said on Tuesday it was "appalled" by the comments.

"Not only does this betray a baffling ignorance of where, why and how rape occurs, but it also lays the blame on rape survivors, who, as the government must know, can range from young children to victims of honour crimes," it said.

Pakistan regularly ranks among the worst places in the world for gender equality.

'Sedition' nipped in the bud, says Jordan King

Prince Hamzah is under my protection'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIRUT

Jordan's King Abdullah broke his silence on Wednesday to tell his nation that the worst political crisis in decades sparked by an alleged plot involving his half-brother Prince Hamzah was over.

The government had accused Prince Hamzah of involvement in a conspiracy to "destabilise the kingdom's security" and arrested at least 16 people.

But King Abdullah said that Prince Hamzah, who has signed a letter pledging his loyalty to the king following mediation by an un-

cle, was safe in his palace under his "protection".

"I assure you, that the sedition has been nipped in the bud," King Abdullah said in an address.

The challenge of these last days was not the most dangerous for the stability of the country – but it was the most painful for me because the parties involved in this sedition were from home and from outside," he said.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Joe Biden has expressed "strong support" for Jordan's King Abdullah as they spoke by phone on Wednesday.

"We have indications that

U.S. military cites rising risk of Beijing's move against Taiwan

China has been holding 'combat-type' drills close to island

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

The American military is warning that China is probably accelerating its timetable for capturing control of Taiwan, the island democracy that has been the chief source of tension between Washington and Beijing for decades and is widely seen as the most likely trigger for a potentially catastrophic U.S.-China war.

Pakistan also is a key player in China's Belt and Road Initiative – a massive, cross-continental infrastructure development project aimed at expanding China's commercial connections globally.

"America will soon be ceding important real estate to its top rivals," said Mr. Kugelman. "That's the cost of an impending U.S. withdrawal from the region. But with the U.S. intent on pulling back, it is seemingly a cost it is willing to bear."



Crucial test: Taiwanese sailors standing guard in front of a Navy frigate in the port of Keelung, on March 18. ■ AP

Taiwan will fight to 'very last day' if China attacks

REUTERS
TAIPEI

Taiwan will fight to the end if China attacks, its Foreign Minister said on Wednesday, amid mounting Chinese military pressure, including aircraft carrier drills, near the island.

Taiwan has complained of repeated military activities by Beijing in recent months, with China's Air Force making almost daily forays in Taiwan's air defence identification zone. On Monday, China said an aircraft carrier group was exercising close to the island.

"From my limited understanding of American decision makers watching developments in

region, they clearly see the danger of the possibility of China launching an attack against Taiwan," Joseph Wu told reporters.

"We are willing to defend ourselves without any questions and we will fight the war if we need to fight the war. And if we need to defend ourselves to the very last day we will defend ourselves to the very last day."

Washington has been pushing Taipei to modernise its military so it can become a "porcupine", that is hard for China to attack. Mr. Wu said they were determined to improve their military capabilities and spend more on defence.

Chinese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu said the military threat against his country is increasing, and while he said it was not yet "particularly alarming," the Chinese military in the last couple of years has been conducting what he called "real combat-type" exercises closer to the island.

Iranian ship attacked in Red Sea, report says it was Israeli payback

Vessel was deployed to safeguard shipping in the area: Tehran

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

An Iranian freighter was hit by an "explosion" in the Red Sea, Tehran said on Wednesday, after U.S. media reported Israel had struck the ship in retaliation for past Iranian strikes on its vessels.

Iran was at pains to stress that the freighter was a civilian ship, although other sources said it had been used by Iranian commandos as a base for shipping protection and other duties in the area.

The explosion comes at a sensitive time as U.S. President Joe Biden attempts to revive a 2015 nuclear deal with Iran which was strongly opposed by Israel and abandoned by his predecessor Donald Trump in 2018.

The blast struck the "Iranian commercial vessel" MV Saviz off the coast of Djibouti on Tuesday morning, Foreign Ministry spokesman



A satellite photo of MV Saviz in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen. ■ AP/PLANET LABS

Said Khatibzadeh said, adding an inquiry had been opened into the cause.

No causalities

"The accident caused no casualties and a technical investigation is under way to determine its circumstances and origin," he said. "Our country will take all necessary steps through international bodies in this regard."

Mr. Khatibzadeh said the Saviz was a "civilian vessel" that had been deployed in

coordination with the International Maritime Organization to protect shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Many foreign governments have stationed protection vessels in the area since a rash of attacks by Somali pirates between 2000 and 2010.

"This ship has been serving as Iran's logistics station – for technical and logistical support – in the Red Sea," the spokesman added.

The New York Times cited a U.S. official as saying Israel had informed Washington it had struck the ship in "retaliation for earlier Iranian strikes on Israeli vessels".

The paper said that according to the Israelis, "the Saviz had been damaged below the water line".

There was no immediate reaction from the Israeli authorities to the Times report.

Rouhani says Vienna talks open 'new chapter'

Focus on U.S. involvement, ending curbs

ment and reimpose unilateral sanctions.

But differences remain over the mechanics of the move as Tehran has since responded by suspending compliance with some of its own obligations under the deal.

The U.S. was not present at the discussions because Iran has refused to meet the U.S. delegation so long as its sanctions remain in place.

Instead, the EU acted as an intermediary, but all sides gave a positive assessment of the opening talks. "A new chapter has just been opened yesterday," Mr. Rouhani said.

An Iranian delegation met on Tuesday with representatives of the remaining parties to the agreement to discuss how to bring Washington back into it and end crippling U.S. sanctions and Iranian countermeasures.

U.S. President Joe Biden has said he is ready to reverse the decision of his predecessor Donald Trump to withdraw from the agree-

SEARCH FOR MISSING



Pooja
General Public is hereby informed that a lady namely Pooja, W/o Bittu Kumar Rajput, R/o H.No. 1180, Gali No. 11, Kapashera, New Delhi, Age: 23 years, Height: 5'5". Complexion: Fair Face: Round, Built: Medium, Wearing: Blue Colour Suit, White Colour Payjama and Red Colour Chappal in her feet has been missing from her home since 06.03.2021. In this regard a DD No. 111A dated 06.03.2021 has been registered at P.S. Kapashera, New Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing lady but no clue has come to light so far, if any one having any information about this lady please inform undersigned.

E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax: 011-24368639

DP/553/SW/2021

SEARCH FOR MISSING MALE

Vikram
General Public is hereby informed that one male (depicted in the photo) namely Vikram S/o Dinesh R/o Village Parvanjor, PS Parvanjor, Distt. Kanfer, Jharkhand Aged-22 Years has been reported missing since 24.02.2021 at 06:00 PM from A-292, Metro Vihar, Phase-II, Holambi Kalan, Delhi-110082 vide DD No.544 Dated 01.03.2021 registered at Police Station Narela Industrial Area, Delhi. His physical description is as under:- Complexion: Wheatish, Height: 5'4", Face: Round, Built: Medium, ID: Normal, Clothing: Sky blue coloured shirt, Black coloured payjama and slipper in feet. Any person having any information/Clue about this missing male, may inform SHO, Narela Industrial Area, Delhi at E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in or website : http://cbi.nic.in

Sd-
Tele No.: 011-24368638 or 24368641
SHO, Narela Industrial Area, Delhi
FAX No.: 011-24368639
Mob: 7065036324

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED

See Section U/S 82 Cr. P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused Naushad, S/o Lt. Ikramuddin, R/o H.No. C-232, Shaheed Nagar, Sahidabad, Ghaziabad U.P. has Committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 632/20 U/S 498A/406/323/342/376/377/506/34 IPC & 3/4 Dowry prohibition of marriage right Act & 4 Muslim women protection of marriage right Act, P.S. Dayal Pur, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said Naushad cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said Naushad has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused Naushad of FIR No. 632/20 U/S 498A/406/323/342/376/377/506/34 IPC & 3/4 Dowry prohibition of marriage right Act & 4 Muslim women protection of marriage right Act, P.S. Dayal Pur, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 15.05.2021.

By Order
Ms. Mayuri Singh,
Addl. Chief Metropolitan Magistrate-03,
Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

All adults in U.S. eligible for vaccine from April 19'

Biden urges people not to lower guard

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden said he's bumping up his deadline by two weeks for states to make all adults in the U.S. eligible for coronavirus vaccines. But even as he expressed optimism about the pace of vaccinations, he warned Americans that the nation is not yet out of the woods, urging them to continue to wash their hands, socially distance and wear masks.

"Let me be deadly earnest with you: We aren't at the finish line. We still have a lot of work to do. We're still in a life and death race against this virus," Mr. Biden



Joe Biden

said on Tuesday.

But he expressed hope that his announcement, that every adult will be eligible by April 19 to get a virtual line to be vaccinated, will help expand access and distribution of the vaccine.

Focus on U.S. involvement, ending curbs

ment and reimpose unilateral sanctions.

But differences remain over the mechanics of the move as Tehran has since responded by suspending compliance with some of its own obligations under the deal.

The U.S. was not present at the discussions because Iran has refused to meet the U.S. delegation so long as its sanctions remain in place.

Instead, the EU acted as an intermediary, but all sides gave a positive assessment of the opening talks.

"A new chapter has just been opened yesterday," Mr. Rouhani said.

MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	49662	-0.94
US Dollar	74.47	-1.43
Gold	45768	1.59
Brent oil	62.49	-2.57

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	814.75	-20.80
Asian Paints	2628.60	17.00
Axis Bank	688.25	10.35
Bajaj Auto	3680.20	64.70
Bajaj Finserv	9539.60	20.10
Bajaj Finance	5077.10	84.00
Bharti Airtel	541.60	9.40
BPCL	428.20	0.10
Britannia Ind	3808.55	77.95
Cipla	840.85	4.70
Coal India	131.25	0.95
Divis Lab	3698.95	10.85
Dr Reddys Lab	4692.65	73.40
Eicher Motors	2538.20	51.60
Hindustan Steel	1437.40	4.85
HCL Tech	1037.20	8.80
HDFC	2482.70	10.40
HDFC Bank	1447.20	6.95
HDFC Life	699.85	2.70
Hero MotoCorp	2941.60	53.65
Hindalco	352.20	1.75
Hind Unilever	2405.25	-3.05
ICICI Bank	577.65	11.75
IndusInd Bank	945.55	18.30
Infosys	1430.20	19.15
Indian Oil Corp	92.70	1.55
ITC	213.80	1.15
JSW Steel	562.30	24.85
Kotak Bank	1792.00	23.70
L&T	1404.15	3.15
M&M	796.30	15.20
Maruti Suzuki	6865.00	113.70
Nestle India Ltd.	17409.85	328.15
NTPC	105.45	-0.60
ONGC	104.65	0.70
PowerGrid Corp	210.55	1.35
Reliance Ind	2002.85	18.55
SBI Life	918.50	20.95
State Bank	358.55	8.00
Shree Cement	30230.65	116.55
Sun Pharma	621.05	0.60
Tata Consumer Products Ltd.	665.75	-8.80
Tata Motors	307.80	0.05
Tata Steel	874.85	12.00
TCS	3271.40	6.70
Tech Mahindra	1002.40	11.05
Titan	1514.10	-11.40
UltraTech Cement	6760.05	23.40
UPCL	654.45	-6.90
Wipro	438.00	10.08

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on April 07

CURRENCY TT BUY TT SELL

US Dollar 74.35 74.67

Euro 88.33 88.71

British Pound 102.41 102.85

Japanese Yen (100) 67.67 67.97

Chinese Yuan 11.36 11.41

Swiss Franc 79.96 80.35

Singapore Dollar 55.48 55.73

Canadian Dollar 58.94 59.20

Malaysian Ringgit 17.98 18.08

Source: Indian Bank



Citroen enters India with C5 Aircross SUV

CHENNAI

French carmaker Citroen announced its entry into the Indian market with the unveiling of the C5 Aircross on Wednesday at an introductory price of ₹29,900 lakh (ex-showroom New Delhi). "With the launch, Citroen starts a new chapter in India and you can expect a lot of action in the coming months with the first vehicle from our new family of B-segment cars," said CEO Vincent Cobee.

Equitas SFB's advances surge 16% to ₹17,896 cr.

CHENNAI

Equitas Small Finance Bank Ltd. (SFB) has reported a 16% year-on-year rise in gross advances to ₹17,896 crore while total deposits rose 52% year-on-year to ₹16,391 crore. Current account savings account (CASA) deposits more than doubled to ₹5,613 crore against ₹2,208 crore, according to a regulatory filing by the bank. The private lender said all the figures were provisional.

India will need 2,200 jets in 20 years: Boeing

NEW DELHI

India will need more than 2,200 new jets valued at about \$320 billion over the next 20 years, Boeing said. While the pandemic sharply reduced Indian air travel in 2020, the recovery rate of domestic passenger traffic is among the fastest globally, reaching 76% of pre-pandemic levels. Of the 2,200 new aircraft, 88% will be single-aisle and 12% twin-aisle.

Mercedes sold 34% more cars in Jan.-March

MUMBAI

Mercedes-Benz India has sold 3,193 units in the January to March quarter, a growth of 34% over the year-earlier period. "The [year] 2021 has begun on a strong note for us as we look for a substantial sales recovery this year," said Martin Schwenk, MD and CEO. "Our Q1 performance makes us confident that this growth momentum can be continued."

CM YK

RBI extends fresh support of ₹50,000 cr. to NABARD, others

Panel to review ARCs in the works, priority sector rules to stay for 6 more months

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

To help mitigate the impact of the pandemic and aid economic revival, the RBI said it would extend fresh support of ₹50,000 crore to the All India Financial Institutions for new lending in FY22.

Accordingly, NABARD will be provided a special liquidity facility (SLF) of ₹25,000 crore for one year to support agriculture and allied activities, the rural non-farm sector and non-banking financial companies-micro finance institutions, the RBI said.

An SLF of ₹10,000 crore will be extended to the National Housing Bank for one year to support the housing



First base: The extension for priority sector norms will boost credit at the bottom of the pyramid. • V.V. KRISHNAN

sector. SIDBI will be provided ₹15,000 crore under this facility for up to one year for funding of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). All three facilities will be available at the prevailing policy repo rate.

Signalling the importance of Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) to deal with bad loans, the RBI said it would constitute a committee to undertake a comprehensive review of the working of ARCs in the finan-

cial sector ecosystem and recommend suitable measures for enabling such entities to meet the growing requirements of the financial sector.

It said while ARCs had grown in number and size, their potential for resolving stressed assets was yet to be realised fully.

A six-month extension to September 30 for Priority Sector Lending (PSL) classification for lending by banks to NBFCs for 'on-lending' to sectors that contribute significantly to the economy in terms of export and employment – has been approved.

This would provide an impetus to NBFCs providing credit at the bottom of the pyramid.

OYO says unit facing claim at NCLT, has filed appeal in case

Founder terms reports it has filed for bankruptcy 'untrue'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Ritesh Agarwal, the founder and CEO of OYO on Wednesday denied reports that the hospitality start-up had filed for bankruptcy, adding that a claim against a subsidiary had led to a petition at the NCLT (National Company Law Tribunal).

"There is a PDF and text message circulating that claims OYO has filed for bankruptcy. This is absolutely untrue and inaccurate," Mr. Agarwal posted on Twitter, reacting to tweets and a document circulated on social media. "A claimant is seeking INR 16 Lakhs (USD 22k) from OYO's subsidiary



leading to a petition at NCLT," he tweeted.

Mr. Agarwal asserted that OYO had paid the amount, which had already been banked by the claimant "under protest". OYO has also challenged the NCLT order

against its subsidiary (OHHPL) for the amount of ₹16 lakh.

"OYO is recovering from the pandemic steadily and our largest markets are operating profitably," the firm's CEO added.

"We are surprised to hear that the Hon'ble NCLT has admitted a petition against OHHPL, a subsidiary of OYO for ₹16 lakh in a contractual dispute, which dispute is not even with this subsidiary," an OYO spokesperson said. "We have filed an appeal. The matter is sub-judice and we would refrain from commenting further on the merits of the matter at this stage."

"This sale will reduce IL&FS' overall debt by ₹1,200 crore, which is the combined debt of entities under IL&FS' environment businesses," IL&FS Group said in a statement.

"In addition, around 4,000 employees, including consultants, have been transferred along with the businesses, thus effectively resulting in an annual savings of about ₹50 crore to

Rupee suffers worst 1-day fall in 20 months

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

The rupee nosedived 105 paise to mark its biggest single-session drop in over 20 months against the U.S. currency on Wednesday amid concerns over surging COVID-19 cases.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the Indian currency settled at 74.47 to the U.S. dollar, marking its lowest level since November 13 last year. The rupee also logged its worst single-day fall since August 5, 2019.

The local unit opened at 73.52 against the greenback and traded in the range of 73.52 to 74.50 on Wednesday.

The rupee may trade in the range of 73.70 to 74.75 in the next couple of sessions, said Saif Mukadam, research analyst, Sharekhan. "The up move was mainly propelled by the banking space," he added.

Bank stocks lift Sensex as investors cheer RBI's tack

Policy stance buoys index by 0.94%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Investors joined industry groups, fund managers and bankers in welcoming the RBI's growth-supportive monetary policy on Wednesday with a rally in banking stocks lifting the benchmark S&P BSE Sensex.

The 30-share Sensex jumped 460.37 points, or 0.94%, to close at 49,661.76. Banks led the gains with State Bank of India climbing 2.25% and ICICI Bank advancing 2.05%.



Dinesh Khara

said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. "A big cheer is the G-Sec buying program of ₹1 lakh crore to ensure liquidity and flatten the long-term yield curve. RBI's decision to maintain its high GDP growth forecast also helped calm the market over its fears about the second wave of infections," he added.

Beset with multiple challenges, the foremost being the uncertainty stemming from the second wave and rising inflationary risks, the RBI did well to hold the policy rates while continuing the accommodative stance," said Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General, CII.

Help cut term premium

Commenting on the secondary market G-Sec acquisition programme, Samarth Reddy, CIO, Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance said, "it indicates an intention to calendarise its [RBI's] G-Sec purchases and will help to manage the yield curve and may help to reduce the term premium as well."

A. K. Das, Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer, Bank of India said the policy announcement represented a balanced approach to make economic revival deep-rooted, to ensure orderly development of financial markets and keep price movement at manageable levels.

IL&FS sells green arm, cuts debt by ₹1,200 crore

Transfer of staff to save ₹50 cr. a year

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Debt-laden IL&FS said it has sold its entire stake in IL&FS Environmental Infrastructure & Services Ltd. (IEISL) and its subsidiaries to EverEnviro Resource Management Pvt. Ltd., reducing the overall debt by ₹1,200 crore.

"This sale will reduce IL&FS' overall debt by ₹1,200 crore, which is the combined debt of entities under IL&FS' environment businesses," IL&FS Group said in a statement.

IEISL is a leading integrated waste management firm.

The sale forms a part of the new board's strategy to resolve overall IL&FS Group debt as per the resolution plan approved by NCLAT.

the IL&FS Group," it added.

IL&FS, the promoter shareholder of IEISL, held 97.54% of the equity of IEISL and IL&FS Employee Welfare Trust, the balance.

IL&FS is a leading integrated waste management firm.

The sale forms a part of the new board's strategy to resolve overall IL&FS Group debt as per the resolution plan approved by NCLAT.

"Indian market is invigorated by RBI's long-term dovish stance till the economy reverts to normalcy,"

Dixon, Bharti in pact for telecom gear under PLI

JV to also make networking products

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA

NEW DELHI

Electronic products maker Dixon Technologies on Wednesday said it had signed an MoU with Bharti Enterprises to form a joint venture to apply for the government's production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for manufacturing of telecom and networking products.



A filing. It added that the joint venture (JV), in which post the execution of mutually acceptable agreements

IPL's reigning behemoth MI primed to crush all comers

With an abundance of strengths and no obvious weakness, Rohit Sharma's side is tipped to complete an unprecedented hat-trick of titles

IPL 2021

AMOL KARHADKAR

They said it cannot win in the United Arab Emirates. It proved them wrong in 2020. They said it wins only during odd years. It proved them wrong in 2020.

They now say no team has won a hat-trick of titles. Mumbai Indians is set to pay them no heed again. It enters the 14th edition as the frontrunner to win a record-extending sixth crown.

Rohit Sharma's army – oops, *paltan* – carries the tag of being the “the most well-prepared outfit” in the tournament's history. It's no wonder, therefore, that it has a ready-made replacement for each of its starting XI. Such is the bench strength that despite injuries and possible pandemic-enforced absences, MI can field a side full of international cricketers right through the season.

Two of its key batsmen – Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav – will be eager to celebrate their much-awaited international debuts by continuing to make a mockery of opposition bowlers.

And as if that weren't enough, Hardik Pandya will resume all-round duties after featuring in the UAE purely as a batsman while he rehabilitated his back. He played the finisher's role to perfection last edition, but this time around, having bowled full

X-factor

Six-hitting prowess: In 2020, MI clobbered a staggering 137 sixes, a whopping 32 more than next-best Rajasthan Royals. While de Kock (22) and Rohit (19) lit up the PowerPlay, Suryakumar (11) and Ishan (30) kept the hits coming in the middle to allow Hardik (25) and Pollard (22) to go berserk at the end. In a game of small margins, these lusty blows have often proven decisive.

Tilt during India's T20I series against England, Hardik is set to unleash his entire range. It really doesn't augur well for MI's opponents.

Lethal pace combo

While the top seven are as ferocious as any in the world, the pace combination of Trent Boult and Jasprit Bumrah is as lethal as it gets.

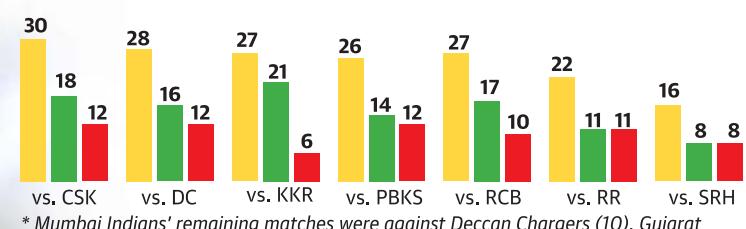
The only possible weak link is the spin department. But with leg-spinner Piyush Chawla, the third-highest wicket-taker in IPL history, having been roped in, there is cause for optimism. Not only can Chawla be handy, he can also act as the perfect mentor for promising leggie Rahul Chahar.

Don't be surprised if by May 30, both Chawla and Chahar have proven all their detractors wrong and are singing “Where's the competition?” along with the rest of their teammates.



OVERALL*

Played 203 | Won 120 | Lost 83



* Mumbai Indians' remaining matches were against Deccan Chargers (10), Gujarat Lions (4), Kochi Tuskers Kerala (1), Pune Warriors (6), and Rising Pune Supergiant (6)

THE MUMBAI INDIANS DUGOUT

TOP GUNS IN CURRENT SQUAD

BATSMEN	M	Inns	Runs	HS	Avg.	SR	50s/100s
Rohit Sharma	155	151	4060	109 n.o.	31.47	130.37	31/1
Suryakumar	47	45	1416	79 n.o.	35.40	135.76	10/0
Quinton de Kock	32	32	1032	81	35.58	136.50	8/0
ALL-ROUNDERS	M	Inns	Runs	50s/100s	Wkts.	BBI	4W
Kieron Pollard	164	3023 (147 inns)	83	15/0	60 (92 inns)	4/44	1
Hardik Pandya	80	1349 (74)	91	4/0	42 (60)	3/20	0
Krunal Pandya	71	1000 (60)	86	1/0	46 (69)	3/14	0
BOWLERS	M	Inns	Wkts.	BBI	Avg.	Econ.	4W
Jasprit Bumrah	92	92	109	4/14	23.72	7.41	2
Dhawal Kulkarni	34	34	36	3/18	24.11	7.95	0
Rahul Chahar	28	28	28	3/19	26.46	7.41	0

THE SQUAD

BATSMEN: Rohit Sharma, Aditya Tare (wk), Anmolpreet Singh, Chris Lynn, Ishan Kishan (wk), Quinton de Kock (wk), Saurabh Tiwary, Suryakumar Yadav.

ALL-ROUNDERS: Adam Anukul Roy, Arjun Tendulkar, Hardik Pandya, James Neesham, Kieron Pollard, Krunal Pandya, Marco Jansen.

BOWLERS: Adam Milne, Dhawal Kulkarni, Jasprit Bumrah, Jayant Yadav, Mohsin Khan, Nathan Coulter-Nile, Piyush Chawla, Rahul Chahar, Trent Boult, Yudhvir Singh.

MUMBAI INDIANS' 2021 FIXTURES

April 9	vs. RCB	7.30 p.m.	Chennai
April 13	vs. KKR	7.30 p.m.	Chennai
April 17	vs. SRH	7.30 p.m.	Chennai
April 20	vs. DC	7.30 p.m.	Chennai
April 23	vs. PBKS	7.30 p.m.	Chennai
April 29	vs. RR	3.30 p.m.	Delhi
May 1	vs. CSK	7.30 p.m.	Delhi
May 4	vs. SRH	7.30 p.m.	Delhi
May 8	vs. RR	7.30 p.m.	Delhi
May 10	vs. KKR	7.30 p.m.	Bengaluru
May 13	vs. PBKS	3.30 p.m.	Bengaluru
May 16	vs. CSK	7.30 p.m.	Bengaluru
May 20	vs. RCB	7.30 p.m.	Kolkata
May 23	vs. DC	3.30 p.m.	Kolkata

SOURCE: ESPNCRICINFO | COMPILED BY G. PRASAD

FACTFILE

MOST MATCHES AS CAPTAIN



Rohit Sharma
Total | Won | Lost
116 | 70 | 46

MOST MATCHES



Kieron Pollard
164

BEST BATTING STRIKE-RATE#



Hardik (159.26)
Runs | Balls
1349 | 847

BEST ECONOMY RATE#



Krunal Pandya (7.26)
Overs | Runs concd.
207.3 | 1508

QUICK SINGLES



Dhoni's advice has been useful, says Natarajan

Sunrisers Hyderabad's left-arm yorker specialist T. Natarajan says Mahendra Singh Dhoni's advice to bowl slow bouncers and cutters during his breakout IPL season last year has helped him get better at his craft.

“Speaking to somebody like Dhoni itself is a big thing. He spoke to me about fitness and encouraged me, saying that I will keep getting better with experience. He said, use slow bouncers, cutters, and variations like that. It has been useful for me,” Natarajan, who bowled 71 yorkers last season and dismissed the CSK skipper, was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

A never-ending nightmare: Maxwell on bio-bubble challenges

RCB's all-rounder Glenn Maxwell says being continuously confined to bio-bubbles can become a “nightmare” and cricketers are leading a “difficult lifestyle” right now to ensure that they continue to do their job.

“You almost tend to forget how to have a normal conversation with the outside world. That can be very hard mentally and is a massive challenge. But it's great to be back playing and to be able to do our jobs and entertain people. But it's still a difficult lifestyle at the moment,” he said.

RCB's Daniel Sams tests positive

Devdutt Padikkal joins the squad in Chennai

SPORTS REPORTER

BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) all-rounder Daniel Sams has tested positive for COVID-19, the franchise announced on Wednesday.

The Australian had arrived in Chennai on April 3 with a negative test report. But he tested positive in his second test on Wednesday, and will now be in isolation at a designated medical facility, a club statement said.

To miss two games

The 28-year-old, who is asymptomatic, has been in quarantine since his arrival in India and hadn't made contact with any other player or RCB staff member.

Sams is set to miss at least

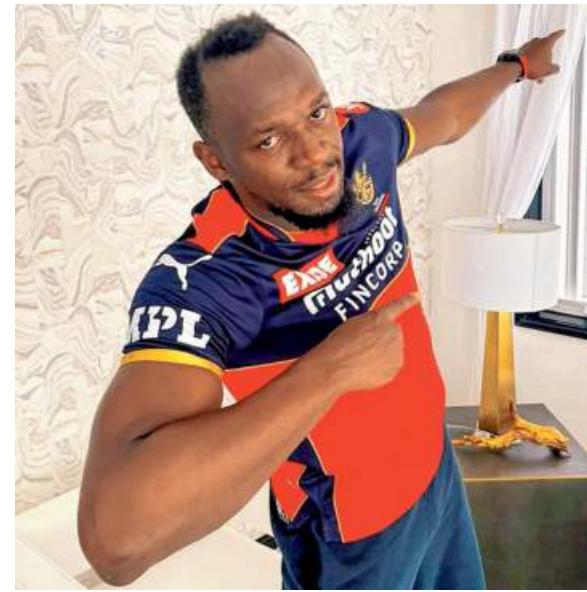


Daniel Sams. ■ TWITTER

the first two games for RCB, against Mumbai Indians on April 9 and Sunrisers Hyderabad on April 14.

But RCB received a boost

12th man waiting!



Go, RCB: Bolt tweeted this picture saying, 'Challengers, just letting you know, I'm still the fastest cat around,' prompting Kohli and de Villiers to welcome him on board. ■ TWITTER

Fakhar powers Pakistan to series win

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CENTURION

Opener Fakhar Zaman hit a second successive century to help Pakistan win the deciding ODI against South Africa by 28 runs and take the series 2-1 on Wednesday. This is Pakistan's first ODI series win in South Africa since 2013.

Fakhar made 101 and captain Babar Azam 94 from 82 balls to propel Pakistan to 320 for seven. South Africa was 292 all out in reply, with three batsmen scoring half-centuries but none converting it to a big score.

South Africa had to change more than half its team after five players left for the IPL and batsman Rassie van der Dussen was ruled out with injury.

Fakhar, who had blasted 193 in a losing cause in the second ODI, made 101 from 104 balls this time and shared a 112-run opening stand with Imam-ul-Haq (57). The tourists were 206 for one at one stage before reaching 320 for seven.

The scores: Pakistan 320/7 in 50 overs (Imam-ul-Haq 57, Fakhar Zaman 101, Babar Azam 94, Hasan Ali 32 n.o., Keshav Maharaj 3/45) bt South Africa 292 in 49.3 overs (Janneman Malan 70, Kyle Verreyne 62, Andile Phehlukwayo 54, Mohd. Nawaz 3/34, Shaheen Afridi 5/58).

Real has Liverpool's measure

Foden strike gives City the advantage over Dortmund



Sealing it: Vinicius Junior, left, celebrates his second strike, and Real's third, with Casemiro. ■ GETTY IMAGES

The English side improved after the break and was able to pull one back early in the second half with Salah finding the net from close range after a shot by Diogo Jota was partially blocked by Luka Modric in the 51st.

Phil Foden capped a fine Champions League display for Manchester City with a 90th-minute goal to secure a 2-1 win over Dortmund.

Ilkay Gundogan brought down a cross at the far post and laid the ball off for Foden to sweep into the net, after Marco Reus had equalised for the visitors in the 84th minute.

The results:
Manchester City 2 (De Bruyne 19, Foden 90) bt Borussia Dortmund 1 (Reus 84).
Real Madrid 3 (Vinicius Junior 27, 65, Asensio 36) bt Liverpool 1 (Salah 51).

Fast conditions set to pose supreme challenge

AUGUSTA MASTERS

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

AUGUSTA

Augusta National has served a warning to the world's greatest golfers with firm and fast conditions like some have never seen ahead of Thursday's start of the 85th Masters.

Five months after Dustin Johnson shattered the course record with a 20-under par 268 in rain-softened conditions, the Masters is back in its typical April setting and serving up lightning-fast greens with firm fairways to roll balls into danger.

“With firm greens, this golf course needs to be respected,” three-time Masters winner Phil Mickelson

TV PICKS

Europa League: Sony Ten 1, 2, 3 & Sony Six (SD & HD), 12.30 a.m. (Friday)
Augusta Masters golf: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 12.30 a.m. (Friday)

IN BRIEF



Federer poised for return in Madrid

MADRID Roger Federer is set to play his first match on clay in almost two years at next month's Madrid Open, after he was confirmed for the event on Tuesday. The 39-year-old was listed among the players to have registered for the May 2 to 9 tournament in the Spanish capital, with Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal also in the 56-man field.

FIFA suspends Pakistan and Chad

ZURICH FIFA suspended the national football federations of Pakistan and Chad on Wednesday amid disputes about how they should be run. The Pakistan federation, known as the PFF, was suspended for "third-party interference" for the second time in four years. The suspension for Chad comes after the African country's government tried to dissolve the national federation and appoint new officials to run the sport. AP



Coutinho to miss Copa America

SAO PAULO Barcelona midfielder Philippe Coutinho will not play for Brazil at this year's Copa America after undergoing another knee surgery, national team doctor Rodrigo Lasmar said. Coutinho, 28, underwent surgery in early January to repair a torn meniscus and had another operation Monday on the same left knee. Barcelona did not reveal how much time he would miss, but Lasmar effectively ruled him out for the rest of the season. AP



De Bruyne extends contract with Man City

MANCHESTER On Wednesday announced that Kevin De Bruyne has signed a two-year contract extension, committing his future to the club until the summer of 2025. "Kevin De Bruyne has signed a two-year extension to his current contract, keeping him at City until the summer of 2025," the club said in a statement. ANI

Russian Olympic champions banned

ASSOCIATED PRESS LAUSANNE

Russian Olympic champions Andrei Silnov and Natalya Antyukh have each been banned for four years for doping offences, the Court of Arbitration for Sport said on Wednesday.

Silnov and Antyukh were both charged last year with using or attempting to use a prohibited substance or method. The charges stemmed from a World Anti-Doping Agency investigation into Russian doping in 2016.

Silnov won the high jump gold at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and Antyukh won the 400m hurdles at the 2012 London Games.

India off to a winning start against Argentina

PUTS IT ACROSS the reigning Olympic champion 4-3 in the first practice match

HOCKEY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA BUENOS AIRES

The Indian men's hockey team made a positive start to its tour of Argentina, defeating the reigning Olympic champion 4-3 in the first practice match here on Tuesday. Nilakanta Sharma (16th minute), Harmanpreet Singh (28th), Rupinder Pal Singh (33rd) and Varun Kumar (47th) were the scorers.

Drag-flicker Leandro Tolini (35th and 53rd) and Maico Casella (41st) reduced the margin.

Both teams were slow to get off the blocks in the first quarter, but India picked up pace in the second.

Perfect assist

Shilanand Lakra set up India's first goal as his perfect assist found Nilakanta inside the circle and the striker put the ball past the Ar-



Good show: After a slow start in the first quarter, India picked up pace in the second. ■ TWITTER/THEHOCKEYINDIA

gentina goalkeeper.

Argentina secured a penalty corner soon but the experienced custodian P.R. Sreejesh made a brilliant

save. Dilpreet Singh then earned India a penalty corner in the 28th minute and Harmanpreet made no mis-

take to hand his team a 2-0 lead. Argentina made a strong comeback in the third quarter, scoring in the 32nd minute through Tolini,

who was spot on in converting a penalty corner.

India won a set-piece in the 33rd through Jaskaran Singh and the seasoned Ru-

Nethra seals a berth for Tokyo

SAILING

SPORTS BUREAU MUSANNAH (OMAN)

Nethra Kumaran assured herself a spot in the laser radial class category at the Tokyo Olympics, after finishing races nine and 10 in the first and second positions respectively, on the penultimate day of the Asian Olympic qualification sailing championships here on Wednesday.

Nethra's nearest competitor is compatriot Ramya Saravanan, who is in third place with 39 nett points, trailing by 21 points. The least Nethra has to do is complete the race.

Dream come true

"On the one side it's been a dream-come-true moment for me and on the other side, it's just one step/race tomorrow (Thursday) to finish," said Nethra.

The sailor from the Tamil Nadu Sailing Association said coaching under Hungarian coach Tamás Eszes for the last one-and-a-half years at Gran Canaria in Spain has proved to be invaluable.

"I trained with a lot of quality International sailors



Made for each other: Nethra Kumaran with the craft that has served her so well in Oman. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

there and that helped me a lot," said the World Cup bronze medallist.

The Indian pair of Varun Thakkar and K.C. Ganapathy were on top in the 49er class with a strong finish by securing fourth, second and third places in races 13, 14 and 15 respectively.

For the duo to qualify, it has to finish in the top six

on Thursday.

The results (overall standings, placings of Indians):

49er: Men: 1. Varun Thakkar & K.C. Ganapathy; **Women:** 4. Ekta Yadav & Ritika Dangi.

Laser radial: 1. Nethra Kumaran, 3. Ramya Saravanan, 5. Harshita Tomar.

Laser standard: 3. Vishnu Saravanan, 10. Upamanyu Dutta.

Windsurfing: RS:X: Men: 6. Jeetendra Kumar, 7. Ebab Ali; **RS:X: Women:** 3. Ishwariya Ganesh.

Yuki gears up for US Challengers

KAMESH SRINIVASAN NEW DELHI

From Singapore, Lucknow to Dubai, it has been a spring of hope for Yuki Bhambri, who lost two years to a knee injury.

By defeating two of the country's best players Ramkumar Ramanathan and Prajneesh Gunneswaran in qualifying for the Dubai ATP-500 event, the 28-year-old Yuki showed that he was getting into his groove. He played well against Aljaz Bedene of Slovenia, a top-60 player, before losing in three sets.

Yuki is hoping that his body would cooperate for some robust tennis. "I have been relatively okay. Some days my knee does hurt. Am still figuring out all the exercises that need to be done consistently to make sure that I am pain free," said Yuki.

Having good results does make you confident," said Yuki, who will leave for Florida to compete in two Challengers in Orlando and Tallahassee.

"I enjoy playing in the US. I am looking forward to these

events as I have not been there for a long time," said Yuki.

It has been two weeks of solid preparation for Yuki back home in the Capital, as he got to train with Saketh Myneni, Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan and Vijay Sundar Prashanth.

"Got to practice with good players, as the ITF tournament was happening here. I am looking forward to playing tournaments again," said the wiry Yuki, who has shed a lot of weight and become more athletic.

After Singapore and before going to Dubai, Yuki had used the time to play doubles in the \$15,000 event in Lucknow with Saketh Myneni and won the title.

"Having good results does make you confident," said Yuki, who will leave for Florida to compete in two Challengers in Orlando and Tallahassee.

"I enjoy playing in the US. I am looking forward to these

Vikas sets up LB Shastri's win Skipper Vikas Dixit topscored with a century and took two wickets as last year's runner-up LB Shastri CC beat Indian Navy by 10 runs to enter the semifinals of the 31st all-India Hitkary Om Nath Sood Memorial tournament.

The scores: LB Shastri 289/5 in 40 overs (Vikas Dixit 100, Jonty Sidhu 62 n.o., Hiten Dalal 57, Priyansh Arya 41) bt Indian Navy 279 in 39.5 overs (Arun Basmat 49, Nakul Sharma 49, Harsh Chaudhary 47, Priyansh Arya 3/52).

Superb spell by Harshit

Harshit Malhotra picked up nine wickets for just four runs as Daksh CA defeated SDM CA by nine wickets in the Ratan Lal Saini in 17 tournament. SDM was bundled out for 24.

The scores: SDM 24 in 16 overs (Harshit Malhotra 9/4) lost to Daksh Academy 25/1 in 4.1 overs.

Ashish and Madhur bat well

Ashish Siwach (81) and

Madhur Yadav (71) helped Baba Haridas Academy beat Harbhajan Academy by 91 runs in the BLS League under-16 tournament.

The scores: BHA 292 in 49

overs (Ashish Siwach 81, Madhur Yadav 71, Madhav Ahuja 4/32, Harshit Aneja 3/54) bt Harbhajan Academy 201 in 43.4 overs (Dev Batra 41, Jatin 4/26).

Sohrabh, Lakshay lead

Delhi Colts' victory Sohrab (76) and Lakshay Thareja (65) starred in Delhi Colts' big win in the first Bhopal Singh Balyan tournament.

The scores: Delhi Colts 286/6 in 40 overs (Sohrab 76, Lakshay 65, Divyanshu 55, Ayush Jamwal 3/63) bt MAC 113 in 33 overs (Shubham Chohan 54).

Ravinder FA posts win

Ravinder Faguna Academy beat Positive Road Academy by 44 runs in the first Kraguzz Sports U-14 tournament.

The scores: RFA 134/3 in 25

overs (Sameer Khan 60 n.o.,

Paarth Bhadana 59 n.o.,) bt

PRA 90/9 in 25 overs.

Maulana Azad enters final

All-round performance by Dhananjay Singh and handy contributions from Aayush Kumar and Lakshay Rathih helped Maulana Azad Club beat Sonnet Club by one wicket to enter the final of the Harcourt Butler Under-15 tournament.

The scores: Sonnet Club 263

in 38.2 overs (Vinay Kumar 83, Aakarsh Malhotra 76, Avishkar 37, Jehan 4/61, Dhananjay Singh 3/42) lost to MAC 267/9 in 39.5 overs (Lakshay Rathih 75, Aayush Kumar 61 n.o., Dhananjay Singh 58, Aryan Vashish 3/39).

Ayush powers Sahgal Club

Delhi Ranji player Ayush Badoni top-scored with an unbeaten 80 and left-arm spinner Varun Sood picked up three wickets as Sahgal Club beat Sports Cube Academy by nine wickets in the 4th RK Kapoor memorial T20 tournament.

The scores: VMS 157 in 20

overs (Praveen Dabas 49, Rishabh Soni 33, Lalman Yadav 4/21) lost to DLW 160/6 in 17.3 overs (Siddarth Luthra 73 n.o., Sumit Kumar 4/39).

Divij-Ebden pair exits

SPORTS BUREAU CAGLIARI (ITALY)

Divij Sharan, seeded third with Matthew Ebden of Australia, was beaten 6-1, 6-4 by Treat Huey and Frederik Nielsen in the doubles pre-quarterfinals of the €408,800 ATP tennis tournament here on Wednesday.

Other results:

€44,200 Challenger, Split, Croatia: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Tristan-Samuel Weissborn (Aut) & Purav Raja bt Duje Kekez & Mili Poljic (Cro) 6-2, 6-3.

\$15,000 ITF men, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt: First round: Sasi Kumar Mukund bt Timo Stodder (Ger) 6-4, 7-5.

Judo team forced to pull out of Olympic qualifiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

A 12-member Indian judo team was forced to withdraw from the ongoing Asia-Oceania Olympic qualifiers in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, after two judokas – Ajay Yadav and Ritu – tested positive for COVID-19 just before the start of the tournament.

Yadav (73kg) and Ritu (52kg) were positive in the second test conducted after landing in Kyrgyzstan and both are asymptomatic. It is the first instance of an Indian contingent's campaign being derailed at an Olympic qualifier because of the virus.

All the 12 judokas and four coaches had returned negative in the first test conducted after landing in the central Asian country.

Olympic-bound archers get their second shots



Atanu Das. ■ TWITTER/@ARCHERATANU

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA PUNE

The Olympic-bound Indian archers on Wednesday took their second shots of COVID-19 vaccine, becoming the first fully vaccinated lot of athletes from the country ahead of the Tokyo Games.

In an initiative undertaken by the Army Sports Institute, where the national camp for the recurve archers is being held, all the eight senior archers, the coaches and support staff were administered the second shot at the Military Hospital here.

The eight archers are Atanu Das, Tarunadeep Singh and B. Dhiraj (reserve) in men's and Deepika Kumari, Ankita Bhakat, Komolika Bari and Madhu Vedwan (reserve) in the women's section.

"Second and final dose of the vaccine is done. Thank you so much Army Sports Institute for making everything smooth and convenient," Atanu captioned his vaccination photo on his Instagram handle.

Curry stars as Warriors down Bucks

NBA

REUTERS SAN FRANCISCO

Stephen Curry scored 41 points, including 30 in the second half, as the Golden State Warriors rallied late to beat the Milwaukee Bucks 122-121 here on Tuesday.

Kelly Oubre Jr. had 19 points and Kent Bazemore added 18 as the Warriors ended a three-game losing

streak in the opener of a stretch of four home games.

Oubre gave the Warriors the lead on two free throws with 7.7 seconds remaining. Golden State had lost seven of its previous eight games.

Trae Young scored 30 points and sparked a 3-point shooting barrage as Atlanta defeated visiting New Orleans 123-107 for its fourth straight win. Talen Horton-Tucker scored 17 points off

the bench as Los Angeles beat Toronto 110-101.

Memphis snapped Miami's four-game winning streak with a 124-112