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OTHER STORIES

Businessman's house burgledDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

Burglars struck at the house of a businessman in Nanganallur and made away with 35 sovereigns of gold jewellery on Wednesday night.

According to police, on Wednesday night, thieves entered a house in 37 th street in Nanganallur, when the residents were asleep. Sources said the thieves had broken into a car parked outside the house and used spare keys to enter the house. They had reportedly escaped with 35 sovereigns gold kept in the bureau.

Businessman Vivekanandhan and his family were asleep in the bedroom on the first floor of the house when the culprits ransacked the house on the ground floor. Police said on Thursday morning, the family noticed the house was ransacked and the jewels locked inside the bureau missing. Palavanthangal police were alerted about the incident. They came to the spot along with a forensic team and sniffer dog. A case of burglary has been registered and the police are now scrutinizing the CCTV clips recovered from the neighbourhood to find a lead. Further investigations are underway.

Elderly woman attacked, robbed of chainDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

An elderly woman was attacked and robbed of her chain by unidentified persons in Perungulathur, even as she resisted their attempts.

Police sources said Chandra (75), a resident of Gandhi Nagar in Perungulathur was drawing kolam outside her house on Thursday morning. Two unidentified men on a car who saw her stopped their vehicle a few meters ahead. One of them came to her on the pretext of asking an address, another man from the car walked up to her snatched her five sovereigns chain from her neck. The woman immediately retaliated and held on to her chain tightly. In the tussle, the assailant pushed her down on the road as she continued to resist his attempt. However, they managed to snatch the chain, and escaped on the car. Chandra suffered injuries. based on the complaint from the victim's family, Peerankaranai police filed a case. a probe is on.

Bodies of two TN fishers brought homeARULOLI M | DC
KANYAKUMARI, APRIL 15

The bodies of the two Colachel-based fishermen killed in an accident while fishing in mid-sea Northwest of New Mangaluru in Karnataka, were brought home, on Thursday.

The two fishermen, Helin Alexander (38) and Dason of Colachel in Kanyakumari district, along with five others from Kanyakumari, Thoothukudi and Ramanathapuram districts, and seven others from West Bengal and Odisha, ventured for fishing from Bypore fishing harbour near Kozhikode in Kerala, on the 11th of this month, on a fishing vessel, IFB Rapha belonged to Jaffar of Kozhikode.

As they were fishing 60 nautical miles off the Mangaluru coast around 2:30 am on April 13, their boat was accidentally hit by a Singaporean merchant vessel, 'APL Le Havre'. In the mishap, the fishing boat was completely damaged and it sunk.

The crew onboard the merchant vessel managed to rescue two fishermen, Velmurugan of Ramanathapuram district and Sunil Das of West Bengal, but later, fished out the bodies of three other fishermen, Helin Alexander and Dason of Colachel, Kanyakumari district and Manick Das of West Bengal.

On information about the accident, three Indian Coast Guard ships are said to have rushed to the spot to help search operations to rescue the nine remaining fishermen, said Indian coast guard sources. A chopper also has been deployed for the search operation around 45 nautical miles off New Mangaluru coast, they added. The wife of one of the Manapadu-based fishermen, Dennison, who also is one among the nine missing fishermen, on Thursday petitioned the Thoothukudi Collector, Senthilraj, demanding immediate action to ensure the safe return of her husband.



A group of transgenders takes pledge and plants saplings to mark Transgenders Day at Chetpet on Thursday. — DC

Covid victim's funeral done by two religionsA. ARUL PALANI | DC
CUDDALORE, APRIL 15

The funeral of a Covid-19 victim was performed by both Muslims and Hindus separately in Cuddalore district following the mix up of bodies of two coronavirus patients by the government hospital staff on Wednesday.

Recently, Arumugam, 51, of Pudupet near Panruti, and Zahir Hussein, 50, of Perumathur village near Bhuvanagiri were admitted for Covid-19 treatment at the government general hospital, Cuddalore. Both the patients died on Tuesday night. The hospital staff bungled while handing over the bodies to their relatives on Wednesday morning.

Without realising the

■ **Meanwhile, hospital authorities in Cuddalore district have decided to fix a tag on Covid-19 patients to prevent mix-ups**

mix up, the relatives of Zahir Hussein buried the body of Arumugam in the Muslim burial ground. However, the family members of Arumugam noticed the blunder and alerted the hospital staff. They rushed to Perumathur in an ambulance with Zahir Hussein's body. They demanded the authorities to hand over Arumugam's body to them for conduct of the last rites as per Hindu customs. They wanted removal of Arumugam's body from the Muslim burial ground.

When Muslims raised objections, the revenue officials held talks with them. After they agreed, Arumugam's body was retrieved from the burial ground and handed over to his relatives late on Wednesday night. Following this, as per Hindu customs Arumugam's relatives performed his cremation at Pudupet, about 25 km away from Bhuvanagiri.

Social activists said this may be the first time the last respects were accorded to a person by both Muslims and Hindus separately.

Passenger stopped from boarding flight to AndamanDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

A youth from Andaman, who studies here in Chennai, was stopped from boarding the flight to Andaman as he had tested positive for COVID-19.

They cancelled his journey and immediately alerted the health department. Sources said that, after he developed a cough and cold, he was tested for the infection. When the results showed that he was Covid positive, he was

checked the medical certificates of the passengers, the staff at the counter found that Thamilarasan, (24) a college student, had already tested positive for COVID-19.

They cancelled his journey and immediately alerted the health department. Sources said that, after he developed a cough and cold, he was tested for the infection. When the results showed that he was Covid positive, he was

asked to remain in-home quarantine.

However, ignoring the direction, he decided to go back home to Adaman and continue his treatment there. But when he reached the airport, he was stopped before he could collect the boarding pass when the airline staff checked his medical report. Officials from the state health department admitted him to Chromepet government hospital for treatment.

Rising cases hit air passenger trafficP.A. JEBARAJ | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

The surge in the number of coronavirus cases in the state has impacted the air traffic at the Chennai airport with at least 36 flights cancelled on a single day, due to low patronage.

According to a source from the airport, the Chennai airport, which usually has higher passenger traffic looked nearly empty on Thursday, due to the increase in the cases of Covid-19 in the state, and the strict restrictions that come with it. The airport for the last two three months saw an increase in the number of passengers, with nearly 270 flights, incoming and outgoing each day. Chennai airport had seen 25,000 to 30,000 passengers a day

Chennai airport had seen 25,000 to 30,000 passengers a day recently. But the passenger's flow has dropped suddenly with the rising covid-19 cases in the state

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Sources said on Thursday alone, 18 flights from Chennai- Delhi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Indore, Hyderabad, Nagpur, Pune, Surat, Mangalore, Andaman and vice versa were cancelled at the Chennai Airport due to low occupancy. Only 221 flights were operated from and to Chennai airport, reports said.



B. Vijayalakshmi

Viewpoint

While CBSE cancelled class 10 exams and postponed class 12 exams in

view of galloping Covid-19 cases, the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations said it

would take a decision on the ICSE and ISC exam dates soon after reviewing the situation. Meanwhile, plus-2 students in Tamil Nadu are keeping their fingers crossed over their final exam scheduled to be held between May 5 and May 31.

The state government this week postponed the language exams from May 3 to May 31 as vote counting for Assembly elections

Corpn banks on containment zone strategy again for CovidT. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

While Chennai is grappling with the second wave of Covid-19, once again the authorities are banking on the aggressive containment zone strategy that helped the Corona task force to flatten the curve of the first wave last year.

The city, now the major contributor to the total Covid-19 tally of the state adding over 2,000 cases every day, has currently been brought under a total 1,119 containment zones across 15 zones. Learning from the past experience, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) administration has now decided to convert each street with more than three active cases into a containment zone. However, the movement of people is restricted only on the streets with more than 10 active cases.

A senior health department official said the introduction of containment zones would definitely help them to prevent further spread of the virus. 'These zones are formed based on the possibility of spread of virus. A street can be declared as a containment zone if a single case is reported there. It will be maintained by restricting the accessibility of residents to the public. A regular awareness on Covid-19 appropriate behaviour through the volunteers will be done in these areas. Going by the past experience, this model has yielded the desired result. And it would be continued in required places analysing the impact of three parameters', he said. Once an area or street is

Daily tally nears 8K markDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

The state on Thursday registered the highest single-day surge in new Covid-19 cases, nearing the 8,000-mark with 29 deaths. According to the data provided by the state health department, the state added 7,987 cases, surging from 7,819 on Wednesday.

Now the total positive cases in the state reached 9,82,935 while death toll rose to 12,999 including 4,353 in Chennai. The city contributed 2,558 cases. With this, the district recorded a total of 2,74,734 cases so far.

The Chengalpet district, the second main contributor, reported 685 cases, a dip from 772 on Wednesday. The total active cases in the district have

reached 63,790. While Coimbatore district recorded 540 on Wednesday, it went down to 534 on Thursday.

While Chennai, Coimbatore and Chengalpattu continue to add over 500 cases each, five districts including Thiruvallur, Trichy, Tiruppur, Madurai and Kancheepuram reported 200 plus cases each. Cuddalore, Dindigul, Erode, Krishnagiri, Nagapattinam, Ranipet, Salem, Thanjavur, Thiruvallur, Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts registered 100 plus cases each.

Chennai and surrounding districts Thiruvallur and Chengalpattu together added 3,716 cases.

Active cases, meanwhile, have touched 58,097, a jump from 54,315 on Wednesday. The total active cases in Chennai

district, which is the worst hit, added 21,391 cases on Thursday.

While eight people died in Chennai, Kancheepuram reported four deaths. Three people succumbed to Covid-19 in Nagapattinam. Chengalpattu, Coimbatore, Selam and Tirunelveli districts registered two cases each. Cuddalore, Dharmapuri, Erode, Madurai, Thenkasi and Villupuram districts also recorded deaths.

A total of 93,995 persons underwent RTPCR tests, a dip from 96,513 on Wednesday. As many as 2,05,44,549 individuals tested so far in the state. Meanwhile, actor Vivek received Covid-19 vaccine at the Omandurar Covid centre. The health secretary said there was no shortage of beds and vaccines in the state.

declared as a containment zone, its borders will be cordoned off to prevent movement of people, that is strictly restricted to emergency cases only. Police personnel are deployed 24x7. If the residents in these areas want to purchase essential items, they will have to inform the police. The police personnel will get it for them by ensuring that groceries and vegetables are supplied every day outside the barricades. Most of the zones in the city are formed with at least 150 families so that officials could maintain a close monitoring.

It was on April 2 the city set up its first containment zone though the first Covid-19 case was reported on March 9. According to GCC officials, out of 1,119 zones, Royapuram, one of the worst-hit zones in the city, has 210 streets with more than six cases and 52 streets having more than 10 active cases. There are some streets which have more than 30 active cases like the one near DAV Girls School that has 38 cases.

However, the authorities, following criticism from the public, will not enclose all streets by putting up barricades. But, close monitoring with the help of police and volunteers will be maintained. They will help the residents to get essential items at their doorsteps.

GCC commissioner G. Prakash said the number

of volunteers will be increased from 8,000 to 12,000 in a week to handle the situation effectively.

Dr. Rex Sargunam, president, Tamil Nadu Health Development Association, said it would be easier for the authorities to arrest the spread of the virus in containment zones compared to the first wave as vaccines are available now.

The authorities should take a call on universal vaccination in containment zones. Even those who test negative there should be vaccinated. Many western countries have implemented this strategy effectively. If it's implemented in our country, the result of the containment zone strategy will be quick and effective', he suggested.



Water-logging in Triplicane area after Thursday morning rain. — DC



A tree lies uprooted in Mylapore. — DC

Civic bodies must ensure dumping grounds not close to areas of habitation: HCDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

The Madras high court has reminded the Muthur Town Panchayat in Tiruppur district, that the municipal authorities are under a duty and obligation to ensure that dumping grounds are not close to areas of habitation and that the waste material should be treated hygienically and scientifically so as to ensure that there is no nuisance or foul odour that the local inhabitants have to face.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy made the observation while disposing of a Public Interest Litigation filed by K.Kemban.

The bench said there were two aspects to this so-called public interest litigation. One pertaining to a work order issued in favour of Kanganam Constructions by Muthur

Vacate, hand over premises to Madurai corpn for smart city project: HCDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

The Madras high court has granted four weeks time to a litigant to vacate his premises and hand over the same to the Madurai Corporation for laying road for the smart city project in Madurai district.

Disposing of the petition filed by Karthick, a division bench comprising Justices M.M.Sundresh and S.Ananthi gave liberty to the petitioner to approach the authorities seeking alternative accommodation and as and when, such a request

Town Panchayat on January 29, 2016 and the other pertaining to the dumping of waste and a compost yard at the Muthur weekly market place in Chinna Muthur village, Kangayam Taluk,

is made, the same is expected to be considered within a period of four weeks there from.

In his petition, the petitioner sought to quash an order passed by the Madurai Corporation, dated December 15, 2020, and consequently allow the petitioner to reside in his dwelling house located in No.566, Melakara Theru, Valgai Vadakarai, Puliyanthoppu, Madurai.

The bench said this was a second round of litigation filed by the petitioner, after the earlier order passed by this court. By the impugned order, the petitioner was asked to

remove the encroachment to facilitate the laying of the road for the smart city project. Counsel for the petitioner submitted that there were other constructions, which were not touched. However, the standing counsel for the Corporation submitted that so far as the project was concerned, all other encroachments have been removed except the building of the petitioner. He further submitted that until and unless this encroachment was removed, the ongoing project cannot go on, the bench added.

the local residents, the bench added.

The bench said as far as the work awarded in favour of Kanganam Constructions was concerned, no action can be taken on the basis of the

present petition and the vague allegations therein. However, it was left open to the petitioner to make a representation to the local municipal authorities for maintaining a degree of cleanliness and hygiene at any place which has been identified for dumping waste or for use as a compost yard. Regular sanitation and cleaning work must be undertaken to ensure that citizens residing nearby were not put to any difficulty or face any health hazard, the bench added.

The bench said in the event the petitioner makes a representation pertaining to the dumping ground and compost yard to the Muthur Town Panchayat within 4 weeks from date, the Muthur Town Panchayat should dispose of such representation by a speaking order within eight weeks of the receipt thereof and indicate the measures taken to deal with the perceived menace.

Reschedule plus-2 exams after review

will take place on May 2. Several states started reopening schools partially from October 2020, but physical classes were suspended following a spike in coronavirus cases. Last year, board exams were postponed and cancelled and results were announced based on an alternative assessment scheme.

Chief Minister Palaniswami last month had announced that students of classes 9, 10, and 11 would be promoted to the next class without any examinations. Odisha, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh governments have postponed classes 10 and 12 board exams. Haryana has cancelled class 10 exams and postponed class 12 exams. The Telangana government has ordered the can-

cellation of class 10 board exam and postponed the intermediate exams. However, Goa, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are yet to take a decision on cancelling/postponing their board exams.

While it will not be possible to conduct plus-2 exams online as students cannot familiarise themselves with the online pattern at a short notice, changing the paper pat-

tern, like objective-type questions, will also be difficult and challenging at this juncture.

With active caseload touching 9,82,935 in Tamil Nadu on Thursday and the government machinery battling this health exigency, the education department can very well postpone the plus-2 exam, review the situation by end of May and reschedule the date.

OTHER STORY

Miscreants break into state government official's house in Pudukkottai town

DC CORRESPONDENT
PUDUKKOTTAI, APRIL 15

Miscreants broke open a locked house of a state government official and made away with 100 sovereigns of gold ornaments, silverwares weighing about one kgs, and cash of ₹1 lakh at Thiruvappur in Pudukkottai town, on Thursday.

Police said the official identified as Poornavalli, district audit officer, Pudukkottai municipality, along with her family was away at Pudukkottai and returned home on Thursday morning, and found to her shock that her house and steel almirah where the valuables are kept were broke open. Based on her complaint, a police team led by DSP Pudukkottai, Senthil Kumar, visited the scene of the crime along with forensic experts.

Thirugokarnam police are investigating.

Man commits matricide, held

DC CORRESPONDENT
PERAMBALUR, APRIL 15

Police here arrested a man for allegedly murdering his mother over a money dispute, at Arananarai village in Perambalur district, on Thursday.

Police identified the victim as Solaiammal who received the monetary benefit of her daughter Malarkodi, who died in government service a few years back. The deceased was residing in a residential area in the same village.

The accused, Selvaraj, who often quarreled with his mother asking her a portion of the monetary benefits of Malarkodi, on Thursday murdered his mother by slashing her neck with a deadly weapon, and fled.

On information, police went to the spot and removed the body to the government hospital here for post mortem. Perambalur police arrested Selvaraj and are investigating.

In a year, Tamil varsity sells books worth ₹ 19L

G. SRINIVASAN | DC
THANJAVUR, APRIL 15

"The Tamil university has sold books worth ₹19.20 lakh during the pandemic year 2020," said Dr. G. Balasubramanian, Vice-Chancellor, Tamil University here, on Thursday.

Speaking at the inauguration of 50 per cent discount book sales exhibition in connection with the Tamil New Year celebrations at the university administrative building, Balasubramanian said the university which publishes rare books of tamil scholars, researchers and also encyclopedias and Tamil literary works, has been organising 50 per cent discount book exhibitions during events like Anna's birthday, Tamil

university founding day and Tamil New Year day, to help common people to purchase and read them.

Accordingly, this exhibition which started on April 15 in connection with Tamil New Year day celebrations, will go on till May 14, Balasubramanian said. People can purchase books at 50 per cent discount.

Later, the vice-chancellor released 20 books, reprinted at a cost of Rs 2 crore by the university and 'Tamil civilisation' - a quarterly journal of news and research. Ramanathan, former head of publication department, Tamil university, received the books. He said that book reading habits have not dwindled because of the advent of social media and the

internet. People prefer the convenience of keeping books in their hands and reading them. Books published by the university will remain as treasures and help younger generations.

The vice-chancellor also said that under the 12th five-year plan, another 16 books are in the final stages of being published by the university. People can get the books in the following address - Publication Department, Main administrative building, Vaagai Valagam, Tamil University, Thanjavur - 10.

Dr. K. Chinnappan, Registrar, Tamil University, and Thyagarajan, head, publication department, participated.

Kamal hits out at AIADMK government

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

Makkal Needhi Maiam founder Kamal Haasan lashed out at the AIADMK government, alleging corruption in the construction of a 12 feet wall, built only six months back, on the banks of a big tank at Ukkadam in Coimbatore.

Since the wall it collapsed in overnight rains, Haasan, in a statement on Thursday, wondered why there was no guarantee for warranty or guarantee for massive constructions undertaken at a cost of crores

of rupees through tenders.

Even an electric shaver, costing ₹1,000, came with a warranty, pointed out Kamal raising a question on the mystery behind e-tenders being awarded to 'relatives.' He was indirectly referring to the general charges that tenders were given to relatives of top honchos in the government during the AIADMK regime.

What action would be taken against the contractors who undertook the construction of the wall and how many officials would be punished, he asked, saying that corruption

was evident from the fact that beautification work was taken up in a city that did not have basic amenities.

The wall on the banks of the tank in Ukkadam was built under the smart city project, he said.

We live in times when check dams wash away within six months of construction, hospital buildings collapse even as they are being built, mini clinics show cracks during the inauguration and the collapsed pond that joined the list of achievements of the 'tender government, Kamal said.

Midnight scare: Leopard enters house, captured

DC CORRESPONDENT
VELLORE, APRIL 15

The entry of a leopard into a house here on Thursday and attacking three members of the family has triggered panic among residents in the area. The incident allegedly occurred in Kalarpalayam village in Gudiyatham, in Vellore district, on Wednesday night. The animal is said to have come near the house of one Velayutham, who had kept his goats and livestock sheltered on the sides of his house. Around 1 am, the big cat had entered the house to stalk for the livestock.

Seeing the leopard, street dogs in the vicinity began chasing it, and the animal quickly entered Velayutham's house, before he could close it. The house door was kept open for ventilation, and Velayutham was lying in the front yard of the house.

Velayutham's wife Prema



The leopard tranquilised and taken by forest officials and veterinary team. K.Senthil Nathan

(40), son Manohar (20) and daughter Mahalaksmi (14) were sleeping inside the house. All the three ran out of the house in panic and locked the main door from outside, trapping the leopard inside the house.

On information, police, forest officials and a veterinary team from Hosur also rushed to the spot, and after a night long operation, tranquilised the

animal. The animal was then moved to a stretcher and shifted to a cage, and taken away in an auto to a forest area near Sarangal on the Tamil Nadu border.

Later, it was released into the wild after checking its health condition, said officials.

The three injured persons were admitted to the Gudiyatham government hospital for treatment.

Summer showers rejuvenate greenery in Nilgiris

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, APRIL 15

Good summer showers, a welcome one, that has continued to drench the Nilgiris for the past couple of days, has started to enrich the greenery and summer colours in the hills, besides rejuvenating the tea gardens here.

While the popular summer season is already underway since the dawn of April, the summer showers have brought a refreshing look to the landscape which was hit hard by frost bite in the preceding months.

Flowering plants in public gardens like the Government Botanical Garden, and also in private gardens need summer showers to bloom on time, which

would extend during the second-half of April. For water managers here, the showers have done a world of good by recharging the ground water table and also increasing the storage levels in the drinking water reservoirs here.

The showers have been particularly heavy in Kotagiri and Coonoor as the Kil-Kotagiri in the eastern Nilgiris recorded 115 mm of rains, on Wednesday. Showers lashed Coonoor and Ooty on Thursday afternoon.

For the farming sector, the rain has brought immense cheer as it would be beneficial to the standing potato and carrot crops. For tea plantations, these rains have come as a blessing to rejuvenate the tea gardens to pep up the yield.

Status of RTI appeals reviewed

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, APRIL 15

The state chief information commissioner, R. Rajagopal, reviewed the status of appeal petitions received under Right to Information Act, in Thanjavur district, here on

Thursday. Collector M. Govinda Rao and SP, Thanjavur district, Deshmukh Sekar Sanjay, participated. The commissioner asked the officials to provide information sought by people under the right to information act, within the stipulated time.

Royal family member passes away

Thanjavur, April 15: Veerender Raje of the Maratta royal family and younger brother of Shivaji Rajah Bhosle, life members of Saraswathi Mahal library, and president, Hindu Swarajya Mahasangh, passed away here on Thursday. The cremation will take place on Friday, said the royal family sources.

Adhishesan statue: Giant truck hauls 230 tonne rock

DC CORRESPONDENT
VELLORE, APRIL 15

The giant truck with 138 wheels carrying a massive rock weighing around 230 tonne meant for an idol of Adhishesan in Bengaluru,

reached Arcot from Vandavasi, on Thursday evening.

A highway patrol team took charge of guiding and steering the truck which reached the borders of Ranipet district from Cheyyar by 5 am on

Thursday. By 8 am, the truck was stationed on the Arcot by-pass road. Since it created a traffic snarl, the truck would slowly start moving towards Bengaluru by 5 pm, said officials.

Sources said that devotees

lighted camphor and worshipped the stone and also threw flowers on it as the truck moved past. Sources said that the truck would cover 40 kms a day and take roughly 10 days to cover the distance to Bengaluru.



COFFEE-BREAK

Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



Aries: Ignore people who comment on your actions. Take parental advice to harmonise domestic atmosphere. You are likely to find joy with your romantic partner.



Taurus: Those in administrative services are likely to be promoted. There are chances of a transfer for some. It is an auspicious day for investments.



Gemini: Look out for investment opportunities offering safe returns. Use flattery to infuse new life into a romantic affair. Drive carefully.



Cancer: Children will catch the joyous vibrations at home. You may spend big on good plans. Make sure you pursue professional goals with utmost dedication.



Leo: Introspect and plan for the future. You may dabble in equities to earn long-term profits. Timely support from your family is indicated. Finances will be sound.



Virgo: You may be bored and lazy. Businessmen profit from new contacts. An unwanted quarrel with neighbours is likely. Take care of your teeth. Volunteer work could be beneficial.

You share your b'day with

The multi-talented Mandira Bedi is an Indian actress, fashion designer, and television presenter. She's famously known for her hosting duties for ICC Cricket World Cups



Libra: You could be torn psychologically and physically by domestic and career demands. Expenses rise. Don't take hasty decisions on new proposals.



Scorpio: Avoid eating unsafe food. You may fall ill. Take care of your diet. You will be attracted towards religious activities.



Sagittarius: Spending money carelessly could backfire. Your partner will be supportive and loving. Do not overreact to an emotional situation.



Capricorn: Keeping focussed will help you overcome recent hiccups. Your charm will not work with your mate. Sincere work will be rewarded. A new deal could bring immediate monetary gains.

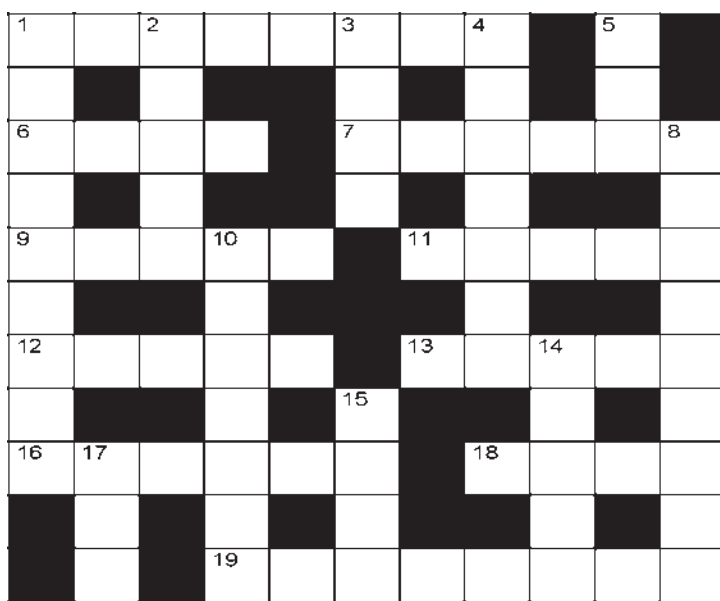


Aquarius: Partners are likely to differ and decide to separate. Don't waste time on unnecessary argument. Express gratitude to your spouse or loved one who is managing your household.



Pisces: Health will improve. Stick to routine activities. A new assignment may not prove lucrative. Keep in the good books of your seniors to progress. Do not get lured into joining the private sector.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across

1. Ignobly faint-hearted (8)
6. At a distance (4)
7. Pulling behind (6)
9. Establish by deduction (5)
11. Dance club (5)
12. Model of excellence (5)
13. Spry (5)
16. Sign (6)
18. Laboratory gel (4)
19. Selecting from a variety of sources (8)

Down

1. Alliance between parties (9)
2. Jetty (5)
3. Tariff (4)
4. Gaping open (7)
5. Merriment (3)
8. Come, Tiger! (anag) (9)
10. Shifty (7)
14. Cast metal bar (5)
15. Chime (4)
17. Lubricate (3)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

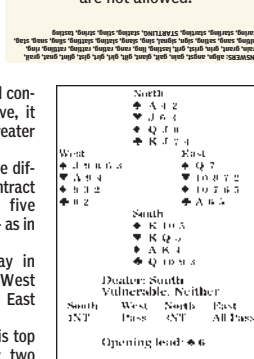
- Across:** 6. Deadlocked, 8. Rusty, 10. Khaki, 13. Incompetent, 14. Swell, 17. Photo, 19. Nectarines.
- Down:** 1. Fees, 2. Edgy, 3. Hock, 4. Okra, 5. Addition, 7. Croissant, 9. Troll, 11. Hutch, 12. Apt, 15. Eche, 16. Lean, 17. Pail, 18. Owed.

Word Mine

G
R
S
T
L
T
A
N
I

TODAY'S RATINGS: 32 AVERAGE: 37
GOOD: 42 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used once only. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.



jumble

YAUBO
DYUBD
TENNIY
LARNYE



spades and three diamonds. So, he must drive out both missing aces to get to nine tricks. Here, if he wins the first trick and attacks hearts, he is safe. But it is natural to start on the clubs. Then, though, East can win with the ace and return his remaining spade, establishing West's suit while he, West, still has the heart ace as an entry.

Since South has two spade stoppers but two cards to drive out, it is usually correct to duck the first trick. After doing that

here, declarer wins East's spade return and plays a club. When East wins with his ace, he doesn't have another spade to lead. And if East did have a third spade, the suit must be splitting 4-3, in which case South will lose only two spade tricks and the two aces.

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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



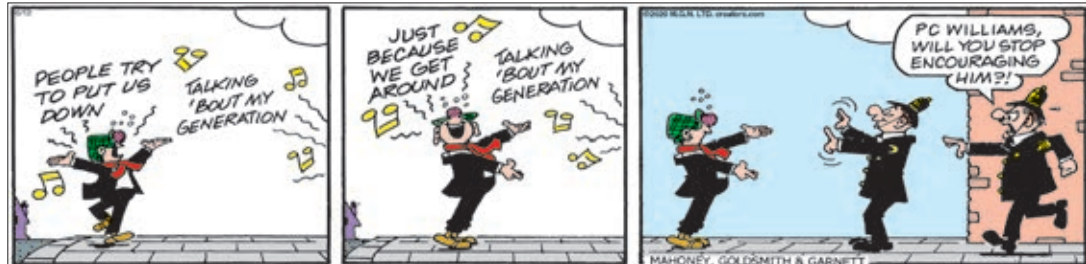
ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



THE OPPONENT HAS FIVE CARDS



Supposedly an accountant applying for a job was asked, "What is two and two?" When he replied, "How much do you want it to be?" he was hired.

Perhaps Lord Byron had similar thoughts in mind when he wrote in a letter to his future wife, Anne Isabella Milbanke (who left him after only one year of marriage), "I know that two and two make four -- and should be glad to prove it -- if I could -- though I must say if by

any sort of process I could convert two and two into five, it would give me much greater pleasure."

Bridge players may have difficulty in a no-trump contract when an opponent has five cards in a suit he has led -- as in today's deal.

How should South play in three no-trump after West leads the spade six, and East puts up the queen?

First, declarer counts his top tricks. He has only five: two

SHORT TAKES

CONG. WANTS SPL PACKAGE FOR DABBAWALAS

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, APRIL 15

Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole on Thursday sought a relief package for taxi drivers, flower vendors, salon workers and Mumbai's dabbawala among others. Patole wrote a letter in this regard to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray stating that these sections of the society should be incorporated in the relief package which has been announced by the state government.

Two days ago, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had announced several sops from monetary reliefs to free distribution of food grains for the vulnerable sections including registered auto drivers, construction workers and hawkers. In addition to this, financial assistance will be provided to the economically weaker sections below the poverty line families, women, senior citizens, widows, disabled and tribal communities. Close to seven crore beneficiaries of Food Security schemes in Maharashtra would be given free food grains including 3 kg wheat and 2 kg rice per person for a month.

CBI TOLD TO PROBE ISRO CASE PLOT

FROM PG 1

On April 5, the Centre moved the top court seeking urgent hearing and consideration of the panel's report terming it as a "national issue".

The espionage case, which had hit the headlines in 1994, pertained to allegations of transfer of certain confidential documents on India's space programme to foreign countries by two scientists and four others, including two Maldivian women. The scientist was arrested during the Congress regime in Kerala.

Justice Jain committee had one representative each from the Centre and the Kerala government.

The court had appointed the panel on September 14, 2018, while directing the Kerala government to cough up ₹50 lakh compensation for compelling Narayanan to undergo "immense humiliation".

The ₹50 lakh compensation was paid by the Kerala government. Besides awarding compensation of ₹50 lakhs, the top court in 2018 had said that Mr Narayan could proceed with the civil suit he had filed for compensation.

STATES TOLD TO MAKE GOOD USE OF MEDICAL OXYGEN

New Delhi, April 15: The Centre on Thursday asked states to make rational use of medical oxygen and ensure there is no wastage while stressing that there is sufficient stock of oxygen in the country.

Medical oxygen is a critical component in the treatment of Covid-19 affected patients. An inter-ministerial Empowered Group (EG2) of officers was constituted during the Covid pandemic in March 2020 to ensure the availability of essential medical equipment including medical oxygen to the affected states, the Union health ministry said.

Along with the ramped up production of the oxygen manufacturing units and the surplus stocks available, the present availability of oxygen is sufficient, the ministry said.

FIRE-FIGHTING BEGINS AS TALLY GOES UP BY 2 L

FROM PG 1

According to Union Health Ministry officials, Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh are among the states where double mutant strain - coded as B.1.617 -- of the COVID virus has been found. Experts believe this double mutant variant could be the main reason for rapid spread of Covid under the new wave.

"It is reasonable to say that the variant (double mutation) is of concern because it has been found in a significant number of people. And it is not just because it has been found in a certain number of people but we know that these particular mutations have (also) got physiological effects on our context," principal scientific adviser to Prime Minister K. Vijay Raghavan told a media house in an interview.



A health worker collects swab sample from a woman for Covid-19 test at MCD dispensary in Jangpura. — PTI



Devotees wait in a long queue to offer prayers on the occasion of Bengali New Year on Thursday. — PTI



People, not adhering to norms, walk at the Heritage Street near Golden Temple. — PTI

Weekend lockdown in Delhi till April 30

■ Gyms, malls, auditoriums to remain closed ■ Restaurants to operate home-delivery services

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced a curfew this coming weekend and the closure of malls, gymnasiums and auditoriums till April 30 as part of sweeping restrictions to break the chain of the Covid-19 infection in the city. According to an official order, the weekend curfew will be effective from 10 pm on April 16 (Friday) to 5 am on April 19 (Monday), even as gymnasiums, auditoriums, malls, spas, entertainment parks and assembly halls will remain closed in the national capital till April 30.

Cinema halls will function with only 30 per cent capacity. However, officials said a decision to extend the weekend curfew will be taken after reviewing the Covid-19 situation next week. There will be no in-house dining in restaurants, the Chief Minister said at an online press conference a day after the city recorded the biggest single-day jump of 17,282 Covid-19 cases.

However, the restaurants will be allowed to operate home-delivery and take-away services, he said, adding that bars will remain closed till April 30. The Chief Minister made these announcements after he met Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal. He said the essential services and weddings will not be affected by the weekend curfew and passes will be provided to those attending weddings.

In its order, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) said during the weekend curfew, the movement of people for wedding-related (up to 50 people) and funeral-related (up to 20 people) gatherings will be allowed. People going to airports,



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a roadshow campaign for state Assembly polls, amid the rise in Covid-19 cases across the country, in Kolkata on Thursday. — PTI

EC rules out clubbing poll phases

RAJIB CHOWDHURI & PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI | DC
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE, APRIL 15

Undeterred by the exponential rise in daily cases of the Coronavirus disease across the country and West Bengal, the Election Commission of India (EC) ruled out a possibility of clubbing the remaining phases of the ongoing Assembly elections in the state due to lack of availability of another 1,500 companies

of the Central paramilitary forces.

"There is no such plan of clubbing" the three poll phases, the Election Commission said after new Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra took stock of the ground reality from various poll observers deputed in the state and chief electoral officer West Bengal Ariz Aftab in a video conference.

At the meeting, opinions were also sought from them about the deployment and distribution of

the Central forces in case of clubbing the last three poll phases after the state recorded daily new Covid-19 cases at 6,769 till Thursday with 22 fresh deaths in the last 24 hours, sources said.

This time, election to the West Bengal Assembly is being held in eight phases. Polling for four phases have ended and the fifth phase will be held on Saturday. Polling for the sixth, seventh and the eighth phase will be held on April 22, April 26 and April 29, respectively.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday evening also appealed to the EC to club the "remaining phases" of the polls into one, within few hours of the central poll panel's decision to go ahead with the existing poll schedule even after the deadly virus claimed a Congress candidate's life and infected two others, including one from the TMC in the state. She also stressing that her party had opposed the prolonged eight-phase poll schedule.

people often indulged in recreation and other such activities that could be "curtailed" and "curbed" without much inconvenience to them.

railway stations and ISBTs will be allowed to proceed on the production of valid tickets.

However, those going for vaccination will be

required to apply for a curfew pass. Mediapersons have been exempted from the weekend curfew.

People dealing in food, groceries, fruits, vegetables

and dairy products will also have to seek a curfew pass for their movement.

Kejriwal said the reason behind the weekend curfew was that on these days,

‘Tika ustav’ another sham by govt: Rahul

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi once again lashed out at the BJP-led central government over the Covid-19 'mismanagement'. He alleged that the "tika ustav" was just another sham by the government and further that there are no beds, ventilators or vaccines available.

Through his official Twitter handle, he tweeted, "There are no tests, no beds in hospitals. There are no ventilators, no oxygen. There are no vac-

cines also. The utsav is a pretense".

Gandhi's attack comes in the wake of India reporting an unprecedented increase in Covid-19 cases with over 2,00,000 cases being reported on Thursday, the biggest single-day hike since the beginning of the pandemic.

Rahul Gandhi has been actively using social media and other platforms to highlight the 'deficiencies' of the central government in managing the outcome of the Coronavirus pandemic.

J&K defers shifting of ‘Darbar’

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, APRIL 15

The Jammu and Kashmir authorities have deferred 'Darbar' move, the biannual shifting of the civil secretariat or the seat of the government and other offices from winter capital Jammu to summer capital Srinagar in view of the surge in Covid-19 cases.

The 'Darbar' was scheduled to close in Jammu later this month and reopen in Srinagar on May 10. But now the secretariat will function at both Jammu and Srinagar "in an equitable manner", J&K's Lieutenant

Governor, Manoj Sinha, said on Thursday.

"In view of sharply rising cases of Covid in J&K, the Govt has taken few important decisions ensuring safety of employees. Darbar move deferred because of Covid, Secretariat to function in both Srinagar & Jammu, office functioning not to be affected because of e-office," he tweeted.

He added, "Secretaries will function from both locations in an equitable manner. Office functioning will not be affected as files to move electronically between both Secretariats in e-Office."

MAHA OPPOSES OPENING OF JAIN TRUSTS TO DISTRIBUTE ‘PIOUS FOOD’

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, APRIL 15

A day after the Bombay High Court refused permission to a city mosque to open up for Ramzan prayers, the Maharashtra government opposed a petition by two Jain Trusts seeking permission for devotees to collect food from the trust's premises during the nine-day-long Ayambil fast.

A division bench of Justice S.C. Gupta and

Justice Abhay Ahuja have deferred the hearing till Friday on two petitions filed by two Jain Trusts seeking an urgent relief by allowing devotees to take away "pious boiled cooked food" from the premises of the trust for nine days between April 19 and April 27.

The main prayer of the petitioners was to quash the state diktat and allow them and other 48 Jain Trusts to open their temples with SOPs in place.



MP MINISTER STIRS ROW, SAYS ‘PEOPLE GET OLD, THEY MUST DIE’

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, APRIL 15

An 'uncharitable' comment by a minister in Shivraj government on spiraling Covid-19 deaths in Madhya Pradesh has sparked a huge row here with Opposition Congress calling it 'shockingly insensitive'. State animal husbandry minister Prem Singh Patel while seeking to downplay the sudden spurt in fatalities due to Coronavirus infections in MP, said "people get old, they have to die".

He was speaking to reporters in Barwani in MP late on Thursday. "Deaths are occurring. Nobody can stop death. People get old, they have to die", Patel said. The minister's comment comes at a time when the situation has worsened in the state with hospitals running out of beds for patients and mortuaries and crematoriums overflowing with bodies of the Covid-19 victims.

DIET | PLAN Pet food makers cite ambiguous biz environment, absence of uniform framework

India's 29 million pets facing shortage of food

New Delhi, April 15: India, which has an estimated pet animal population of 29 million, is facing a shortage of pet foods, a government body said on Thursday and urged the industry to boost local production by taking advantage of the existing central schemes.

Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) chairman O.P. Chaudhary, addressing a webinar organised by industry body PHDCCI, said the industry players can avail credit facility given under the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Scheme

(AHIDS) for setting up animal feed manufacturing facilities.

However, pet food makers such as Mars International India and Royal Canine India said higher taxes, ambiguous business environment, absence of uniform framework and quality standards are major hindrances for the sector's growth.

"On an average, India requires 30,000 tonnes of pet foods. In India, there are pet food manufacturers but not sufficient enough to meet demand and quality," Chaudhary said while addressing the

webinar on the pet food industry.

Some quantity of pet foods are imported but are costly to reach the people at affordable prices, he said, adding that the scarcity of pet foods was faced during the Covid-19 lockdown last year and the government had intervened.

Asserting that a balanced nutritious diet is key to keep the pets healthy, Chaudhary said, however, pet foods are not reachable to every Indian pet owner because of the cost and availability.

Overall, animal nutrition is a concern for

Indian livestock sector as there is about 35-40 per cent shortage of animal feed and fodder, he added.

Stating that the pet industry in India is growing at a faster rate, the AWBI chairman said the government is taking measures to address the demand-supply gap and assisting the private sector to invest in setting up of animal feed plant under the ₹15,000 crore worth AHIDF scheme.

Under the scheme, up to 90 per cent credit is given at a lower rate form scheduled banks to the individuals, MSME (Micro, Small

and Medium Enterprises), FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations) and Section 8 companies for infrastructure development, he said.

"The pet food industry can avail the opportunities to manufacture pet food in India and meet the demand," he added. Further, the chairman said animal feed is not regulated in India at present. "There is no system in place for meeting licensing norms. Therefore, it is the high time to establish the pet food plants."

He also said that raw materials required for pet

food is available in the country. India is producing 8.1 million tonnes of meat, out of which chicken meat is 50 per cent.

"The offals are wasted and same can be utilised for pet food manufacturing. Not only chicken and meat, India is sufficiently producing foodgrains which can also be utilised," he added.

According to AWBI Secretary Sujit Kumar Dutta, there is a huge opportunity in research and development of pet foods as many are demanding vegetarian pet foods. — PTI

IN BRIEF

Taiwan transport minister resigns

Taipei, April 15: Taiwan's government on Thursday said it had accepted the resignation of its transport minister following a train crash earlier this month that killed 49 people, the island's deadliest in decades.

The April 2 crash was caused by a railway maintenance truck that slid down an embankment and onto the track moments before a high-speed train passed by.

The accident, which left more than 200 injured, plunged Taiwan into mourning.

Lawmaker caught naked

Ottawa, April 15: A Canadian Parliament member was caught stark naked in a virtual meeting of the House of Commons. William Amos, who has represented the Quebec district of Pontiac since 2015, appeared on the screens of his fellow lawmakers completely naked Wednesday.

A screenshot obtained by *The Canadian Press* shows Amos standing behind a desk between the Quebec and Canadian flags, his private parts hidden by what appears to be a mobile phone in one hand.

Xi to attend climate summit

Beijing, April 15: Chinese President Xi Jinping will join an online French-German climate summit "at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron", Beijing's foreign ministry said Thursday.

The virtual discussions with the key European Union nations — to be held on Friday — come as US envoy John Kerry is in China for environment talks.

Kerry is not expected to meet with Xi, on a trip which has so far taken place behind closed doors.

Russia threatens Ukraine: Kiev

Kiev, April 15: Ukraine's foreign minister said Thursday that Russia was flagrantly threatening Ukraine with destruction, as Western countries raise the alarm over an escalation of the separatist conflict.

Foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba said during a press conference that Russian pundits and officials are "openly threatening Ukraine with war and the destruction of Ukrainian statehood." "We condemn Russia's aggravation of the security situation, Moscow's actions and statements aimed at escalating military tensions."

U.S. to sell F-35s to the UAE

Washington, April 15: President Joe Biden's administration indicated Wednesday it was moving forward with a \$23 billion sale of F-35 fighter-jets to the UAE but was considering restrictions and would not deliver them soon. The State Department shortly after Biden's inauguration in January ordered a review of the massive arms package, which was approved by former president Donald Trump.

Responding to a lawsuit seeking to block the sale, the State Department said it planned a "robust and sustained dialogue" with the UAE.

IRAN N-TALKS 'POSITIVE': RUSSIA

Vienna, April 15: Russia said Thursday that the latest talks in Vienna to save the 2015 Iran nuclear deal were positive despite fresh tensions, with Tehran preparing to ramp up uranium enrichment in response to an attack on a facility it blamed on arch-foe Israel. The latest round of negotiations took place between diplomats over roughly two hours on Thursday afternoon, with Russia's ambassador to the UN in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov tweeting afterwards that the "general impression is positive". He added Thursday's talks "will be followed by a number of informal meetings in different formats, including at expert level". The talks comprised delegations from the remaining parties to the deal — Germany, France, Britain, China, Russia and Iran.

An European diplomat had said that Iran's announcement that it would enrich uranium up to 60 percent "puts pressure on everyone". The move would take Iran closer to the 90 percent purity level needed for use in a nuclear weapon. EU external affairs spokesperson Peter Stano described the announcement as "extremely worrisome from a nuclear non-proliferation point of view".

WHO: Europe surpasses 1 million Covid-19 deaths

Geneva, April 15: A top official from the World Health Organisation says Europe has surpassed 1 million deaths from Covid-19 and the situation remains serious, with about 1.6 million new cases reported each week in the region.

Addressing recent concerns about vaccines, Dr Hans Kluge also said the risk of people suffering blood clots is far higher for people with Covid-19 than people who receive AstraZeneca's Coronavirus vaccine.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to Greece, Kluge did point to early signs that transmission may be slowing across several countries and cited declining incidence among the oldest people.

He said the proportion of Covid-19 deaths among people over 80, who have been prioritised for vaccines, had dropped to nearly 30% the lowest level in the pandemic.

For now, the risk of suffering blood clots is much higher for someone with Covid-19 than for someone who has taken the AstraZeneca vaccine, he said. Let there be no doubt

Zurich, April 15: Novartis announced Thursday it will join forces with fellow Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche to produce tocilizumab, a drug being tested for its effectiveness against Covid-19-linked pneumonia.

It is the third time Novartis has made its production capacities available to a competitor during the Coronavirus pandemic, as several laboratories strike unprecedented partnerships to fight the global crisis.

Novartis is already collaborating with BioNTech and CureVac in producing Covid-19 vaccines.

The new tocilizumab deal will see Roche's manufacturing expertise transferred to the Novartis Drug Substance Singapo-

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This photo taken and received from an anonymous source via Facebook on Thursday shows protesters marching during a demonstration against the military coup in Mogoke in Myanmar. — AFP PHOTO / ANONYMOUS SOURCE

Myanmar troops shoot at health staff, 1 killed

Protesting medicos flee for safety to a nearby mosque

Yangon, April 15: Myanmar's military opened fire on protesting healthcare workers Thursday, killing at least one bystander as the demonstrators fled for safety to a nearby mosque.

The country has been in turmoil since the military seized power from civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb. 1, triggering a massive uprising that the junta has sought to quell using lethal force.

But protesters have continued taking to the streets, this week using the Myanmar New Year holiday of Thingyan as their latest rallying point as the normal festivities have been cancelled.

In Myanmar's second-largest city Mandalay, a demonstration by medical workers Thursday turned violent when soldiers opened fire, sending them running to the mosque.

"They were shooting everywhere... they were targeting the Sule mosque compound because people in there were hiding protesters," said an eyewitness.

A 30-year-old man who lived in the compound was shot dead, and at least two others were injured, said a doctor who treated the wounded.

"The man who died was shot from the back and it penetrated through his chest," he said.

A medic who participated in the protest said he saw the arrest of six nurses and doctors during the crackdown. "We lost contact with some medical team members as well," he said. Myanmar's health-

care workers have been at the forefront of a nationwide civil disobedience movement, refusing to return to work under a military regime. Their absence has left many of the country's hospitals understaffed during the pandemic.

Civil servants from other sectors have followed suit, bringing the operation of

what kind of help he wanted from the British government.

Britain Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said last week he condemned the bullying actions of the Myanmar military regime in London.

More than 700 people in Myanmar have been killed in a brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protesters and others opposed to February's coup.

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Ousted Myanmar envoy appeals for UK govt help

London, April 15: The ousted Myanmar ambassador to Britain has appealed to the British government to help him as he faced eviction from his London residence.

Kyau Zwar Minn had to spend a night in his car last week after his country's military attaché barred him from the embassy in central London.

He told reporters from behind the padlocked gates of his residence in north-west London on Thursday that he is not going to

go today and intends to stay despite orders from his former staff that he has to move out.

The former diplomat had called for the release of former elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was detained after the military took power in a coup on Feb. 1.

Asked what he would do over the next few days, he replied: Who can tell? The last time they seized the embassy without warning, so I need to be careful.

He did not elaborate on

care workers have been at the forefront of a nationwide civil disobedience movement, refusing to return to work under a military regime. Their absence has left many of the country's hospitals understaffed during the pandemic.

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French nationals in Pak told to leave

Islamabad, April 15: The French embassy here on Thursday advised all French nationals in Pakistan to temporarily leave the country after violent protests by a radical religious group that has now been banned by the government.

The Tehreek-i-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) took to streets on Monday to launch violent protests to force the government to expel the French ambassador over blasphemous caricatures published last year.

Pakistan. It said that the departures will be carried out by existing commercial airlines.

Interior minister Sheikh Rashid announced on Wednesday to ban the TLP and officials said that Prime Minister Imran Khan and his cabinet endorsed the summary by the interior ministry to outlaw the group.

The trouble began after police arrested the TLP chief Saad Raizvi on Monday ahead of the April 20 deadline by the group to expel the French ambassador.

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DECCAN
Chronicle

16 APRIL 2021

Biden's Afghan exit will hurt India, aid Pakistan

US president Joe Biden's decision to go beyond his predecessor Donald Trump's deadline of May 1 this year for all US forces to pull out of Afghanistan is not unexpected. The Americans people have been long fed up with their longest war which has cost trillions of dollars and 2000 soldiers. The US got Osama bin Laden (hiding in Pakistan with the support of the Army) and that's when the grudge match really ended.

The nation-building project in Afghanistan, beloved of many US Democrats and just a few Republicans too may be, was not going anywhere. So, there appeared no point hanging in there. There were no strategic dimensions to remaining engaged in Afghanistan either. In the current US assessment, if the Taliban were to once again be back in the saddle in Kabul as is more than likely, there is little chance they will seek to cross the oceans and attack the American mainland as the al-Qaeda under bin-Laden had done. America currently has more pressing strategic concerns than Afghanistan — namely China, Russia, Iran, climate change, the Covid pandemic.

When Mr Biden was vice-president to President Barack Obama, he was among those whose advice was to retain a small counter-terrorism force in Afghanistan. That advice is now evidently deemed obsolete. But why did the Biden administration not adhere to the Trump deadline? Nothing would have been lost by doing so.

The reasons appear mainly to do with optics. Pulling out a large body of soldiers and rolling up a vast military infrastructure, even when no rearguard fighting may be on the cards, takes time-consuming planning. Besides, sticking to the deadline set by a predecessor who has turned ignominious may not bring credit in domestic politics. Besides, extending the deadline entails no extra costs for America.

From the Taliban perspective, with Pakistan's help if they have held on for so long after being ousted from power in 2001, what is a few months more? The Taliban know they have nothing to lose. In fact, the extra four months may work to the Taliban's advantage as it give them more time to launch more vicious attacks, one of whose (intended) outcomes may be to push domestic Afghan factions into submission before the much-touted "interim" government is brought into some kind of shape through talks. That shape is overwhelmingly likely to be the one that the Taliban want.

The US was desperately after a "responsible" withdrawal. Historically, the Americans wanted to look good in comparison to the Soviet Union, the withdrawal of whose troops from Afghanistan in the late 1980s was widely deemed ignominious. But the Afghans aren't likely to be fooled by appearances. The international community neither.

The US pullout, which hardly offers America any political gains in the region, may be expected to make the position of Pakistan, China and, to some extent, even Russia, firmer than hitherto. India, in contrast, may be required to do much diplomatic footwork, especially in relation to the Taliban. Historically, after the Taliban interregnum India had aligned its position with that of the government in Kabul. It may be obliged to stick to that broad line even after the return of the Taliban, no matter in what form. New Delhi has a difficult task on its hands.

Let all follow CBSE's example

With the daily caseload of Covid-19 infections crossing two lakhs, an unprecedented and alarming milestone as yet, on Thursday, the country needs to pull up its socks and fight the virus with all available tools. Precious time has already been lost in augmenting the healthcare system or streamlining the inoculation programme by ensuring adequate availability of vaccine. Any fresh move could take time. In the meanwhile, the government must take whatever steps it can, expeditiously. One major step has been taken when the Central Board of Secondary Education put off the Class 12 examinations and scrapped the ones in Class 10. The government must now see to it that the other national and well as state boards follow suit and eliminate the chances of the pandemic spreading through examination halls.

The government must also target the other potential superspreader events such as religious, political and social gatherings. West Bengal has four more phases of the polling, and electioneering is in full swing with mammoth rallies. The government must check with the Election Commission how it may be possible to curtail electioneering. India has some religious festivals every season; the Kumbh Mela in which millions of devotees attend is under way. Healthcare experts have been demanding restrictions on it but none has been imposed yet. The government must, in consultation with the state government in Uttarakhand and the organisers of the festival, explore the possibility of cutting the duration of the festivities short and impose stricter controls on the attendees. The Muslim community has entered into the annual fasting period, which normally ends with a community feast every day and with grand gatherings at the end of the month. The government must consult the community leaders and see how the events do not end up spreading the virus. The absence of a concerted, coordinated and result-oriented approach could land the nation in a larger mess than what it had found itself in when the virus came with the first wave.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

R. MOHAN
Resident Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:
Chennai: SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254747, 22254748
Coimbatore: 77 Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore 641009. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256
Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256.
Bengaluru: 5th Floor, BMTC Commercial Complex, 80 Ft. Road, Koramangala, Bangalore-560095. Ph: 08043460500; Fax: 080-22960551/52/55
Visakhapatnam: Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax (0891) 2755285
Vijayawada: No. C 3 & 4, Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 2555284/ 2555287, Fax (0866) 2555234
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhuweswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618
Kochi: No. 3-B, 3rd Floor, DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloor-Kadavanthara Road, Ernakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408
Anantapur: Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904
Nellore: Survey No. 527/2, Burrampur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348581/ 82, Telefax (0861) 2348580
Karimnagar: Survey No. 1341, Vavilalpally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar 505 001. Phone: (0878) 2228908; Telefax (0878) 2220433
Kozhikode: No. 3-B, 3rd Floor, DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloor-Kadavanthara Road, Ernakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408
Kozhikode: No 6/1002 E, First Floor City Mall, Opp. YMCA Kannur Road, Kozhikode - 673 001 Fax : 0495 4019018
Thiruvananthapuram: St Joseph Press Thycaud post, Cotton Hills, Thiruvananthapuram-14, Ph: 0471-2735105/6/7, Fax: 0471-4016112 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08ss

Subhani



Covid: Who'll pay price for irresponsible netas?



Karan Thapar

As I See It

Nowhere are politicians perfect. They all make mistakes. Though they may atone for them later, usually in defeat, they're almost always disinclined to apologise. But I'm not put off by that. If you want them to take decisions, some are bound to be wrong. That's a fact of life. But what irks me is irresponsibility. In particular, refusing to take tough decisions because it does not politically suit them to do so. For this there can be no excuse and little forgiveness.

Faced with the raging second surge of Covid-19, which is relentlessly soaring at nearly 200,000 cases a day, our politicians have behaved irresponsibly. Worse, they continue to do so. Undeterred by criticism from the media and grave warnings from doctors and public health experts, they are now passing the buck.

What am I referring to? The electoral rallies with several lakh people that were held till very recently in Kerala, Assam and Tamil Nadu and which will continue to dominate the political horizon in West Bengal for the rest of this month. But I am also talking of the Shahi Snans, which have started in Haridwar and will continue for another two weeks. Like the political rallies, these religious baths will attract hundreds of thousands of people, if not millions, and there will be no social distancing and precious little mask wearing.

The rallies and snans could easily become super-spreader events. Some perhaps already have. Others are likely to follow. But even if by some miracle that doesn't happen, is it worth the risk? That may sound like

a rhetorical question but, quite frankly, it is not.

So why are they permitted? Let's take the political rallies first. They are an easy, simple and time-tested way of attracting large crowds and addressing them at one go. They also attract television attention and newspaper coverage. Therefore, they get talked about and that, it's hoped, will create political momentum. This is why politicians are so reluctant to abjure them.

In comparison, virtual campaigning is more difficult, the response isn't easy to assess, and it doesn't create any buzz. Therefore, citing the excuse of democracy, our politicians have continued to physically campaign as if the Covid-19 pandemic belongs to another and far-off world.

In fact, when questioned they've either been defiant, or they have blamed the Election Commission. This is what Hemanta Biswa Sarma said earlier this month: "There is no Covid in Assam... there is no need to wear a mask in Assam. Why wear masks unnecessarily and create a panic?". Incidentally, he is the state's health minister.

Days later, at a press conference in West Bengal, Union home minister Amit Shah was asked how he justified massive political rallies when the virus was surging past 100,000 cases a day. (Since then, it's crossed a yet higher peak of nearly 200,000 a day.) Without a blush or a moment's hesitation, he said the question should be asked of the Election Commission. It has set the rules and guidelines and his rallies are fully in accord with them. Sadly, I don't recall any journalist asking Mr Shah if this is an adequate answer from the nation's home minister or simply an irresponsible attempt to pass the buck.

A day later the commission spoke out but almost sotto voce and certainly ineffectively. As a national newspaper put it, the commission "will not hesitate in banning rallies and meetings if precautions are not adhered to". Not surprisingly, they weren't, and equally unsurprisingly the commission retreated to its earlier convenient silence. And so the irresponsibility continues.

Now, let's come to the shahi snans. When Tirath Singh Rawat took over as chief minister of Uttarakhand, he dispensed with his predecessor's insistence on a prior Covid test before participating in a snan. "Nobody will be stopped in the name of Covid-19 as we are sure that faith in God will overcome the fear of the virus", he glibly though very confidently told another national newspaper. Days later he tested positive.

Meanwhile, one newspaper, quoting government officials, said one crore people were expected to visit Haridwar on April 14, which was Baisakhi, whilst two crore more were anticipated between April 11 and 14. Photographs and WhatsApp clips showed that in fact happened. I fear they could soon realise the truth of the old cliché "God helps those who help themselves".

The government will tell you that banning or even restraining the long-awaited and deeply loved religious events is hard to do. Of course it is. It could make governments unpopular. But then who said being PM during the worst crisis of the century is easy?

religious events is hard to do. Of course it is. It could make governments unpopular. In a democracy, no one wants that. But then who said that being Prime Minister or chief minister during the worst health crisis in a century is easy? Yet, if British PM Boris Johnson could enforce stringent curbs over Christmas and Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel during Easter, do Prime Minister Modi and CM Rawat lack the strength to behave similarly? If Mr Johnson and Ms Merkel can take unpopularity on the chin, are our netas made of weaker stuff? Or could it be that our lot have deliberately chosen not to act because not only is it easier not to do so but that will also ensure that they remain the darling of the masses?

Finally, just one question remains: how heavy a price will we pay for this irresponsibility? We know the damage the rallies and snans could do can only be estimated two weeks later. That's not too far away. But chances are... it won't be the politicians who will suffer. It will be the poor people of India. The former will bask in their electoral triumphs or boast of their administrative expertise. The latter could end up infected, with sickness and possibly worse to follow.

And then? Before you answer, remember, this is India. I doubt if anyone will hold the errant politicians to account. They come from all our political parties and they'll all get away with it. But it's likely to be very different for the majority, who are poor. If they get infected, fall ill and even die, who will care for and mourn them? They've paid the price of political incompetence for generations, possibly centuries. And as they've always done, they'll pick themselves up, place their faith in God and carry on. I doubt if this time will be any different.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

NEW CEO'S RESPONSIBILITIES

At a time when the Election Commission of India is accused by the opposition leaders of taking partisan decisions in favour of the ruling dispensation, Sushil Chandra has taken charge as the new Chief Election Commissioner of India. They quote the unprecedented eight phase Assembly election schedule in West Bengal and the happenings during the election campaigns to support their apprehensions. Whenever we think of the ECI, only the face of late TN Seshan comes to mind as the commission functioned honestly without giving room for complaint from any quarters. He is the one who proved to the electorate the real powers ECI has been endowed with. The electoral reforms he brought in are laudable. Sushil Chandra has taken the reins of the Commission at a time when the common man is not without suspicion over the fair functioning of the commission and expects him to steer the ECI in the right and sacred manner and prove that he is also capable of delivering the best as per law like Seshan, revered as the father of elections.

Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai

SPUTNIK-V GETS NOD

The approval of Russian made Sputnik-V vaccine for emergency use by the country's drug regulator, Drugs Controller General, at a time when the country has been grappling with an issue of vaccine shortage and an exponential rise in Covid-19 cases is a momentous step in our fight against the contagion. As vaccines are potent weapons in our arsenal to keep the pandemic under control and save human lives, it must be leveraged fully. The recommendation of an expert panel to fast track the approval of vaccines that have passed regulatory scrutiny in the US, Europe, UK, Japan or listed in WHO's (World Health Organisation) emergency is pragmatic response to a public health emergency. Scaling up our vaccination programme and widening its ambit to cover a significant proportion of the population holds the key to keep the contagion from spiralling out of control.

M.Jeyaram, Sholavandan

Kamal Davar



Ramping security or building trust: How best to tame India's Maoists?

The audacious ambush by Naxals in the Bijapur badlands of the Chhattisgarh state, killing 22 Special Forces policemen and injuring 30 others on April 3, 2021, brought forth the discomfiting reality of India's inadequate preparedness in dealing with its most serious internal security affliction, namely, the Naxal-Maoist challenge. That these avoidable casualties are attributed to an operation which was mounted by our own forces to nab the charismatic young Naxal leader, Madvi Hidma, in the Tekulguda region of Bastar — a hotbed of Naxal activities since decades — makes this tragic incident all the more embarrassing for those who conceived and mounted it.

The video released by the Naxals, of the release ceremony of police commander, Rakeshwar Singh Minhas, captured by them in this botched-up police operation with a large turnout of cheering local villagers should warn the Indian state to streamline its strategy to combat Left Wing Extremism (LWE) — the generic and official name for the Naxal-Maoist insurgency.

Though some in the security establishment have felt that over the years the Maoist-Naxal threat has reduced considerably with the "Red Corridor"

shrinking gradually, the official statistics of India's ministry of home affairs do not convey the same improvement in the internal security operations to counter LWE. MHA figures reveal that only 46 districts are now seriously affected by LWE while 90 districts over 11 states are covered under the special security-related expenditure scheme of the government. The official MHA website also conveys that between 2004 and 2019, 8,197 civilians have been killed by the Naxals, mostly tribals, after brutal tortures as they were branded as "police informers". In addition, between 2018 and November 2020, 460 Naxals were eliminated whilst 161 security forces personnel lost their lives in the same period.

During the past 15 years or so, the deadly dimensions of Naxal-related violence have manifested many times, surprising our security forces dealing with the Naxal insurgency, primarily in states like Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Odisha, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar. It cannot be ever forgotten how in one of the largest Naxal attacks on security forces personnel, Maoists had killed 75 CRPF personnel in Dantewada district on April 6, 2010. Similarly, on May 25, 2013,

25 senior Congress leaders including former Union Minister Vidya Charan Shukla were massacred in Darbha Valley in Chhattisgarh. The Naxals have successfully snatched weapons from security personnel after killing them, continue employing high-intensity IEDs at will in various innovative ambushes and even managed to hijack a train! The list of Naxal successes is, unfortunately, rather exhaustive.

It will be prudent for India's security establishment to factor in the reality that the burgeoning Maoist-Naxal threat has a distinct external dimension with the wily Chinese supplying arms and ammunition to the Naxals through the "Red Corridor" via our North-East and the Nepal border. These insurgents derive their inspiration from the late Chinese Communist supremo, Mao Zedong, who had once declared that "revolutionary warfare is never confined within the bounds of military action because the purpose is to destroy an existing society and its institutions and replace them with a completely new structure". It is not surprising thus that the Naxal movement, which emerged from the cauldron of agrarian unrest in an unknown West Bengal village of Naxalbari has, over the years, acquired a separatist

and a grave violent orientation.

Though, unquestionably, governments at the Centre and states have brought in some improvements in the fight to counter LWE, yet the recurrence of deadly incidents, occurring off and on, should propel the Centre to conceive and implement a National Strategy. Basic factors, including shameful economic and social disparities that exist in our nation, may give rise to rural and urban unrest but remain largely unaddressed in most of the states. Some well-meaning people have argued that a major root cause of growing Naxalism has been the willful reluctance of the states and the Centre to not promulgate the Ninth and Fifth Schedules of the Constitution which enforces relevant land laws and which will benefit the tribals and poor inhabiting the forests. However, to merely attribute the spread of LWE to poverty and lack of development will be a rather simplistic formulation.

As the Centre and state governments reach out to the poor and hapless to alleviate their sufferings, Naxal leadership must be contacted to give up their armed struggles, embrace the amnesty announced by the governments and join the national mainstream. In the past, unfortunately, it has been experi-

enced that the LWE leadership has not only refused the administration's peace and rehabilitation efforts, but also deliberately targeted developmental activities of the government in the remote areas. Schools, hospitals, post offices and even the labour force engaged in some construction works have been violently attacked.

With alacrity, the Centre will have to re-energise its security strategies to combat the Naxals. Better training, modern light equipment and weaponry for the police and the central forces earmarked for these operations have to ensue. Above all, ground-level intelligence structure using locals needs to be re-invigorated. High-tech gadgetry including sophisticated communication and monitoring equipment, helicopters and drones need to be extensively fielded. The Indian Army must train police and paramilitary commanders in special operations and leadership skills at the combat levels. Finally, synergy between the Centre and states machinery to effectively combat the highly motivated Naxals is paramount.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, was founder of the Defence Intelligence Agency and deputy chief of the Integrated Defence Staff

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,803.68	0.53
Nifty 50	14,581.50	0.53
S&P 500*	4,160.59	0.87
Dollar (₹)	74.91	0.21
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.34	0.12
Euro (₹)	89.76	0.09
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,301▲159	0.003
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.62	0.06
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.126	-0.03
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.588	-0.048

* As of 8:30 PM IST

WPI inflation spikes to 7.39% in March

The wholesale price-based inflation shot up to over 8-year high of 7.39 per cent in March on rising crude oil and metal prices. The low base of March last year, when the data was computed with a low response rate due to the lockdown, contributed to the spike in inflation in March 2021. The WPI inflation was 4.17 per cent in February 2021 and 0.42 per cent in March 2020. This is the third month of uptick seen in Wholesale Price Index-based inflation.



UAE Exchange, Repco among applicants 8 apply for SFBs, universal banks

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 15

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday said that four applicants each have applied for 'on-tap' licences to start universal banks and small finance banks under the private sector. The four that have applied for universal bank licences are Abu Dhabi-based remittance house UAE Exchange, government-owned multi state co-operative named Repco Bank, Flipkart co-founder Sachin Bansal-led NBFC MPI called Chaitanya India Fin Credit Pvt Ltd and ex-Citi Banker Pankaj Vaish & others.

This is not the first time that UAE Exchange is attempting a banking foray. It had applied for a universal banking licence in June 2017 as well.

Applicants for small finance banks are VSoft Technologies Private Limited—a provider of banking and payment solutions to financial institutions—Calicut City Service Co-operative Bank Limited, Akhil Kumar Gupta and Dvara Kshetriya Gramin



Financial Services Private Limited.

Set up in 2002, Calicut City Service Co-operative Bank caters to customers in the city of Kozhikode in Kerala. In March 31, 2019, the cooperative bank had 1.48 lakh members. It has 24 branches across the city. Dvara Kshetriya Gramin Financial Services, incorporated in 2008, by Dvara Trust provides financial services in rural areas. Details about Akhil Kumar Gupta were not available.

The applications will now be evaluated by the standing external advisory committee, set up by the RBI last month, under former deputy governor Shyamala Gopinath.

In the last round, the RBI gave two universal banking licences in April 2014 to

IDFC First Bank and Bandhan Bank. It gave 10 SFB licences in 2018, including to Janalakshmi, Ujjivan, RGVN (North East), among others.

The RBI had issued guidelines for on-tap licensing of universal banks in the private sector on August 1, 2016 and of SFBs on December 5, 2019.

By the 2016 guidelines, entities seeking universal bank licences must be individuals/entities with at least 10 years senior-level experience in banking and finance, private companies or groups with at least 10 years of good track record. Groups or companies seeking licences must have assets of Rs 5,000 crore and their non-financial businesses don't account for 40 per cent of these assets.

CITIBANK TO EXIT CONSUMER BANKING BUSINESS IN INDIA

Mumbai, April 15: US banking major Citibank on Thursday announced it will exit the consumer banking business in India as part of global strategy. The business comprises credit cards, retail banking, home loans and wealth management.

The bank has 35 branches in the country and employs about 4,000 people in the consumer banking business.

On Thursday, the bank announced exiting from the consumer banking businesses in 13 countries, with its global CEO

Jane Fraser attributing the decision to an absence of scale to compete in these geographies.

Contours of the exit were not immediately known. Citi had entered India in 1902 and started the consumer banking business in 1985. —PTI

Farm jobs increase by 9 mn in FY21

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

Employment in agriculture went up by 9 million in March 2021, a year after the pandemic struck the nation. Rural India has seen a churn as people who lost non-farm jobs have gone for farm jobs, finds private think-tank CMIE.

As people lost jobs, they moved from one kind of job to another in hunt for a new occupation. Large numbers eventually migrated to agriculture. As a result, employment in agriculture at the last count, in March 2021, was higher by 8 per cent compared to year-ago numbers.

Over 6 million salaried jobs were lost in rural India in 2020-21 and most of these would have migrated to farming. Rural India also saw nearly 3 million business persons being rendered unemployed.

However, productivity of this additional employment is low. Agricultural output is estimated to have increased by 2.3 per cent in almost each of the four quarters of 2020-21. The 8 per cent increase in labour implies a sharp fall in labour productivity.

"We believe that this huge influx of labour into agriculture during 2020-21 is largely disguised unemployment. It hides the greater employment challenge in March 2021 than the 5.4 million net jobs lost at the end of March 2021," said Mahesh Vyas, CEO, CMIE.

Travel M&A begins: Flipkart to buy Cleartrip in distress sale

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

Marking the beginning of mergers & acquisitions in the pandemic-hit travel sector, Flipkart is acquiring online travel aggregator Cleartrip in a distress sale.

The e-commerce major on Thursday announced its decision to buy 100 per cent of Cleartrip's shareholding. The deal could be a mix of cash and equity and will see Cleartrip valued at \$40 million.

Cleartrip had raised \$75 million so far and was reportedly valued at \$300 million in 2016. Concur Technologies, DAG Ventures and Gund Investment are the key investors of



Cleartrip, which reported revenues of Rs 319 crore and loss of Rs 14 crore in FY20, according to Tofler.

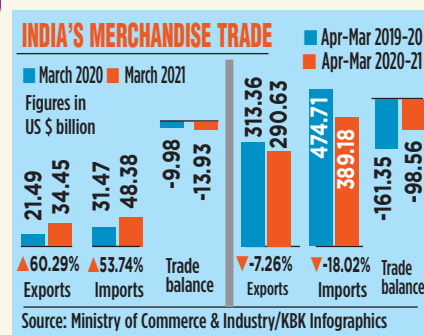
Cleartrip will continue to operate as a separate brand, retaining all employees while working closely with Flipkart to further develop technology solutions to make travel simple for customers.

Cleartrip, founded in 2006, has been competing with MakeMyTrip, Yatra,

Ebiz, and Booking.com. Most of the online travel aggregators have been suffering losses even before pandemic due to heavy competition and thin margins. The pandemic further hit the travel as well as hospitality industry badly. According to HVS Anarock, these industries will increasingly witness mergers and acquisition in 2021 owing to the financial stress.

"The Flipkart Group is committed to transforming customer experiences through digital commerce. This investment will help strengthen our wide range of offerings for customers," said Kalyan Krishnamurthy, CEO, Flipkart Group.

BUSINESS BRIEFS



WIPRO Q4 NET PROFIT UP 27.7%

New Delhi, April 15: Wipro on Thursday posted a 27.7 per cent jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,972 crore for the March 2021 quarter, and exuded confidence of sustaining strong growth momentum in the coming quarters. Wipro had posted a net profit (attributable to equity holders) of Rs 2,326.1 crore a year ago, as per Ind-AS.

Its revenue from operations rose by 3.4 per cent to Rs 16,245.4 crore from Rs 15,711 crore in the same period last fiscal. Wipro—which gets a bulk of its topline from IT services—said it expects revenues from that unit to be in the range of \$2,195 to \$2,238 million in the June 2021 quarter. This translates into a sequential growth of 2-4 per cent. —PTI

AMBANI SENDS OXYGEN TO MAHA



Mukesh Ambani

April 15: Mukesh Ambani is diverting oxygen produced at his refineries to help India battle a savage coronavirus outbreak that's paralysed the commercial capital. Reliance Industries Ltd, has started supplying oxygen from Jamnagar to Maharashtra at no cost, a company official said. Maharashtra will get 100 tonnes of the gas from Reliance, Eknath Shinde, urban development minister, said in a tweet. RIL is diverting some oxygen streams meant for its petcoke gasification units after making it suitable for medical use, the official said.

—Debjit Chakraborty/Bloomberg

GAMES

SHORT TAKES



K. Viswanathan

Anand's father passes away

Chennai: Five-time world chess champion Viswanathan Anand's father, K Viswanathan, died here on Thursday following brief illness. He was 92 and breathed his last at a city hospital, family sources said.

A former General Manager of the Southern Railway, Viswanathan is survived by two sons and a daughter. Anand's wife Aruna described him as a great support to the celebrated chess player.

"He was a great support to Anand. He witnessed all of Anand's world championship victories," Aruna said.

"A simple man, he made sure his son had the right values. He took great pride in his achievements," she added.

Anand started learning chess from age six from his mother, but learned the intricacies of the game in Manila where he lived with his parents from 1978 through the '80s while his father was contracted as a consultant by the Philippine National Railways

Aditi gets off to season's best start

Kapolei, US: Indian golfer Aditi Ashok carded three birdies in her first five holes to get off to her best start of the 2021 LPGA season with a 3-under 69 in the first round of the Lotte Championship. Aditi, playing her fifth event of the year, was under 70 for the first time this year and that should augur well for the 23-year-old from Bengaluru, who has made the cut in all four previous starts this year.

Teeing off from the tenth, she birdied the 10th, 13th and 14th and turned in 3-under. Aditi was four shots behind co-leader Britanny Altomare and Filipina Yuka Saso (64). —PTI

Olympics could be cancelled

Tokyo, April 15: A senior Japanese politician said cancelling the Tokyo Olympics over the coronavirus remains a possibility on Thursday, as a surge in cases renews concerns about the Games with less than 100 days to go.

Toshiro Nikai, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's number two, said the Olympics must be cancelled "without hesitation" if the virus situation is too severe.

A year after their historic postponement, the 2020 Olympics remain beset by pandemic problems, with parts of the torch relay forced behind closed doors and public support consistently low.

Organisers and Olympic officials insist the Games

will go ahead safely, but Nikai said Thursday that all options were on the table. "We need to make a decision depending on the situation at the time," he told the private TBS television network.

"We need to cancel it without hesitation if they're no longer possible," added Nikai, who is the LDP's secretary general.

Asked if he considered cancellation an option, Nikai said: "Yes of course. If infection spreads because of the Olympics, I don't know what the Olympics is for."

He added however that he sees the Games as an "opportunity", and it was "important for Japan to foster excitement with

● **Toshiro Nikai, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's number two, said the Olympics must be cancelled "without hesitation" if the virus situation is too severe.**

support from the public".

"We definitely want to make a success. In order to do so, there are various issues to solve. It's important to solve them one by one."

'MIGHT BE NO SPECTATORS'

The comments were quickly dismissed by an unnamed LDP official, who told the Jiji news

agency: "The Games will not be cancelled."

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said she had "been told that the comment meant it is an option".

"I take it as a message of strong encouragement that we contain the coronavirus by all means," she said.

Japan's vaccine minister meanwhile mooted the possibility of a total bar on spectators at the Games.

"We'll hold the Olympics in a form that is feasible," the *Asahi* newspaper quoted Taro Kono as saying.

"There might be no spectators."

Nikai's remarks come with fresh worries in Japan about what experts have called a fourth wave of infections.

Record numbers of cases have been reported in Osaka in recent days, and the government has been forced to authorise new restrictions just weeks after lifting a virus state of emergency.

Compounding the problem is the comparatively slow roll-out of the vaccine in Japan, which has so far only approved the Pfizer/BioNTech version.

Around 1.1 million people in the country of 126 million have received a first dose of vaccine so far, with the roll-out only expanding to the elderly this week. Despite the problems, Olympic organisers insist the Games can be held safely and have released virus rulebooks to allay public fears.

—AFP

SARITA FIGHTS BACK TO KEEP ASIAN TITLE

Almaty, April 15: Scripting a sensational comeback, an aggressive Sarita Mor reeled off nine straight points in the summit clash to retain her Asian Championship title in 59kg while Seema Bisla (50kg) and Pooja (76kg) settled for bronze medals here on Thursday.

Sarita, who won gold at the 2020 championship, lagged 1-7 after a botched up challenge but turned it around with a tremendous fight back against Mongolia's Shoovdor Baatarjav.

Attempting a move at 1-3 on the edge of the mat, Sarita lost her balance, allowing her rival to get one point. However, the Mongolian's coach challenged the call to get her ward four points.

From there on, there was no stopping Sarita. She effected a take-down, following it up with an expose and then one more take down on the edge of the circle to make it 7-7.

At that juncture, time running out fast, the Mongolian camp challenged the call and lost that to give an extra point to Sarita, who won 10-7.

—PTI

Foden fires Man City into semis

Dortmund (Germany), April 15: Manchester City set up a blockbuster Champions League semi-final against Paris Saint-Germain as Phil Foden's second-half winner sealed a 2-1 victory at Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday to send the Premier League leaders through 4-2 on aggregate.

England midfielder Jude Bellingham gave Dortmund an early lead, but a second-half Riyad Mahrez penalty and Foden's powerful strike moved City into the last four of Europe's top club competition for the second time.

Having also scored the 90th-minute winner to give City a 2-1 victory in last week's first leg in Manchester, England international Foden again broke Dortmund hearts.

"We are finally in the semi-finals and we're really happy," Guardiola told Sky with his team bidding to win four titles this season.

"The guys deserve it because what they have achieved this season is incredible."

Guardiola was full of praise for Mauricio Pochettino's PSG after they reached the last four by squeezing past holders Bayern Munich on away

THE RESULTS

Borussia Dortmund	1
(Bellingham 15)	
Manchester City	2
(Mahrez 55-pen, Foden 75)	
(Manchester City win 4-2 on aggregate)	
Liverpool	0
Real Madrid	0
(Real Madrid win 3-1 on aggregate)	

goals.

"We saw yesterday how strong they (PSG) are, Neymar is an excellent player and they have eliminated the world's best team," said Guardiola.

"It's time to celebrate and drink a lot of wine, then prepare to face Chelsea (in the FA Cup semi-finals on Saturday)."

City had bowed out at the quarter-final stage in each of the last three seasons, and had to come from behind at Signal Iduna Park as Dortmund shrugged off their indifferent Bundesliga form to take the lead on 15 minutes.

Four days after scoring his first Bundesliga goal, Bellingham also hit the back of the net for the first time in the Champions League.

—AFP



Manchester City's Phil Foden (right) celebrates after scoring against Borussia Dortmund in their Champions League quarterfinal second leg match in Dortmund, western Germany, on Wednesday.

—AFP

Hardik promoted in BCCI contracts

New Delhi, April 15: The star trio of India captain Virat Kohli, his white-ball deputy Rohit Sharma and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah retained their top bracket BCCI contracts, worth ₹7 crore each, while all-rounder Hardik Pandya earned a promotion despite an injury-plagued season.

A total of 28 cricketers were awarded central contracts in four categories on Thursday.

At this moment in Indian cricket, there are only three certainties across formats and the scenario hasn't changed with Kohli, Rohit and Bumrah being the elite of elites.

All-rounder Pandya is one of the notable promotions to Grade A, which is worth ₹5 crore, despite the fact that he endured a back injury which has prevented him from bowling for much of the last year. He was in Grade B last year.

"Hardik is very much in line to play Test matches in England and will be one of the most important players after our A+ cricketers when we play the T20 World Cup. So Hardik's promotion is about what he brings to the team. That's what the selectors have factored in," a senior BCCI official said on conditions of anonymity.

LIST OF BCCI'S ANNUAL CONTRACTS

GRADE A+ (₹7 crore): Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah.

GRADE A (₹5 crore): R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Shikhar Dhawan, K.L. Rahul, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, Rishabh Pant, Hardik Pandya.

GRADE B (₹3 crore): Wriddhiman Saha, Umesh Yadav, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Shardul Thakur, Mayank Agarwal.

GRADE C (₹1 crore): Kuldeep Yadav, Navdeep Saini, Deepak Chahar, Shubman Gill, Hanuma Vihari, Axar Patel, Shreyas Iyer, Washington Sundar, Yuzvendra Chahal, Mohammed Siraj.

Rookies Shubman Gill and Mohammed Siraj have got their maiden central contracts worth ₹1 crore in Grade C while Shardul Thakur has been elevated to group B. The trio has been rewarded for lion-hearted performances during India's historic Test triumph in Australia this year.

Among the demotions, pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar has dropped to Grade B, which is worth ₹3 crore, while Kedar Jadhav has been dropped for good.

—PTI

ALL-WIN DAY FOR INDIAN BOXERS AT YOUTH WORLDS

New Delhi, April 15: It was a second successive all-win day for Indian boxers at the youth world championships in Kielce, Poland with two from the women's contingent advancing to the quarterfinals after clinching dominating triumphs.

Poonam (57kg) and Vinka (60kg) won their bouts comprehensively to make the last-eight stage on Wednesday. While Poonam defeated Hungary's Beata Varga, Vinka sailed past Bosnia and Herzegovina's Tara Bohafjuk.

In the men's draw, Asian youth silver-medallist Ankit Narwal (64kg) advanced to the second round after a comprehensive 5-0 win over Slovakia's Miroslav Herceg.

In the 91kg category, Vishal Gupta notched up a comfortable unanimous victory over Bulgaria's Georgi Stoev to enter the round of 16. Also entering the pre-quarters was Vikas (52kg) after getting the better of Bulgaria's Yassen Radev 5-0.

—PTI

ORANGE	
Nitish Rana, KKR	137
Sanju Samson, RR	123
Manish Pandey, SRH	99
PURPLE	
Harshal Patel, RCB	7
Andre Russell, KKR	6
Avesh Khan, DC	5

Off the field



Chris Lynn of Mumbai Indians winds down by surfing in Chennai

Kohli rebuked for breaching code

Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Virat Kohli has been reprimanded for breaching the IPL's Code of Conduct after he was seen kicking a chair in frustration following his dismissal in the game against Sunrisers Hyderabad here. Kohli was not at his fluent best in the game on Wednesday which RCB won the by six runs.

"Kohli admitted to the Level 1 offence 2.2 of the IPL's Code of Conduct. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding," said the IPL in a statement.

Vengalil Narayan Kutty was the match referee in the game while Nitin Menon and Ulhas Gandhe were the on-field umpires.

Shams, back-up for Covid-stricken Axar

Delhi Capitals on Thursday dropped in young Mumbai left-arm spinner Shams Mulani as IPL's first short term Covid-19 replacement as he was brought in for Axar Patel, who is yet to recover from the dreaded virus and is still in a medical care facility. DC also has substituted injured captain Shreyas Iyer with Karnataka off-spinner Aniruddha Joshi. However, the media release issued by the IPL doesn't have any details about paceman Anrich Nortje's RT-PCR result, which is believed to be positive. "DC have brought in Shams Mulani as a short-term Covid-19 replacement for Axar Patel," the release stated.

Umps got no-ball right: SRH coach

Sunrisers Hyderabad coach Trevor Bayliss has said the umpires got it right by calling Harshal Patel's waist-high full toss a no-ball in the final over before RCB clinched the game by six runs in the IPL here. SRH skipper David Warner was not happy with that call. "He (Warner) was a little animated because we weren't playing very good cricket and we lost," Bayliss said referring to Warner. "I think the umpires got it right. There was a bit of conjecture over obviously the second high no-ball, but the first one was not directed at the batter's body, so that wasn't a warning," Bayliss said.

RAJASTUN DELHI

Miller, Morris shine as Royals turn tables on Capitals

Mumbai, April 15: David Miller's combative 43-ball 62 and Chris Morris' timely onslaught (36 not out) powered Rajasthan Royals to a dramatic three-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in their IPL match here on Thursday.

Opting to bowl, RR pacer Jaydev Unadkat took three wickets for 15 runs to restrict the Capitals to 147 for 8.

Miller then anchored the Royals' chase but it was Morris whose blitzkrieg took Royals home with two balls to spare. It is Royals' first win of the season.

The Royals were 17 for 3 in the fourth over and 42 for 5 at the halfway mark. They needed 58 from the last five overs and 12 from the final over.

Morris ended the run chase with a six off Tom Curran.

Royals' run chase was, however, in tatters as soon as it started. Chris Woakes removed openers Manan Vohra (9) and Jos Buttler (1) in a space of three balls in the third over.

In the next over, Kagiso Rabada dismissed the dangerous Royals captain Sanju Samson — the only centurion so far this season — with Shikhar Dhawan taking the catch at the slip.

Shivam Dube (2) perished while playing an unnecessary uppish shot at a length ball off Avesh Khan with Dhawan taking his 78th catch of the IPL.

The same pair worked in tandem two overs later with Dhawan taking his third catch of the day after Riyan Parag (2) had misused an Avesh Khan delivery.

The Royals were 52 for 5 at the halfway mark and by then the asking rate has gone up to nearly 10 an over.

But, Miller and Rahul Tewatia (19) kept the Royals in the hunt with a 48-run stand for the sixth wicket before Rabada came back to give the much-needed breakthrough for the Capitals.

Earlier, a brilliant three-wicket burst from pacer Jaydev Unadkat helped RR restrict DC to 147 for 8. Unadkat (3/15 off 4



David Miller of Rajasthan Royals plays a shot during the IPL match against Delhi Capitals at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Thursday.

overs) dismissed Prithvi Shaw, Shikhar Dhawan and Ajinkya Rahane to trigger DC's top-order collapse from which they never recovered fully. Captain Rishabh Pant's blistering 32-ball 51, studded with nine fours, was not enough as DC could only post a modest total after being put in to bat. DC made a disastrous start as they were two wickets down for 16 runs in the fourth over with Unadkat dismissing the opening duo of Shaw (2) and Dhawan (9) cheaply. Shaw was the first to go in the second over, caught at backward point before Dhawan perished while attempting a ramp shot with RR captain and wicketkeeper Sanju Samson taking a stunning diving catch to his right. Ajinkya Rahane's (8) underwhelming IPL form continued as he offered an easy caught and bowled chance to Unadkat with a slow ball that clocked just 110km per hour. DC were 36 for 3 at the end of power-play but the slump continued as Marcus Stonis (0), foxed by a Mustafizur Rahman (2/29) delivery, checked his shot at the last minute to offer a running catch to Jos Buttler. The run rate started increasing once captain Pant came to the crease but still DC were 57 for 4 at

SCORECARD

Delhi Capitals: Prithvi Shaw c Miller b Jaydev Unadkat 2, Shikhar Dhawan c Sanju Samson b Jaydev Unadkat 9, Ajinkya Rahane c & b Jaydev Unadkat 8, Rishabh Pant run out 51, Marcus Stonis c Jos Buttler b Mustafizur Rahman 0, Lalit Yadav c Rahul Tewatia b Chris Morris 20, Tom Curran b Mustafizur Rahman 21, Chris Woakes not out 15, Ravichandran Ashwin run out 7, Kagiso Rabada not out 9. Extras (W-5) 5. **Total (for 8 wickets in 20 overs) 147.** **FoW:** 5-1, 16-2, 36-3, 37-4, 88-5, 100-6, 128-7, 136-8. **Bowling:** Chetan Sakariya 4-0-33-0, Jaydev Unadkat 4-0-15-3, Chris Morris 3-0-27-1, Mustafizur Rahman 4-0-29-2, Riyan Parag 2-0-16-0, Rahul Tewatia 3-0-27-0.

Rajasthan Royals: Jos Buttler c Rishabh Pant b Chris Woakes 2, Manan Vohra c Kagiso Rabada b Chris Woakes 9, Sanju Samson c Shikhar Dhawan b Kagiso Rabada 4, Shivam Dube c Shikhar Dhawan b Avesh Khan 2, David Miller c Lalit Yadav b Avesh Khan 62, Riyan Parag c Shikhar Dhawan b Avesh Khan 2, Rahul Tewatia c Lalit Yadav b Kagiso Rabada 19, Chris Morris not out 36, Jaydev Unadkat not out 11. Extras (W-1, LB-2) 3. **Total (for 7 wickets in 19.4 overs) 150.** **FoW:** 13-1, 13-2, 17-3, 36-4, 42-5, 90/6, 104/7. **Bowling:** Chris Woakes 4-0-22-2, Avesh Khan 4-0-32-3, Kagiso Rabada 4-0-30-2, Ravichandran Ashwin 3-0-14-0, Tom Curran 3.4-0-35-0, Marcus Stonis 1-0-15-0.

the halfway mark. Once he had a full measure of the pitch, Pant opened up and hit four boundaries, three of which were consecutive, to take 20 runs from the 11th over bowled by Rahul Tewatia. Pant reached his fifty off 30 balls in the 12th over, with a four off Mustafizur but he was run out the next over with bowler Riyan Parag's throw crashing onto the stumps. — PTI

SIRAJ HEAPS PRAISES ON SHAHBAZ & RAJAT

Chennai, April 15: Royal Challengers Bangalore pacer Mohammad Siraj feels that spin bowling all-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed has justified his selection in the playing eleven, following a match-winning performance against Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL here.

Ahmed picked up three wickets in an over to stage a remarkable turnaround for RCB on Wednesday night as the team defended 149 for 8 for their second win in as many games.

Ahmed even came out to bat at number three ahead of Glenn Maxwell and AB de Villiers, a reflection Virat Kohli's faith in the ability of the left-hander.

"Both Shahbaz Ahmed and Rajat Patidar (who played the last game as Devdutt Padikkal was unavailable) have been brilliant in the practice games," Siraj said in the post-match press conference.

"Shahbaz, as an all-rounder, gives us that extra option with his left-arm spin. The wicket was slow and turning also. Shahbaz Ahmed fitted into it for this game and did the job for us," he added.

"We had overs left of Washington Sundar too. But Virat bhai thought with two right-handers at the crease, a left-arm spinner could be handy.

"He created a chance with Manish Pandey in his first over, and that's why he bowled another, and that changed the game for us," said Siraj. — PTI

POINTS TABLE						
Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
RCB	2	2	0	0	4	+0.175
MI	2	1	1	0	2	+0.225
PBKS	1	1	0	0	2	+0.200
DC	2	1	1	0	2	+0.195
RR	2	1	1	0	2	+0.052
KKR	2	1	1	0	2	+0.000
SRH	2	0	2	0	0	-0.400
CSK	1	0	1	0	0	-0.779

Dhoni & Co. look for winning ways

Mumbai, April 15: Chennai Super Kings would look for inspiration from skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni and a much-improved bowling effort when they take on a power-packed Punjab Kings in the IPL here on Friday.

The two sides experienced contrasting fortunes in their respective tournament opener.

While CSK lost by seven wickets against Delhi Capitals, Punjab Kings eked out a four-run win over Rajasthan Royals in a high-scoring thriller.

With the dew playing a crucial role at Wankhede, the side winning the toss would want to bowl first.

In their first match here, CSK posted a competitive 188 for seven, riding on fine contributions from Suresh Raina (54), Moeen Ali (36), Sam Curran (34), Ravindra Jadeja (26) and Ambati Rayudu (23).

Despite failures from the opening duo of Rituraj Gaikwad and Faf du Plessis besides skipper Dhoni, CSK managed to put up a decent total on the board.

But the Chennai outfit's bowling unit looked completely out of sorts and clueless against the DC opening duo of Shikhar Dhawan and Prithvi Shaw, who were ominous from the word go and stitched a 138-run stand to take the game away from CSK.

The likes of Deepak Chahar, Sam Curran, Shardul Thakur, Jadeja and Moeen Ali all went for big runs and looked rusty.

And come Friday, the onus would be on master tactician Dhoni to inspire his teammates to lift their performance and give Punjab a run for their money. But for that to happen, the CSK skipper himself needs to lead from the front after failing to score against DC.

Punjab Kings, on the other hand, had a narrow escape against RR the other despite posting a mammoth 221 for 6 on the board. Opening the batting, KL Rahul played a captain's knock of 91 off just 50 balls. He was ably

Live on TV

Chennai Super Kings vs Punjab Kings from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD1

HEAD to HEAD

Matches 23

CSK 14 PBKS 8

TIE 1

● Punjab Kings beat Chennai Super Kings in a tie over after match ended in a Super at Chennai in 2010.

FOR THE RECORD

● Lokesh Rahul who scored 4933 runs in 140 innings of 153 matches, needs 67 runs to become the 11th Indian and 70th batsman overall to score 5000 runs in Twenty-20 matches.

● Faf du Plessis who scored 5930 runs in 224 innings of 240 matches, needs 70 runs to become the sixth South African and 45th batsman overall to score 6000 runs in Twenty-20 matches.

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

● Chennai Super Kings beat Punjab Kings by 10 wickets at Dubai.

● Chennai Super Kings defeated Punjab Kings by 9 wickets at Abu Dhabi.

STATS: S. PERVEZ KAISER

supported by big-hitting Chris Gayle (40 off 28) and Deepak Hooda (64 off 28).

For Punjab Kings and Rahul, batting is not at all area of concern as they showed with their performance in the opener, but just like CSK, the bowling unit remains a major worry. RR skipper Sanju Samson almost single-handedly took the game away from Punjab Kings with his whirlwind 63-ball 119-run knock in their opener, but fell short just by four runs in the end.

Young Arshdeep Singh (3/35) eventually emerged as Punjab's saviour.

Besides Arshdeep, veteran Mohammad Shami (2/33) too had a decent outing with the ball but the performance of Jhye Richardson (1/55) and Riley Meredith (1/49) should be a concern for Punjab. — PTI



Chennai Super Kings captain M. S. Dhoni (left) and Suresh Raina chat during a training session.

IPL '21 is bang on track with a hugely local flavour



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

'Expect the unexpected' is an epigram commonly used when it comes to describing the vagaries in the game of cricket. As the Indian Premier League (IPL) keeps its trickle on sluggish pitches like the ones seen in Chennai, the results are far from what a

fan would expect. Who, for that matter, would have imagined the kind of turnaround wins by holders Mumbai Indians (MI) and pretenders Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) in their last matches?

Neither would Punjab Kings (PBKS) fans have

wanted their skipper Lokesh Rahul to ask Arshdeep Singh to bowl the last, crucial over with other experienced bowlers around. The 22-year old Sikh kept the faith his skipper had in him and stopped a rampaging Sanju Samson from crossing the line for Rajasthan Royals (RR) in a close game which Punjab won by 4 runs.

The contrasting stories that the IPL has had so far has brought into the lime-light a new lot of heroes — the uncapped players. Some of whom are not

even on the fringe of national selection. When a Harshal Patel and Shahbaz Ahmed turned around two matches for RCB and were featured prominently in the news the next day, the search engines must have been on overdrive. Ditto with Rahul Tripathi, Avesh Khan, Chetan Sakariya who played pivotal roles for their teams in the past week of the IPL.

As predicted in my last column, the 2021 edition IPL was going to be one where newer, local talent would be wanting to make

their mark, which is exactly what has happened in the tournament so far. The uncapped players, that have shown tremendous resilience, particularly in challenging circumstances, have reposed the faith that IPL talent scouts had in them to play the most prized Twenty20 tournament in the world. Players, considered also rans and the bits-and-pieces type (with due apologies to them) are now standing up and being counted.

With six of the eight teams being led by Indians

(Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad being the exceptions) the IPL now has a more domestic flavour. Finally, after 13 years, team planners have realised that the value of going local is reaping more rewards than punting on international stars. And, it does not disturb the bank balance. To watch a Sanju Samson lead RR with two international captains, Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes (now injured) in the team is a delight. Likewise when Rishab Pant goes out for the toss for Delhi Capitals instead of the experienced

Australian Steve Smith or Ajinkya Rahane.

IPL 2021 is bang on track with a hugely local flavour which warms the cockles of ones heart. With relatively unknown (and uncapped players) making headlines, local is now getting 'hyper-local' which is a great sign for Indian cricket. This, coupled with the uncertainties of the game, promises a much more exciting tournament than previous editions. Fans are now eagerly watching and waiting for more 'local' twists in the IPL tale.