



CAREY 'LUCKY' TO BE PART OF PROMISING YOUNG WOMAN

Actress Carey Mulligan, who plays the protagonist Cassie Thomas in *Promising Young Woman*, says she is fortunate to have landed the Oscar-nominated role. "I felt very lucky to work on this as an actor. This is the kind of story I wish had come out when I was 18," said Mulligan.

LOPEZ, RODRIGUEZ CALL IT QUITS

Singer Jennifer Lopez and baseball star Alex Rodriguez have officially ended their relationship. "We have realized we are better as friends and look forward to remaining so. We will continue to work together and support each other on our shared businesses and projects," they jointly said in a statement.



FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com accuracy • reliability • trust FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES
Today, you will crave total freedom in whatever you are doing, says Ganesh. And sheer entertainment is on the cards for teenyboppers, like mall-hopping or going for a film. The kids will demand a Jumbo Berry ice cone. All in all, it will be a family day for you.

TAURUS
You will wake up feeling determined and decisive today, says Ganesh. Be careful as your rigid views may make you seem stubborn. You may not be willing to come half way during a conflict and will make a habit of articulating your viewpoint.

GEMINI
The day promises sensitivity and compassion for you, predicts Ganesh. You may plan a trip with your family members. You may also invest your money in various financial companies, as securing the future of your family will be foremost on your mind.

CANCER
It is high time that you dedicated yourself to your work. If you are looking to try new things, today may not be a very good day to do so. Stick to doing things the way you have been doing them so far, advises Ganesh.

LEO
You might be the man of the house, but to make that house a home, you need a family. So keep that in mind, says Ganesh, and remember that your family is the foundation of your success. Make every possible effort to make your family's roots stronger.

VIRGO
Today might just bring those emotions to the fore that have been lying in the closet of your heart since long. You will even develop a bonding - a sentimental attachment - with your belongings. But, if and when you don't find the surroundings to your liking, you shall be like a fish out of the water.

LIBRA
Unleash the artist in you today! Don't be surprised if you happen to discover a love for the fine arts. The stars bestow on you refined aesthetic sense. As a result, your penchant for interior decoration is sure to get a boost.

SCORPIO
Family matters have been screaming for long for your attention now. Your estranged spouse may deal the final blow to sever all ties, foretells Ganesh. But keep calm, and hold that tongue, advises Ganesh. Your priority should be to secure your family's peace.

SAGITTARIUS
Expect a call to late-night revelry and a chance to binge. But you don't seem to be in the mood to let your hair loose and party, says Ganesh. However tempting it may be, your serious side will take over and you shall deny the offer. No wonder they like that sensible head on your shoulders.

CAPRICORN
You will start the day with verve and vigour, and will appear a completely different person at work. There will be a discernible change in your way of working, especially in terms of the level of energy and concentration you will put in.

AQUARIUS
A productive day, as you will receive unrestrained support from your bosses and colleagues. Your creativity will reach its zenith and the resulting work will augment your reputation. The day will seem complete when you spend quality time with your family in the evening, says Ganesh.

PISCES
Happiness shared is double the joy; sorrows shared are half the burden. Your family is the foundation of your success, and it is to them you will turn in times of failure as well. With their support, getting back to the top of the game will take no time, says Ganesh.

Fatima constantly doubts herself

New Delhi: Fatima Sana Shaikh became popular even before the audience knew her name. Way back in 1997, she endeared herself to viewers playing Kamal Hassan and Tabu's daughter in *Chachi 420*. Years later, she scored her first blockbuster with the 2016 Aamir Khan-starrer *Dangal*. She has lately been seen in films such as *Ludo* and *Suraj Pe Mangal Bhari*, and is now gearing up for her next film, the OTT anthology *Ajeeb Daastaans*. The actress says she constantly doubts herself, adding that she wants to better herself. "Every day you go through your own journey of asking questions to yourself. There are your own challenges and weaknesses. You have to overpower them and overcome. You would cross those and then you have more challenges and insecurities. That is a constant journey. Every day, there is a new mindset," said Fatima. *Ajeeb Daastaans* brings together four stories that analyse the complexity of human emotions including jealousy, entitlement, prejudices and toxicity, and their after-effects.



Sonam for preservation of timeless classics

Mumbai: Actress Sonam Kapoor Ahuja uploaded a video Thursday where she expressed her support to the Film Heritage Foundation, and the work the organisation has been doing to preserve timeless classics.

In the Instagram caption, she wrote: "Being a second generation actor in a family that celebrates cinema, I've grown up watching my peers and relatives give their all to each film they've been in. I would want the

future generation to not just be able to see their passion, but also witness what it is like to pour their heart out in films. My decision to associate with Film Heritage Foundation is a testament to how strongly I feel about preserving our heritage for the future to see, appreciate and love."

Sonam will soon be seen in the film *Blind*. For the role, she has been learning the body language of the visually impaired.



'Edilsy Vargas perfect as lead in 99 songs'

Mumbai: Latina actress Edilsy Vargas will be seen in AR Rahman's *99 Songs*. He says close to 600 auditions took place for the role of Sophie, before Edilsy bagged it. She is the first Latina to play the lead in a multilingual Indian film.

"Out of the 600 odd auditions, Edilsy looked just like we had imagined Sophie to be in *99 Songs*. She displayed the talent needed to bring all the shades of *99 Songs* to life," Rahman says. She will be seen alongside actor Ehan Bhat who plays the role of Jay, a musician. Sophie represents the world of art while Jay will be showcasing the world of music. Their bond is put to test in the film.

99 Songs will be released in Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu 16 April 2021. Presented by Jio Studios, the film is produced by AR Rahman's production company YM Movies and co-produced by Ideal Entertainment.



Finding soulmates on video calls to become norm soon

PANDEMIC HAS CHANGED THE WAY PEOPLE SEARCH FOR A LIFE PARTNER, SAYS ROHAN MATHUR, BUSINESS HEAD OF A POPULAR MATRIMONY PLATFORM

Virtual ways to find a life partner is now a reality, or better yet, the new normal, suggests a new survey. With the second wave of Covid-19 hitting India, a popular matrimony platform, rolled out a survey to understand how this impacts the search for a life partner. Results show that half of the respondents feel that virtual meetings will become the norm very soon; completely replacing physical meetings during one's search for a life partner. Rohan Mathur, the business head of the company said, "Pandemic has changed the way people search for a life partner. We have witnessed the increasing affinity among our

users towards virtual ways of connecting with prospective matches. While we saw a spike in usage of voice and video-calling on our platform as soon as Covid hit, the trend has continued even after relaxations in government restrictions and a drop in cases." As many as 38 per cent of the respondents are comfortable taking a decision based on virtual meetings alone! While digital has its own ease, it has not completely banished the importance of in-person meetings. Forty four per cent respondents are happy to connect over video calls to know each other but meeting in-person is still required for the final decision. It is interesting to see the new-



found appreciation for small weddings with limited guest lists. Even after the vaccine rollout, 55 per cent

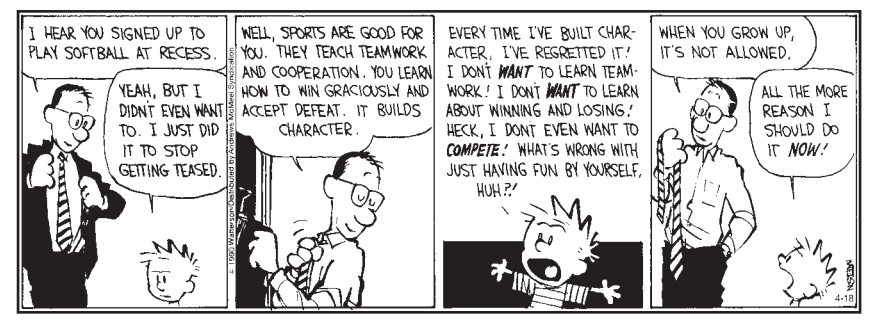
of respondents have expressed their preference for smaller weddings. The second wave of Covid-19 could be one of the reasons for the same. Twenty seven per cent respondents said they would readily have a regular wedding now, albeit with safety precautions. That said, safety and sanitisation have become the top priority in Indian weddings since the pandemic hit. Over 50 per cent respondents chose a Covid-safe wedding over the perfect outfits, pictures and food. Sixty nine per cent respondents said they are now comfortable attending a pandemic wedding with the requisite precautions. AGENCIES



PEANUTS



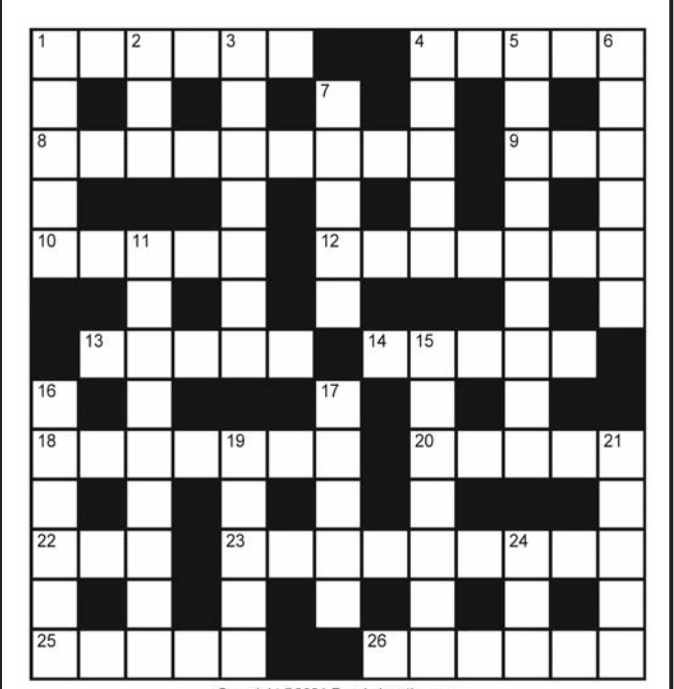
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



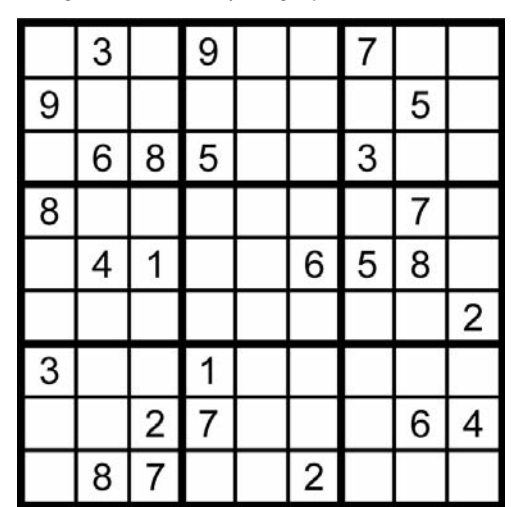
FUN post CROSSWORD



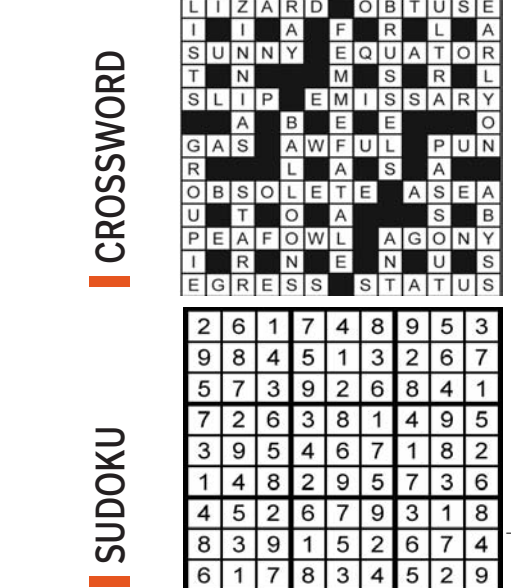
- Across
- 1 Salad ingredient
 - 4 Fancy tie
 - 8 Kitchen appliance
 - 9 Maid's cloth
 - 10 Earthy colour
 - 12 Part of "surf 'n' turf"
 - 13 Hesitate
 - 14 Tropical lizard
 - 18 Devilfish
 - 20 Cruel sorts
 - 22 Paltry amount
 - 23 Find fault
 - 25 Sheets and stuff
 - 26 Immediately! (2,4)
 - 5 Estate functionary
 - 6 Big cats
 - 7 Kind of bird?
 - 11 Binge eating result, maybe
 - 15 Popinjay
 - 16 Tidbit
 - 17 Port of ancient Rome
 - 19 Pie choice
 - 21 Stockholm native
 - 24 Roadhouse

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS

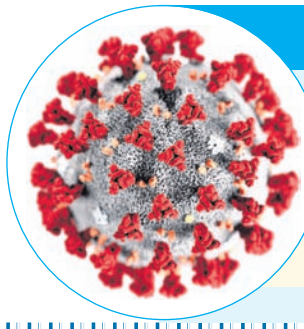


CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



EVICION DRIVE

Civic authorities remove illegal shops from Unit-IV area of Bhubaneswar, Thursday



COVID-19 TRACKER

Table with 4 columns: World, India, Odisha, and sub-columns for Infected, Recovered, and Dead.

Govt offices to function at 50% staff

OFFICES OF THE STATE GOVT'S EMERGENCY SERVICES WILL CONTINUE TO WORK WITH FULL STRENGTH

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 15: In view of the sudden upsurge of Covid cases, the state government Thursday asked all of its offices to function with 50 per cent strength of employees with effect from April 19.

In an order, the General Administration and Public Grievance department said, "All departments of the government shall function with 50 per cent strength of employees (except officers of the rank of deputy secretary and above who shall attend office daily) with effect from 19th April, 2021 onwards."

The departments were asked to make appropriate arrangement to ensure that the office work does not suffer.

The departments and heads of offices located in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack have been given the liberty to decide which employee will attend office. Accordingly, the head of offices have been asked to prepare roster of duty quickly.

However, Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) and Odisha State Disaster Management



Authority (OSDMA) offices, police, fire services, health services, municipal services etc will continue to function in full strength.

The departments have further been asked to take all precautionary measures to prevent the spread of Covid infection among the employees. In case of detection of any case, the concerned office will follow the protocol issued by the government.

The officers and staffers who have been provided with VPN can work from home, when not as-

NORMS BACK IN ACTION

The heads of offices located in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack have been given the liberty to decide which employee will attend office

The departments have been asked to take all precautionary measures to prevent the spread of Covid infection among the employees

The officers and staffers who have been provided with VPN can work from home, when not assigned roster duty

COLLECTORS CAN CALL ANY GOVT STAFF FOR COVID DUTY

BHUBANESWAR: Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra Thursday interacted with the Collectors, Superintendents of Police (SPs), Chief District Medical Officers (CDMOs) and other top officials and briefed them about the latest government decisions on night curfews and weekend shutdowns.

The official asked the Collectors to rope in any government employee irrespective of his/her department for Covid-19 related duty.

"The Chief Secretary made it clear that the district administration should now singularly focus on containment of the spread of the infection. Collector can engage any employee from any department in Covid duty as per the Disaster Management Act. All government employees will be under complete

signed roster duty. Such officials must be available to attend any office work of urgent nature, at short

control of Collectors of the respective districts," a statement from the office of Chief Secretary said.

The Chief Secretary has also asked the Collectors to ensure constitution of rapid response teams which can monitor self isolations, ensure testing and contact tracing. The Collectors have also been asked to monitor the health institutions and ensure availability of oxygen and other essential facilities at Covid Care Centres.

The district administrations have been asked to enforce the Covid norms, monitor violation of Covid safety protocols and act accordingly. Mahapatra also asked the district Collectors to involve the Panchayat Raj Institutions and village communities in containment of the virus in their areas.

notice and be available on telephone at all times, the government said in the order.

State reports 2,989 fresh nCoV cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, April 15: Odisha's Covid-19 caseload jumped to 3,58,342 Thursday after 2,989 people tested positive, the biggest single-day spike this year, while two more fatalities pushed the death toll to 1,935, a Health department official

(438), Kalahandi (260), Cuttack (208), Nuapada (151), Sambalpur (148), Bargarh (126), Puri (112) and Bolangir (110).

The deaths were reported from Kalahandi and Keonjhar districts. A total of 53 other Covid-19 patients have died due to comorbidities.



The state has tested over 94.96 lakh samples, including 34,571 Wednesday and the positivity rate stands at 3.77%

said. Of the new infections detected in all the 30 districts, 1,733 were reported from quarantine centres and the remaining are local-contact cases.

Sundargarh district logged 631 new cases, followed by Khurda

The state now has 14,621 active cases, while 3,58,342 patients has thus far recovered from the disease.

It has tested over 94.96 lakh samples, including 34,571 Wednesday and the positivity rate stands at 3.77 per cent.

VIRUS SCARE

STUDENTS' STIR FOR ONLINE EXAMS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 15: The students of BJB Autonomous College, College of Basic Science & Humanities and Centre for Post Graduate Studies, OUAT Thursday staged protests at their respective educational institutions demanding conduct of online exams in the wake of galloping Covid-19 cases in the state.

The students of BJB Autonomous College demonstrated in front of main entrance of the institution and also blocked the traffic as part of their protest.

The students, who displayed placards and raised slogans, urged the authorities not to expose them to the highly infectious virus.

Ajit Behera, an agitating BJB student, said that recently multiple cases were reported from the college which puts the students at a higher risk. Despite this, the college authorities are not taking any step and decided to conduct the semes-



BJB College students hold a demonstration seeking online exams, Thursday

ter exams from April 19.

He said that many students hailing from bordering areas of Odisha with Chhattisgarh will not be able to attend the exams due to curfew imposed in those areas. "So, holding exams online will be the only option in this situation. Biju Patnaik Institute of Technology, Rourkela

will conduct semester exams online," he added.

After protesting for a few hours, the students held a meeting with the Principal who assured them of taking a decision on exams in a few days after which they called off their protest.

Similarly, the students of College

of Basic Science and Humanities and Centre for Post Graduate Studies, OUAT also protested on the OUAT premises demanding online exam.

Nitesh Kamal, one of the agitating students, alleged that despite requests to disinfect campus no step has been taken by the BMC or the university authorities. Recently, five cases of Covid were reported from OUAT. "We will continue to protest until our demands are met," Kamal said.

Notably, five cases were reported from OAUT recently.

Similarly, the Rajdhani College students also staged a protest demanding online examinations.

In a related development, the students of Ravenshaw University in Cuttack staged a sit-in in front of the Vice-Chancellor's office seeking examinations through online mode. The students urged the VC to refrain from holding offline exams in the wake of the surge in Covid-19 cases.



Students' agitation at OUAT



Demonstration at Rajdhani College

OP PHOTOS

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Include Krushnaprasad under Bharatmala plan: Pradhan

BHUBANESWAR: Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has urged Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari to include Krushnaprasad block of Puri district under Bharatmala project. Pradhan has written to Gadkari and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik after receiving a petition from a Class V student, Master Rishap Pradhan, to reconsider inclusion of east coast of Chilika lake via Krushnaprasad block to be part of Bharatmala project. Pradhan also requested the government to consider construction of a bridge from Satapada to Jahnikuda of Krushnaprasad block to ensure that isolated areas are linked to the mainstream and access to basic facilities. He requested Gadkari and the CM to look into the matter.

SAIL hospital turns Covid care unit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: State-owned steel maker SAIL Thursday said its super speciality hospital at Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) has been approved as a Covid Care hospital.

The step has been taken in the wake of rising cases in the region, Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) said in a statement.

"Inspired by the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and under the guidance of Dharmendra Pradhan,

Minister of Steel, SAIL's super speciality hospital at Rourkela, Odisha, is approved to be used as Covid Care Hospital (CCH)," the company said.

The local district authority had also sent a request for utilising the ICU facilities of the hospital for treatment of Covid-19 patients. The 60 bedded ICU facility of SAIL-RSP will be used for Covid-19 treatment, it said. This hospital will further augment the treatment facilities for Covid patients in the state.

Odisha among top 6 in pangolin smuggling

THE WILDLIFE CRIME WATCHDOG CLAIMED THAT THE MAXIMUM CASES OF PANGOLIN CRIMES WERE REPORTED FROM THE NORTH EASTERN STATE OF ASSAM WHICH SAW 21 SUCH CRIMES BETWEEN 2015 AND 2020

MANISH KUMAR, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 15: Rampant smuggling of pangolins seems to be a cause of concern as Odisha figures among top six states in such cases, a reply from Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) says.

The response from the WCCB, a wing of Union Environment and Forest department, came to the fore against queries posed by this reporter through Right to Information (RTI). The wildlife crime watchdog claimed that the maximum cases of pangolin crimes were reported from the north eastern state of Assam which saw 21 such crimes between 2015 and 2020.

Other states reporting substantial number of such cases include Madhya Pradesh (18), Maharashtra (17), Sikkim (17) and Uttarakhand (10). Odisha and Mizoram recorded eight cases of pangolin smuggling each during the period.

Experts, however, claimed that the scale of pangolin smuggling is much higher than the government figures. Some claimed that pangolin smuggling is quite rampant in the state and the wildlife department fails to curb the menace.

"Elephant ivory and pangolins are some of the most sought after smuggled items from Odisha. Live pan-



5-yr data on smuggling of scaled mammal

Table with 2 columns: STATES and CASES OF SMUGGLING. Lists Assam (21), Madhya Pradesh (18), Maharashtra (17), Sikkim (17), Uttarakhand (10), Odisha (8).

"During my investigation, I found links of pangolin smuggling to West Bengal and other states. They (smugglers) are highly organised in executing the trade and use cyberspace to do their business with least personal meeting unless required," she said.

Interestingly, neither the state nor the Centre has any clue about the pangolin population. Due to the nocturnal nature of the scaled animal, not much information is available on their overall behaviour. Acting Principal Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Shashi Paul said that the state like other Indian states does not estimate the population of this endangered species.

He, however, said that the state is working towards conducting more research on the animal under the captive breeding programme. "We are also taking all possible steps to check the smuggling. We often conduct raids on tip-offs and nab persons involved in such cases with the involvement of our department and Special Task Force (STF)," he said.

According to experts, body parts of pangolins find a special place in the traditional medicine systems of China and other South East Asian countries. The species was categorised as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

golins as well as Keratin scales of the mammals are often seized during raids. The smuggling rackets are flourishing due to the apathy of the wildlife department," Biswajit Mohanty, a wildlife expert from the state said. Sasmita Lenka, Deputy Conservator of Forest (DCF), who personally had investigated a number of such cases as the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Athagarh told Orissa POST that there are links of these smugglers with other states and even countries.

Union Bank of India advertisement containing a Demand Notice and a table with columns: Branch/Name & Address of Borrowers/Guarantors, Nature/Limit, Date of Demand Notice/Outstanding, and Details of Properties Mortgaged.

of the day quote

The farmer faces indifference and neglect from the government, from the mandis of the state to the borders of Delhi where they are protesting for legitimate demands. The government has turned a blind eye and is pretending that farmers don't even exist



BHUPINDER SINGH HOODA | SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER

People are facing untimely deaths. The dead bodies are queueing up in state crematoriums for last rites



AKHILESH YADAV | SAMAJWADI PARTY SUPREMO

Millions of Punjabi's who live and work abroad have made better lives for themselves because those countries have endeavoured to create relatively classless societies where merit coupled with hard work and not the colour of your skin or religion or ethnicity is the determining factor that defines whether you succeed or fail



MANISH TEWARI | CONGRESS LEADER

SHORT TAKES

NIA arrests LeT recruiter

Srinagar: A school teacher, who was a recruiter for proscribed Pakistan-based terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), was arrested from his residence in north Kashmir Thursday, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) said. Altaf Ahmad Rather, a resident of Jammu and Kashmir's Bandipora district, was wanted in a case registered in West Bengal last year following the arrest of a woman, Tania Parveen, for her association with the terror group, a spokesman of the NIA said.

JD(U) and RJD shut offices

Patna: Considering the rapid increase in Coronavirus cases in Bihar as in other parts of the country, major political parties in Bihar including the ruling JD(U) and main opposition RJD have closed their party offices. While JD(U) shut its state headquarters here from Thursday till April 20, the RJD locked its office from April 15 till further orders seeing the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases.

Oxygen cylinder shortage in hosps

Patna: The mounting number of Covid cases has resulted in a shortage of oxygen supplies at several hospitals in Patna. The city's major facilities including Patna Medical College and Hospitals (PMCH), Nalanda Medical College and Hospital (NMCH) and AIIMS are full with Covid patients as a result the smaller hospitals and nursing homes are treating the non-Covid patients. But they have been facing the challenges in obtaining the oxygen cylinders from the companies.

4 of family found burnt to death

Visakhapatnam(AP): Four members of a family were found charred to death under mysterious circumstances at Madhurawada here in the wee hours of Thursday. After inspecting the scene of offence this afternoon, Visakhapatnam city Commissioner of Police Manish Kumar Sinha told reporters that they were investigating whether the deaths were accidental, suicidal or homicidal.



All private hospitals with more than 50 beds should set up an oxygen generation plant
RAJESH TOPE | MAHARASHTRA HEALTH MINISTER

INDIA SIMPLIFIES PROCESS FOR RE-ISSUE OF OCI CARDS

In a decision which is expected to significantly ease the process for re-issue of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards, the Central government has simplified the process. Presently, the OCI card is required to be re-issued each time a new passport is issued up to 20 years of age and once after completing 50 years of age, in view of biological changes in the face of the applicant



Centre asks states to ensure availability of essential supplies



AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 15: Amid concerns over availability of essential items in view of rising COVID-19 cases, the Centre Thursday directed state governments to take steps to stop panic buying by people and ensure there is no hike in prices of key supplies.

In a letter written to state governments, Additional Secretary in Union Consumer Affairs Ministry Nidhi Khare said due to sudden spike in COVID-19 cases, concerns have been raised about "availability of essential commodities to the common man at fair prices."

To maintain smooth supplies, the states have been asked to keep operations of grocery stores/warehouses and chemist shops outside the restrictions under Section 144. "It should also be ensured that the prices of all essential supplies are not increased and they are at fair prices, unless necessitated by cost enhancement due to raw material costs and exchange rates fluctuations," she said.

States have been asked to undertake awareness activity and sensitise public at large to address their concerns so as to "mitigate panic buying" of essential supplies, she added. That apart, states have been asked to set up joint teams of food and civil supplies, legal metrology, food safety, health and policy at state/district level for effective surveillance and enforcement in order to avoid demand-supply mismatch, hoarding and exorbitant pricing of essential supplies.

States have also been directed to set up helplines for consumers

'Proclaim Covid natural calamity'

As Maharashtra bears the brunt of the second wave of Covid-19 sweeping India, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to declare the pandemic a "natural calamity". Penning two separate letters addressed to the PM, Thackeray said that this would enable relief funds to be extended by the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for the pandemic victims. "In view of the Covid-19 pandemic situation in the state, a mini-lockdown is a necessity. Covid-19 pandemic may be notified as a natural calamity for the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). Accordingly, the state may be allowed to pay Gratuitous Relief of Rs 100 per adult per day and Rs 60 per child per day during the period of lockdown to all the Antodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Priority House Hold (PHH) family members whose names are included in the AAY and PHH ration cards," Thackeray said.

to enable them to register complaints for redressal by the public authorities on issue of maintaining essential supplies. The states have been asked to review the situation and take appropriate action based on exigencies.

India added a record over 2 lakh new COVID-19 infections in a day pushing the total tally of cases to 1,40,74,564, while the active cases surpassed the 14-lakh mark, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated Thursday.

India concerned over US troops' forthcoming exit from Afghan

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, April 15: India is concerned about the vacuum that will be created after withdrawal of the US and NATO troops from war-torn Afghanistan, Chief of Defence Staff, General Bipin Rawat said Thursday.

He said that the main concern should not create "space for other disruptors" and therefore, see violence continue in Afghanistan.

India wants to see peace and tranquility returning to the region, he added.

"We would be very happy to provide whatever support we can in the development of Afghanistan and making sure peace returns to that nation. People have got tired and are looking at peace," General Rawat said speaking in a virtual discussion at the ongoing Raisina Dialogue 2021. Asked whether it was Iran and Pakistan that could exploit the situation, the Chief of Defence Staff said there are many nations that would like to step into Afghanistan.



"Many people are looking at the opportunity to exploit the vacuum that is being created. Afghanistan is a nation which is rich in resources," he said. Noting there are nations "that tend to exploit resources for their own benefit without the benefit going to the community of that nation", he said: "The international community must step in to ensure Afghanistan is for the Afghans."

troops from the "forever war" in Afghanistan. His plan is to pull out all US forces -- numbering 2,500 now -- by this September 11, the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The UN, together with Turkey, and Qatar, announced Tuesday that a high-level conference aimed at ending decades of conflict in Afghanistan will go ahead beginning April 24. There would be representatives from both the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Weekend curfew in Delhi till April 30

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 15: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal 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 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. In just a matter of weeks, Delhi has become the worst-hit city in the country in the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, a situation that some doctors are describing as an "absolute rampage". Delhi recorded 16,699 fresh cases of COVID-19 Thursday, and 112 fatalities from the infection -- a frightening positivity rate of 20.22 per cent, the highest ever since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, according to data shared by the health department.



Assamese girls performing Bihu dance on the occasion of Rongali Bihu festival in Guwahati

UNI PHOTO

'50 people can offer namaz at Nizamuddin Markaz'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: The Delhi High Court Thursday allowed 50 people to offer namaz five times a day at Nizamuddin Markaz during Ramzan, saying there is no direction in the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) notification to close down places of worship.

The court also noted that there was "no clear stand" of the central government as to whether religious congregations or gatherings were permitted in other places of worship. Justice Mukta Gupta directed that namaz is to be offered on "first floor above the basement" of the mosque, making clear that it has to be "strictly in accordance" with the

DDMA's April 10 notification and other standard operating protocols.

"Considering the fact that religious places/places of worship are not closed by the DDMA notification, this court finds that the petitioner (Delhi Waqf Board) has made out a prima facie case for permitting devotees to offer namaz at Masjid Bangley Wali," the court said. It directed the Station House Officer of Nizamuddin police station to permit entry of 50 people five times a day to offer namaz only on the first floor of the Masjid Bangley Wali.

"Considering the fact that devotees require to perform namaz five times a day during the holy month of Ramzan and at the same

time care has to be taken that COVID-19, which is increasing exponentially in Delhi, does not spread and does not affect the health of the public at large and those who will visit the mosque to offer namaz, the SHO is directed to permit 50 persons five times a day to offer namaz on the first floor of the masjid," the court said, adding that social distance has to be maintained.

The court declined to increase the number of people or allow use of other floors of the mosque for offering prayers as sought by senior advocate Ramesh Gupta on behalf of the Delhi Waqf Board, saying "day-by-day situation is getting worse in Delhi". "Please wake up to the grim situation in Delhi," the court said.

ASI monuments closed for visitors till May 15

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: All centrally protected monuments, museums and sites under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have been closed with immediate effect till May 15 due to the surge in coronavirus cases in the country, the Union culture ministry said Thursday. An order to this effect was issued by the ASI and it was tweeted by Culture Minister Prahlad Patel this evening.



and till May 15 or until further orders," the ASI said. These include 3,693 monuments and 50 museums.

In live monuments like Puri Jagannath Temple and Somnath Temple, daily 'puja' will be conducted but no public gathering will be allowed, said Nitin

Tripathi, the ministry's media advisor: Last year, too, all monuments and sites maintained by the ASI were closed due to the coronavirus pandemic on March 17. They reopened in July with strict restrictions like mandatory wearing of masks, cap on the number of visitors and social distancing.

The curbs were relaxed later in the year. India's daily COVID-19 cases surged to a record high of 2,00,739 on Thursday, taking the country's cumulative tally to 1,40,74,564, according to Union health ministry data. The death toll climbed to 1,73,123 with 1,038 new fatalities, the highest since October 3, the data stated.

Govt begins mapping of states with greater need of oxygen

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, April 15: Amid reports of shortage of medical oxygen from various parts of the country, the Centre has clarified that the present availability of "oxygen is sufficient", however, it has started mapping of states with greater need of oxygen.

Of the states with greater needs of oxygen are Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Chhattisgarh. Besides, there is more consumption of medical oxygen in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Rajasthan.

Considering reports, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

(MoHF) maintained that India's daily production Capacity of medical oxygen is 7,287 metric tonne and the current stock is more than 50,000 metric tonne, more than the daily consumption of 3,842 metric tonne. However, the government has expected that "the challenge presently is to move oxygen from states with less necessity to states with increased necessity".

The Ministry has said, "mapping of the surplus sources with states that have greater need for oxygen has been started in consultation with the manufacturers, states and other stakeholders".

This has been undertaken through coordinated planning be-



tween the Central and state governments to map their requirements up to April 30 with the available sources and stocks of oxygen

in the country. For the purpose, the Ministry said, a sub-group has been formed under Ministry of Road Transport

and Highways (MoRTH) with Ministry of Railways and transport departments of states to facilitate the movement of transport tankers for Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO).

"Moving of oxygen tankers by rail is also being actively worked out." For the seamless movement of oxygen tankers, orders have been given by PESO (Petroleum and Safety Organisation) for conversion of argon and nitrogen tankers for use as oxygen tankers; thereby the fleet available for transportation of tankers has been enhanced.

Free movement of oxygen tankers inter-state has been facilitated through MoRTH without registration in other states. Further, map-

ping of cylinders state-wise has been done and industrial cylinders have been permitted to be used for medical oxygen after due purging.

Placing of orders for purchase of another one lakh oxygen cylinders by MoHF is also being undertaken and PSA plants sanctioned under PM-Cares are being closely reviewed for early completion of 100 per cent of the plants to enhance self-generation of oxygen in hospitals especially in remote areas.

Noting that "there is sufficient production capacity of around 7,127 metric tonne for oxygen in the country", the Minister said the surplus oxygen available with the steel plants is also being utilized as per the need.



The Pandemic situation is very serious and no one knows how long it will last. People should think for the best but prepare for the worst

DIFFICULT TIMES

Supreme Court judge Justice MR Shah Thursday said all his staff members involved in arranging virtual hearings have tested positive for Covid-19. Justice Shah was sitting on a bench headed by Justice DY Chandrachud as it took up a case through video-conferencing. In the pre-lunch hearing, he broke the news to the lawyers



of the day quote

At this time, due to COVID-19, life may be put in danger, so this is not the right time to protest (farmers' stir)



MANOHAR LAL KHATTAR | HARYANA CHIEF MINISTER

The sanitation drive in the revenue villages is already in the process, and now it is time to sanitise all the cold storages operating in the state



YOGI ADITYANATH | UTTAR PRADESH CM

While vaccination has increased to 90,000 per day, we need to further take it up to 200,000 per day



AMARINDER SINGH | PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

U'khand forest fire toll rises

Dehradun: The death toll in Uttarakhand forest fires since January this year has risen to eight with one more person dying while dousing a wildfire in Chamoli district, a police official said Thursday.

Two burnt alive

Hyderabad: Two persons were charred to death after a moving container truck caught fire on the Outer Ring Road here Thursday.

2 Nigerians held

Bangalore: Four drug peddlers including two Nigerians and a Keralite, who were selling drugs outside a Montessori school have been arrested with synthetic drugs worth ₹20 lakh, police said Thursday.

Man booked

Thane: The Navi Mumbai police have registered an FIR against a 53-year-old school teacher for allegedly attempting to kill his wife over a domestic dispute, an official said Thursday.

30 shanties gutted

New Delhi: Around 30 shanties were gutted after a major fire broke out in a slum cluster in Shaheed Bhagat Singh Camp of west Delhi's Paschimnuri, a Delhi Fire Services official said Thursday.

India will not get pushed under any pressure: Rawat

INDIA AND CHINA ARE LOCKED IN A MILITARY STANDOFF AT MULTIPLE FRICTION POINTS IN EASTERN LADAKH SINCE EARLY MAY LAST YEAR THAT HAS SIGNIFICANTLY STRAINED BILATERAL TIES

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 15: India stood firm in preventing a change of status quo on the northern borders and the country proved it will not get pushed under any pressure, Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat said Thursday, referring to the border standoff with China in eastern Ladakh.



In his address at the Raisina Dialogue here, Gen Rawat said China felt that it will be able to compel nations to give in to its demands by doing a little bit of "shove and push" as it has superior armed forces because of technological advantage.

international community came to India's support to say that "yes there is an international base-rule order which every nation must follow. That is what we have been able to achieve."

engaged in talks to extend the disengagement process to the remaining friction points. "They feel that they have arrived and they have a superior armed force because of the technological advantage that they have," Gen Rawat said.

"They have been able to create disruptive technologies which can paralyse systems of the adversary, and therefore, they feel that just by doing a little bit of shove and push, they will be able to compel nations to give in to their demands," he said.

LADAKH STANDOFF

"But, I think India stood firm on the northern borders and we have proven that we will not get pushed," he said at the virtual conference. The Chief of Defence Staff(CDS) said India was able to get support of the international community by standing firm in preventing the attempt of changing the status quo in the region.

"They tried to ensure that they can change the status quo by the use of disruptive technologies without using force...They thought that India, as a nation, will succumb to the pressures that they have been putting on us because of the technological advantage that they have," he said, adding that did not happen. Gen Rawat said the international community came to India's support to say that "yes there is an international base-rule order which every nation must follow. That is what we have been able to achieve."

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, India and China completed withdrawal of troops and weapons from the North and South banks of Pangong lake in February. The two sides are now

MAN HACKS 6 OF FAMILY TO DEATH IN AP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Visakhapatnam, April 15: A person allegedly hacked six members of a family, including an infant, to death and later surrendered to the police at a village in Visakhapatnam district early Thursday.

City Commissioner of Police Manish Kumar Sinha visited Juttada village under Pendurthi mandal to take stock of the situation. Police said Battina Appala Raju attacked the family members of Bammidi Ramana with a large sickle, allegedly owing to a running feud between the two families for some time now.



Security personnel during the 73rd Himachal Day parade at the Ridge, in Shimla

PTI PHOTO



"What triggered the mayhem is not clear yet. We are investigating whether it was old rivalry or an extra-marital affair that led to the killings," a senior police official said.

Besides Ramana, his kin Usharani (35), Allu Ramadevi (53), Naruna (37), Usharani's children Uday (2) and Urvisha (6 months) were done to death, according to police. Appala Raju later went to the Pendurthi police station and surrendered. The bodies have been removed for post-mortem while police were questioning Raju to establish facts in the case.

FIR against Mamata for instigating people

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Cooch Behar (WB), April 15: An FIR has been lodged against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at a police station here, alleging that she instigated voters to gherao central forces and that, in turn, led to the incident of firing in Sitalkuchi and the subsequent death of four persons.



Siddique Ali Mia, the zilla president of BJP's minority cell in Cooch Behar, cited the TMC supremo's comments during a rally in Banerswar area as he filed a complaint on Wednesday claiming that her address provoked people to attack CISF personnel during the fourth phase of state elections.

Villagers, after being provoked by such provocative statements of Mamata Banerjee, tried to snatch fire arms of the deployed paramilitary forces, Mia said.

He attached a video clip of Banerjee's speech in his complaint at Mathabhanga police station.

"The said villagers including women launched attack upon the paramilitary forces with the intention of causing bodily injury, knowing it to be likely to cause death of the deployed paramilitary forces," he wrote in the FIR, a copy

24-HOUR CAMPAIGN BAN ON DILIP GHOSH

The Election Commission Thursday evening imposed a 24-hour campaign ban on the BJP's West Bengal president Dilip Ghosh for his "there will be Sitalkuchi in several places" remarks. The order said the Commission "sternly warns" Ghosh and advises him to desist from using such statements while making public utterances during the period when the Model Code of Conduct is in force.

of which is with the PTI.

The BJP leader, when contacted, said he would launch a massive protest demanding the chief minister's arrest, if the police "sit idle" on the FIR in the next few days. "She is solely responsible for the

death of those four people. She is answerable to all the voters of our district," Mia stated. At least four persons died outside a polling booth in Sitalkuchi assembly constituency on April 10 when CISF personnel opened fire in "self defence" allegedly after coming under attack from locals. The Election Commission had suspended the voting exercise at the booth following the incident. In its statement, the EC said, "The joint report of the two special observers has been received... Wherein they interalia stated that recourse to open fire by the CISF personnel became absolutely necessary in order to save the lives of the voters lined up at the polling booth, those of other polling personnel and their own lives as the mob had attempted snatching their weapons."

Temperature crosses 40°C in northern India

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, April 15: No heat wave Conditions are likely over the country Thursday but heavy rainfall is very likely at isolated places over Coastal & South interior Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry and Karaikal April 16, said the Ministry of Earth Sciences.



Representational image

However, heat wave conditions were observed in isolated pockets over Saurashtra and Kutch and Haryana April 14.

According to the National Weather Forecasting Centre of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), maximum temperatures more than 40 degree centigrade were recorded at most places over East Uttar Pradesh; at many places over Haryana, Chandigarh & Delhi, Gangetic West Bengal and West Rajasthan; at a few places over Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and West Uttar Pradesh and at isolated places over Chhattisgarh,

Vidarbha, Odisha, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh.

likely at isolated places over Telangana; with lightning, hail & gusty winds (speed reaching 30-40 kmph) also likely at isolated places over Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra,

coastal Andhra Pradesh & Yanam, Odisha and Chhattisgarh; with lightning & gusty winds (speed reaching 40-50 kmph) at isolated places over Rayalaseema, Marathwada; lightning & gusty winds (speed reaching 30-40 kmph) at isolated places over Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan & Muzaffarabad, Rajasthan and Punjab. "Heavy rainfall very likely at isolated places over Odisha, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Mahe and Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal. Heat Wave conditions very likely in isolated pockets over Haryana and Saurashtra & Kutch," the IMD said.

While Friday thunderstorm with lightning, hail & gusty winds (speed reaching 30-40 kmph) is very likely at isolated places over Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan & Muzaffarabad; with lightning and gusty winds (speed reaching 40-50 kmph) at isolated places over Assam & Meghalaya; with lightning & gusty winds (speed reaching 30-40 kmph) at isolated places over Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Gangetic West Bengal, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram & Tripura, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry & Karaikal and Kerala & Mahe and with lightning at isolated places over East Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Sub-Himalayan West Bengal & Sikkim, Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada, Odisha, Coastal Andhra Pradesh & Yanam, Rayalaseema, Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Karnataka and Lakshadweep.

GAGANYAAN MISSION

India, France sign agreement for cooperation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: Space agencies of India and France Thursday signed an agreement for cooperation for the former's first human space mission, Gaganyaan, a move that will enable Indian flight physicians to train at French facilities. French space agency CNES said under the agreement, equipment developed by it, tested and still operating aboard the International Space Station (ISS) will be made available to Indian crews.

The CNES will also be supplying fireproof carry bags made in France to shield equipment from shocks and radiation, it said.

The agreement was announced during French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian's visit to the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) headquarters in Bengaluru.

ISRO has asked CNES to help prepare for the Gaganyaan mission and to serve as its single European contact in this domain, the French space agency said.

"Under the terms of the agreement, CNES will train India's flight physicians and CAPCOM mission control teams in France at the CADMOS centre for the development of microgravity applications and space operations at CNES in Toulouse and at the European Astronaut Centre (EAC) in Cologne, Germany," the CNES said.

The training of astronauts is a critical aspect of the human space mission project. Flight physicians or surgeons are responsible for astronaut's health before, during and after the flight. Currently, all space physicians are from the Indian Air Force. France has a well-established mechanism for space medicine.

international



China increasingly is a near-peer competitor, challenging the United States in multiple areas while pushing to revise global norms in ways that favour the authoritarian Chinese system
AVRIL HAINES | DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE, US

US CONGRESS RESOLUTION TO RECOGNISE 'VAISAKHI'

A US Congressman has introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives to recognise the significance of 'Vaisakhi' and those who celebrate it



of the day quote

The denial of bodily autonomy is a violation of women and girls' fundamental human rights that reinforces inequalities and perpetuates violence arising from gender discrimination
NATALIA KANEM | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNFPA

I think the problem of erosion of democracies, as Freedom House points out, is a very real one in many parts of the world, those that have established democracies and those where democratic governance is quite fragile
WILLIAM BURNS | CIA DIRECTOR

When history looks back on this painful episode - as part of the long litany of battles fought on the bodies of women and girls, from Bosnia to Rwanda, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere - we will rightly be asked what we did to honour our commitments
PRAMILA PATTEN | UN SPL REPRESENTATIVE ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

SHORT TAKES

Bulgarian PM formally resigns

Sofia: Bulgaria's Prime Minister Boyko Borisov Thursday resigned from his coalition government, as expected, after the parliamentary election earlier this month. The announcement was made by the Interim President of the newly elected Parliament, Mika Saykova, during the first session, dpa news agency reported. The resignation of the nationalistic government, which has been in office since 2017, was to be routinely approved by MPs. Thousands of protesters had demanded his resignation over corruption allegations during summer protests in 2020.

12 missing from capsized ship

Port Fourcho: The Coast Guard searched for 12 people missing off the coast of Louisiana Wednesday after finding one person dead and pulling six survivors from rough seas when their commercial vessel capsized in hurricane-force winds. Coast Guard Capt Will Watson said winds were 130 to 145 km/h and seas were 7 to 9 feet when the Seacor Power lift vessel overturned. "That's challenging under any circumstance," Watson said.

1 killed, 12 hurt in market blast

Baghdad: A powerful explosion rocked a market in east Baghdad Thursday, killing one person and injuring 12 others, according to Iraq's military. The cause of the blast in the city's Sadr City area, in the Habibiya neighborhood, was not immediately known. It sent a cloud of black smoke above the area. A military statement said one person was killed and 12 injured, according to a preliminary investigation.

21 killed in bus, truck collision

Cairo: A bus overturned while trying to pass a truck on a highway in southern Egypt Tuesday, causing a collision that killed at least 21 people and injured three others, authorities said. The bus was travelling from Cairo when it turned over and was hit by the truck on a road in the southern province of Assiut, 320 kilometers south of Cairo, Assiut Gov. Essam Saad said in a statement.

Indian traders getting Chinese Covid jab in Nepal

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kathmandu, April 15: Indian traders and businessmen doing business in China are now queuing up in hospitals in Kathmandu to get the Chinese Covid-19 vaccines, according to officials. The officials said that there was an acute surge of Indian businessmen and traders in Kathmandu hospitals this week. We started probing this issue after we noticed that Indian businessmen are getting jabs, two senior Nepal government officials told IANS.

Kathmandu to receive the jab and going back after the immunisation, they added. Some Indian traders had shown their identity cards written in Chinese and they spoke in Hindi, the officials said, adding that it was later found they were flying from India only to receive the jab. Over 30 Indian traders who are doing business in China got the Covid jab Wednesday, while a huge number are still looking for the jab, a senior official at the Shukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital in Teku told IANS. Since Beijing has made Covid vaccination mandatory to enter the country, Indian traders and busi-



nessmen are submitting the identity of doing business in China, the official said. But only later we came to know that they were Indians, the official added. March 16, the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu issued a notice and informed that anyone visiting Beijing should have to submit a certificate of Covid-19 vaccination manufactured in China while applying for the visa.

Nepal has recently received 800,000 doses of Chinese vaccine called Vero Cell developed by Sinopharm as a grant and started inoculating its selected population. Thursday a similar line of Indian businessmen are queuing up in Kathmandu-based government hospitals to get the jabs, the officials confirmed. After the incident came into the light, authorities will now shut down the facility to the Indian businessmen and asked anyone seeking jab should provide a Nepali citizenship. After receiving the

Chinese vaccine, the Nepal government has started inoculating those involved in essential services; students studying in China under the Chinese government scholarship but are currently stuck in Nepal due to pandemic; Nepali students preparing to leave for China for the higher study; and people involved in cross-border trade between Nepal and China. As of Wednesday, 54 000 individuals have received the Chinese jabs. Amid the worsening Covid situation in India, Nepal is in also a spot. Covid cases are rising in Nepal particularly people coming from India using the open border.

Fire at Saudi varsity after Houthi attack

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

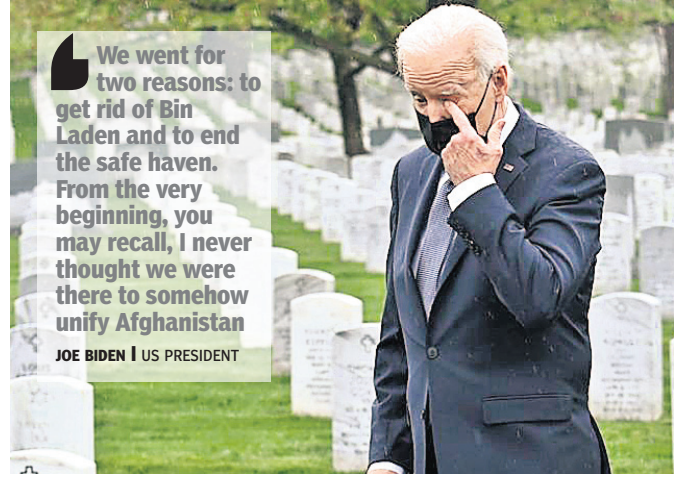
Riyadh, April 15: A fire broke out at a university in southern Saudi Arabia Thursday after the air defence system intercepted an attack by Yemen's Houthi militia. Saudi air defences intercepted and destroyed four bomb-laden drones and five ballistic missiles between Wednesday evening and early Thursday launched by the Houthis towards the southern Saudi city of Jazan, according to a statement by a Saudi-led military coalition. "The interception resulted in scattered debris on campus, which caused a limited fire that was contained," dpa news agency quoted coalition spokesman Turki al-Malki as saying, adding that there were no casualties.

End of America's forever war

Biden has announced that all US troops would be withdrawn from the strife-torn country by September 11, the 20th anniversary of 9/11 attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, April 15: Declaring that the war in Afghanistan was never meant to be a "multigenerational undertaking," President Joe Biden has announced that all US troops would be withdrawn from the strife-torn country by September 11 to end America's longest war that has cost trillions of dollars and the lives of over 2,400 American soldiers.



Biden wipes his eye as he walks through Arlington National Cemetery to honor fallen veterans of the Afghan conflict in Arlington, Virginia

During a televised address to the nation Wednesday, Biden said that keeping thousands of troops grounded and concentrated in just one country at a cost of billions each year made "little sense" to him and to other leaders and urged countries in the region, especially Pakistan, as well as Russia, China, India and Turkey to "do more" to help ensure peace in Afghanistan. "They all have a significant stake in the stable future for Afghanistan," he said while speaking from the Treaty Room of the White House — where former President George W Bush first informed the nation of US strikes on al-Qaida training camps in Afghanistan in October 2001. "It is time to end America's longest war," he said.

Blinken in Afghan to sell troop withdrawal

Kabul: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan Thursday to sell Afghan leaders and a wary public on President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all American troops from the country and end America's longest war. Blinken sought to assure senior Afghan politicians that the United States remains committed to the country despite Biden's announcement. Later, in a meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the National Reconciliation Council, Blinken repeated his message, saying that "we have a new chapter, but it is a new chapter that we're writing together." "We are grateful to your people, your country, your administration," Abdullah said.

Biden said the US will begin final withdrawal from Afghanistan May 1 of this year. There were 2,500 to 3,000 US troops in Afghanistan when Biden took office in January. "We will not conduct a hasty rush to the exit. We'll do it responsibly, deliberately, and safely. And we will do it in full coordination with our allies and partners,

who now have more forces in Afghanistan than we do," he said. American troops, as well as forces deployed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allies and operational partners, will be out of Afghanistan before "we mark the 20th anniversary of that heinous attack September 11 (2001)," Biden said. Soon after, Biden went to the

Arlington National Cemetery to pay homage to the American soldiers who died in the Afghanistan war, which began in 2001 after Al Qaeda terrorists based in Afghanistan attacked the World Trade Centre in New York. Responding to questions at the cemetery, Biden said the troop-pull-out was not a tough decision.

UAE mediating between India, Pak to restore 'functional relations'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Islamabad, April 15: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is facilitating and mediating back-channel talks between India and Pakistan with an aim to turn their rivalry into a healthy and functional relationship, its envoy in Washington has confirmed.



The revelation made by the UAE Ambassador to Washington has hinted towards the US's indirect intervention in the India-Pakistan relationship through its trusted ally, the UAE

As part of the backdoor talks and meetings, top intelligence officials from both Pakistan and India have had secret meetings in Dubai during January 2021 as the UAE played important part in bringing the two sides to calm military tensions over the Kashmir region. UAE played a role in bringing Kashmir escalation down and created a ceasefire, hopefully ultimately leading to restoring diplomats and getting the relationship back to a healthy level, said Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba, during a virtual discussion with Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

All French nationals advised to leave Pak

Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has repeatedly maintained that there can be no talk with India until the Narendra Modi government reverses its decision to abrogate Articles 370 and 35A, stripping the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcating into two Union Territories. However, the intervention of the UAE to de-escalate tensions between India and Pakistan, especially in reference to the boiling tensions along the Line of Control (LoC), has certainly yielded positive results as both sides agreed to enforce the ceasefire along the borders.

All French nationals advised to leave Pak



French nationals advised to leave Pakistan

Islamabad, April 15: The French embassy here 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 Monday to launch violent protests to force the government to expel the French ambassador over blasphemous caricatures published last year. However, no French citizen was reportedly targeted so far but the embassy has urged all the French citizens to leave Pakistan, apparently as a precautionary measure. "Due to the serious threats to French interests in Pakistan French nationals and French companies are advised to temporarily leave the country," the embassy said in an email message to its citizens in Pakistan. It said that the departures will be carried out by existing commercial airlines. Interior minister Sheikh Rashid announced 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 Rizvi Monday ahead of the April 20 deadline by the group to expel the French ambassador.

Blood clot risk higher from COVID than vax: UK study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, April 15: The risk of rare blood clotting following the COVID-19 infection is around 100 times greater than normal, several times higher than it is post-vaccination or following influenza, according to a new University of Oxford study published Thursday.

The research found that the rare blood clotting known as Cerebral Venous Thrombosis (CVT) is more common after COVID-19 than in any of the comparison groups, with 30 per cent of these cases occurring in the under 30s. Compared to the current COVID-19 vaccines being administered, this risk is between 8-10 times higher, and compared to the base-

line, approximately 100 times higher. The study follows reports of possible links between the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine and rare cases of CVT, which are undergoing deeper investigations by the medicines regulators even as the jabs have been ruled as safe and effective. "There are concerns about possible associations between vaccines and CVT, causing governments and regulators to restrict the use of certain vaccines. Yet, one key question remained unknown 'What is the risk of CVT following a diagnosis of COVID-19,'" said Paul Harrison, one of study authors as Professor of Psychiatry and Head of the Translational Neurobiology Group at the University of Oxford.

There are concerns about possible associations between vaccines and CVT, causing governments and regulators to restrict the use of certain vaccines. Yet, one key question remained unknown 'What is the risk of CVT following a diagnosis of COVID-19,'" said Paul Harrison, one of study authors as Professor of Psychiatry and Head of the Translational Neurobiology Group at the University of Oxford.

WORKERS' WOES



Migrant people and workers leave the city in speedboats before the countrywide lockdown imposed as the coronavirus cases increased, at Mawa ferry port in Munshiganj, Bangladesh

Google Earth adds time lapse video to depict climate change

THE TOOL UNVEILED THURSDAY IS ROLLING OUT IN WHAT IS BEING BILLED AS THE BIGGEST UPDATE TO GOOGLE EARTH IN FIVE YEARS

decades of satellite imagery to vividly illustrate how climate change has affected glaciers, beaches, forests and other places around the world. The tool unveiled Thursday is rolling out in what is being billed as the biggest update to Google Earth in five years. Google says it undertook the complex project in partnership with several government agencies, including NASA in the US and its European counterpart, in hopes that it will help a mass audience grasp the sometimes abstract concept of climate change in more tangible terms through its free Earth app. Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald believes



that mission may be accomplished. "This is amazing," she told The Associated Press after watching a preview of the new feature. "Trying to get people to understand the scope of the climate change and

environment." This isn't the first time time-lapse satellite imagery has been used to demonstrate how parts of the world are changing before our eyes due to a changing climate. Most scientists agree that climate change is being driven by pollution primarily produced by humans. But earlier images have mostly focused on melting glaciers and haven't been widely available on an already popular app like Google Earth, which can be downloaded on most of the more than 3 billion smartphones now in use around the world. Google is promising that people will be able to see a time lapse presentation of just about

anywhere they want to search. The feature also includes a storytelling mode highlighting 800 different places on the planet in both 2D and 3D formats. Those videos also will be available on Google's YouTube video site, a service more widely used than the Earth app. The feature was created from 24 million satellite images taken every year from 1984 to 2020 and provided by NASA, the US Geological Survey and the European Union, according to Google. The time lapse technology was created with the help of Carnegie Mellon University. Google plans to update the time lapse imagery at least once a year.

