



KEEPING SANITY

Actor Alaya F says she enjoys being on social media but doesn't take it too seriously

LEISURE P2



US, CHINA COOPERATION

World's two biggest carbon polluters agree to cooperate to curb climate change with urgency

INTERNATIONAL P10



RCB THRASH KKR

RCB hammer KKR riding on brilliant knocks by AB de Villiers and Glenn Maxwell in the IPL

SPORTS P12

The dead too receive pensions in Odisha

THE POWERS GIVEN TO THE PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN ODISHA TO BOLSTER DECENTRALISED GOVERNANCE SEEM TO HAVE BACKFIRED AS SEVERAL ERRING PRIs ARE NOW INDULGING IN MASSIVE MISUSE OF TAXPAYERS' MONEY

MANISH KUMAR, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 18: The powers given to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Odisha to bolster decentralised governance seem to have backfired. Several of the erring PRIs are now found indulging in massive misappropriation of taxpayers' money under the nose of the state government.

One glaring example of a scam in disbursement of pensions has now come to the fore with the audit and investigation done by the officials of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) who connected several dots to prove how lakhs of rupees were siphoned off with the involvement of Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat leaders.

The CAG in its latest finding claimed that their sample audit of selected Panchayat Samitis (PS) and Gram Panchayats (GPs) found that in 11 erring PS and in nine such GPs, cash disbursements of pensions were done against the names of 167 dead pension beneficiaries.

"Audit observed that 167 beneficiaries to whom pension amounting to ₹2.33



lakh had been paid in cash were not alive on the dates of payment of pension. However, pension continued to be paid in their name for 1 to 22 months after their death. Thus, the amounts were suspected to have been misappropriated," the CAG report said.

The misappropriation of funds came to light when the CAG officials tried to match the details of individuals

getting pensions with the details of persons who died as per the records from the local hospitals. Details of their kin receiving ex-gratia from the government under the Harischandra Sahayata Scheme were matched to buttress their point.

In Odisha the elderly, widows, differently-abled, AIDS patients and others receive pensions either from the

Union government under the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) or through the state scheme of Madhu Babu Pension Yojana (MBPY).

"As per the guidelines of NSAP and provisions of MBPY Rules 2008, PS and GPs shall report every case of death of a pensioner immediately to the Block Development Officer (BDO)/ Sub-Collector concerned. Further, annual verification of pensioners shall be conducted by the competent authority to ascertain that the pensioner is alive and continues to fulfil all the conditions of eligibility. Pension shall cease to be payable following the death of the pensioner," the CAG report said.

However due to the deliberate willful defiance of the norms by the PRI officers, tax payers' money was disbursed to ineligible persons in an illegal way.

"Irregular payments of this nature were made possible for not reporting the cases of death of the beneficiaries immediately to the BDOs/ Sub-Collectors by the GPs," the CAG report.

Why Odisha?

The Ministry of Rural Development earlier had asked the state govern-

ment multiple times, especially the Department of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (SSEPD), the nodal agency handling pension matters in the state to pay pensions through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) and not through cash.

However, the state government citing lack of financial inclusion had been paying cash pensions at several areas at panchayat level. Banks have better compliance for pension payments like requirement of life certificates and Aadhar-based verification when paid through bank accounts. But the cash mode of pension payment seemed to have allowed the payments to be made under the PRI institutions without much scrutiny and at the whims and fancies of the local PRI staff, giving scope for giving pensions to undeserving persons.

The CAG, however, could study only 49 out of the 317 panchayat samitis and only 268 out of the 6,798 panchayats from July 2018 to March 2019. The actual amount of misappropriation in this pension scam seems to be much higher than reported in the CAG report.

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Lingaraj Temple closed for devotees

The decision came after four servitors of the 11th century shrine tested COVID-19 positive

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 18: The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Sunday has restricted public entry into the 11th century Lingaraj Temple after four servitors tested positive for coronavirus.

"Keeping in view the detection of substantial number of COVID-19 positive cases among the servitors of

the temple as well as the larger public interest, public entry to the Lingaraj Temple has been restricted from Sunday till further orders, the BMC said in a statement, adding, "The move will help to contain the further spread of virus."

According to sources, about 60 servitors were tested for COVID Saturday and four of them were found to be COVID-19 positive. Meanwhile, the results of the samples of 185 more servitors collected Sunday are awaited. However, the temple will be opened for usual rituals to be conducted by the servitors only. The statement read, "The

temple administration will ensure that rituals are conducted by the servitors only. The Ashokastami car festival, famously known as Rukuna Rath Jatra, will be conducted without the mass participation of devotees."

It may be mentioned here that after remaining closed for almost nine months due to COVID-19 pandemic last year, the temple was reopened for devotees January 6.

Lingaraj Temple is the second most visited temple by devotees in the state after Shree Jagannath Temple, Puri. The Jagannath Temple is to remain closed on Saturdays and Sundays, while no decision has been taken on the total closure of the temple.

The capital city has been reporting a high number of COVID-19 positive cases for the past one week now. On Sunday, 338 new cases were detected. The total number of active cases in Bhubaneswar stood at 2,527, which is more than 10% of the state's active cases.



IRREGULAR by MANJUL



One ex-PM has also sent some boring suggestions to tackle Covid, sir. There is no mention of Jaali, thali or utsav!

10 die due to low pressure oxygen in MP hospital

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Shahdol (MP), April 18: At least 10 COVID-19 patients died in the ICU of a government hospital in Madhya Pradesh's Shahdol allegedly due to low pressure in the medical oxygen supply.

The incident occurred at the Government Medical College Hospital (GMCH) here on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday. However, the district administration denied that these deaths were caused due to the "shortage of oxygen".

"Out of 62 patients admitted in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) ward of the medical college's COVID-19 centre, 10 patients died following the low pressure of liquid oxygen late last night," the facility's dean, Dr Milind Shiralkar, said, adding that the other critical patients are safe. The hospital has 62 ICU beds where critical COVID-19 patients are admitted.

However, Shiralkar later said had low oxygen pressure been the cause, other patients would also have been impacted. "But the low pressure of oxygen didn't affect the other patients," he said.

Shiralkar said experts have been called in to find out the exact cause behind the death of the six patients. He said the liquid oxygen supply at the hospital started running out by late Saturday evening.

"Suppliers were being contacted constantly but the vehicle could not reach till late night, due to which the pressure of oxygen supplied to the patients was reduced," he said.



Hundreds of migrant workers who arrived at the Bhubaneswar railway station from different states owing to COVID-19 scare registering themselves with the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) authorities, Sunday

Mandatory quarantine for Kumbh pilgrims

THE STATE GOVERNMENT RECEIVED A CONSIGNMENT OF 2L DOSES OF COVISHIELD SUNDAY

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 18: The alarming rise in COVID-19 cases across the state notwithstanding, about 400 persons from Odisha participated in the mega annual congregation at Maha Kumbh mela in Haridwar, the Uttarakhand government said.

According to the details provided by the Uttarakhand government, about 400 persons from 150 families visited the religious site to take the holy dip in the Ganga. These participants hailed from Ganjam, Puri, Khurda, Nabarangpur and Cuttack districts.

With several of these pilgrims testing COVID positive upon their return from the Maha Kumbh, the state government has decided to undertake RT-PCR testing of these pilgrims and also made it mandatory for them to undergo 14-day quarantine.

Dr Niranjana Mishra, Director of Public Health, said, "We have made 14-day quarantine mandatory for those who went to pilgrimage at the Maha Kumbh to further spread of the virus in the state. Even if any of them carries a COVID-19 negative report, they will be subjected to quarantine for 14 days." The list of people visiting the re-

ligious sites in Uttarakhand has been provided to the state government. Currently, the Odisha government is working to ensure that these pilgrims are traced and made to complete their quarantine period under government surveillance.

Meanwhile, the state government received new consignment of COVID vaccines Sunday helping it to overcome the acute shortage of vaccines in the state. Around 2 lakh doses of COVID vaccine were received by the state government. "We received around 2 lakh doses of Covishield from the Union government. We will send the doses to different districts to bolster the ongoing vaccination drive in the state. The stock is likely to last for 2-3 more days. We will need more stocks soon to continue with the vaccination drive," Bijay Panigrahi, state Health and Family Welfare Director said.

BMC's crematoriums in limbo as COVID cases increase

THE TWO NEW CREMATORIUMS PROPOSED AT PATIA AND KHANDAGIRI ARE YET TO SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY

AVIRAL MISHRA, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 18: Even as the state capital is witnessing an alarming rise in COVID caseload and even in number of fatalities, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation's (BMC) initiative of constructing two new crematoriums to deal with a larger number of deaths still remains in limbo.

Earlier, in October last year, the city witnessed a massive spike in COVID cases. Consequently, several dead bodies were reported to have accumulated at the only crematorium in the City at Satya Nagar. Keeping this in view, the BMC Commissioner Prem Chandra Chaudhary had declared setting up of two more crematoriums - one



in Patia and another in Khandagiri - to reduce the burden on the Satya Nagar crematorium. "Number of cremations at Satya Nagar crematorium has gone up abnormally due to COVID deaths. Thus, two new crematoriums will

be built at Patia and in Aigina, Khandagiri. While the crematorium at Patia will be gas-based, the one at Khandagiri will run on electricity. Both crematoriums will come up within one-and-a-half months," Chaudhary had stated then.

Six months since the announcement, a second and more insidious COVID wave is sweeping the country, but no progress has been made on the construction of the two crematoriums. Officials at the BMC revealed that while the proposed crematorium at Patia has run into certain technical problems, the one at Khandagiri is facing hurdles in terms of land acquisition. As a result, both the crematoriums are yet to see the light of the day.

"We have almost completed 80% of the work at the Patia crematorium. Presently we are facing a problem in setting up a 100 foot chimney for the furnace, which hopefully will be resolved in a week's time. Once the chimney is erected, the crematorium will start functioning within

a month. However, it will take another six months for the crematorium at Aigina to become operational as there are certain legal challenges in land acquisition," a senior BMC official said.

It may be mentioned that the Satya Nagar crematorium has two furnaces of which one runs on electricity, while the other uses firewood. During October 2020, the BMC was reportedly receiving nearly 25 bodies every day and cremation was only done through firewood following the failure of the electric furnace. The situation had become so grim that the locals approached the Odisha Human Rights Commission complaining about severe air pollution in the area due to excessive smoke from pyres.

India's GDP forecasts downgraded to 10 pc for FY'22

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 18: With the resurgence of COVID-19 cases posing risks to economic recovery, leading brokerages have downgraded India's GDP growth projections for the current fiscal year to as low as 10 per cent on local lockdowns threatening fragile recovery.



While Nomura has downgraded projections of economic growth for the fiscal year ending March 2022 to 12.6 per cent from 13.5 per cent earlier, JP Morgan now projects GDP growth at 11 per cent from 13 per cent earlier. UBS sees 10 per cent GDP growth, down from 11.5 per cent earlier and Citi has downgraded growth to 12 per cent.

India's GDP growth had been on the decline even before the pandemic struck earlier last year. From a growth rate of 8.3 per cent in FY17, the GDP expansion had dipped to 6.8 per cent and 6.5 per cent in the following two years and to 4 per cent in 2019-20.

In the COVID-ravaged 2020-21 fiscal (April 2020 to March 2021), the economy is projected to have contracted by up to 8 per cent. The low base of FY21 was seen aiding a double-digit growth rate in the current fiscal before moderating to 6.8 per cent in FY'23.

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	38.6°C	36.2°C
MIN	25.5°C	25.0°C
Humidity	56%	64%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

Forecast: Light rain likely

leisure



TEIGEN, LUNA REDEFINE MOM-DAUGHTER GOALS

Model Chrissy Teigen and her daughter Luna have redefined mother-daughter goals as they posed together while twinning in black bikinis. Chrissy posted a picture on Instagram Sunday from her luxurious vacation. In the picture the duo is standing on the edge of an infinity pool.

MARY WILSON'S UNRELEASED MUSIC TO BE AVAILABLE SOON

Late singer Mary Wilson left a lot of unreleased music, which will be launched soon. "I made that commitment to her the last time we spoke, less than two weeks before Mary passed," said Bruce Resnikoff, president and CEO of Universal Music, the company that will unveil Wilson's unreleased music.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
The day may start with a dilemma, but that's exactly how your skills will come into play. As evening approaches, you will be applauded for your outstanding performance. If Ganesh is particularly generous today, you may sign new agreements.

TAURUS
Priorities and money matters will line up impatiently to knock on your door (and desk). Your financial constraints will get an outburst today. People may be taken by surprise with the way you get poignant. You will also enjoy the higher accountability reposed on you, predicts Ganesh.

GEMINI
Today, you will get an opportunity to rejuvenate yourself with seamless energy. How? Ganesh's guess is that you will find — or at least you will believe that you have found — your purpose in life. It will keep you excited throughout the day, and maybe even for days to come. You may spend lavishly to improve your personal appearance.

CANCER
You will tend to try new recipes at home. Family members will take advantage and enjoy it. You will indulge in pastimes. Arrival of guests will bring in an air of festivity and happiness, says Ganesh.

LEO
You are blessed with a visionary's creative streak. Perhaps, that's why, you see things differently from others. Today, thanks to the stars, your creative side will surge forth with renewed vigour. You will generate ideas effortlessly and continuously as you reach your creative peak. Just remember that having an imaginative mind means learning lessons from the past and visualising a better future.

VIRGO
Ganesh says today you will be highly motivated. Your creative talents and abilities set you apart as an excellent artist. Words will flow if you give vent to your creativity, and if you choose to sing or dance, you will be the focus of attention. Ganesh advises you to pursue the performing arts or writing as hobbies.

LIBRA
There are many kinds of worries that you must equip yourself to deal with. To do this, you may have to learn and follow the basic steps of problem-solving techniques. The steps involve obtaining facts, analysing them and then arriving at a decision based upon your observations.

SCORPIO
Ganesh feels a taxing and demanding day may be at hand today. Things might baffle you so much that you might lose your ability to think clearly. The battle is not lost because your power of resilience will be the silver lining. Address one problem at a time and take the slow and steady path, advises Ganesh.

SAGITTARIUS
A day of full of caution, warns Ganesh. There are chances that your heart will find its partner, forcing you to fall in love. You may be cupid's next prey. However, watch your steps, as the initial stages of a relationship may be fragile and need to be handled with care. Also, it's time to guard your reputation.

CAPRICORN
You are busy as a beaver. It is extremely difficult for you to think for yourself as you are all tied up by the demands of your work. You want to be creative, but again, the workload will not let you have that freedom, says Ganesh. You have learnt the art of time management. So, you have properly lined up your priorities and success is waiting for you.

AQUARIUS
You will hit the bull's eye, today. From the smallest to the biggest, all of your plans will turn into reality. Don't get disheartened if there are some obstacles on your path; you are fully armed to face the challenges and come out triumphant. Get yourself in the top gear, you will surely succeed, says Ganesh.

PISCES
A reckless attitude is the root cause of any downfall. Ensure responsible behavior and actions at every step at your workplace, today, suggests Ganesh. Be alert and focused and you will be able to dodge any incoming trouble. Today is a day of materialization and the projects and other things that you have been working on since a long time will draw close to completion and begin to pay off.



NUSHRRATT'S candid confession

MUMBAI: Nushratt Bharuccha plays a domestic help in the OTT anthology *Ajeeb Daastaans*. However, the B-town actress confesses when it comes to kitchen skills in real life, no one at home really trusts her!

"In my house there is a saying that if you tell Nushratt to even microwave food, she would probably burn that, too! They don't trust me with my kitchen or house skills at all," the actress laughs, while opening up on the subject in an interview.

However, she did hone her skills at household chores for her role. "For the film, I actually did all that at home -- doing pocha (mopping) and everything," she says.

The segment featuring Nushratt is titled *Khilauna*, and it co-stars Abhishek Banerjee and child star Inayat Verma in pivotal roles. *Khilauna* is directed by Raj Mehta. *Ajeeb Daastaans* has four segments, with the other stories directed by Shashank Khaitan, Neeraj Ghaywan, and Kayoze Irani. The anthology also stars Fatima Sana Shaikh, Jaideep Ahlawat, Konkona Sen Sharma, Aditi Rao Hydari, Shefali Shah, Manav Kaul and Tota Roy Chowdhary.

Alaya doesn't take social media seriously

MUMBAI: Actress Alaya F says she tries keeping it as real as she can on social media and adds that while she enjoys the platform, she doesn't take it too seriously. "I really enjoy social media, I try to keep it real.

But I make sure not to take it more seriously. It brings in a lot of good and bad," she said.

In fact, the actor adds that if she starts getting overwhelmed by social media, she puts her phone away. "You have to focus on the good and if it gets overwhelming, take a break. If I see myself getting overwhelmed with social media, I just put my phone aside -- until I am ready to deal with it again," she says.

For Alaya, it is all about enjoying her time on social media.

"I like to enjoy it, take my time with it, keep it real so that it is not stressful. You don't have to worry about keeping up an image," adds the *Jawaani Jaaneman* actress.

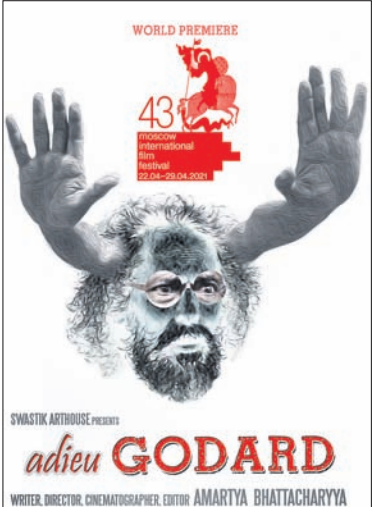


Odia movie *Adieu GODARD* to be screened at 43rd Moscow International Film Festival

The film is a socio-cultural comic tribute to Jean-Luc Godard, one of the most influential French filmmakers of post-war era

POST NEWS NETWORK

BHUBANESWAR: Odia feature film *Adieu GODARD*, written and directed by Amartya Bhattacharyya and made under the banner of Swastik Arthouse will have its world premiere at the prestigious 43rd Moscow International Film Festival (MIFF) later this month, said the producers. An Indo-French production, the film has Choudhury Bikash Das as the central character around whom the film revolves. Shot extensively in Odisha, *Adieu GODARD* is a socio-cultural comic tribute to the legendary French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard. His abruptness and quirky style of cinema making is the cornerstone of the movie.



A screengrab of the movie

Among others, Dipanwit Dashmohapatra, Sudharsri Madhusmita, Swastik Choudhury, Choudhury Jayaprakash Das, Shankar Basu Mallick and Abhishek Giri have played other important characters in the film.

Amartya, who is also the cinematographer and editor of the movie, shared - "*Adieu GODARD* is the most challenging film that I've made so far. I feel

blessed that we've been selected at one of the world's top film festivals."

Producer and actor Swastik Choudhury said - "I am super excited to be part of MIFF. It was not easy to make this film during the lockdown period. But we were able to push the boundaries and complete it. Ours is a tribute to one of the great filmmakers of France."

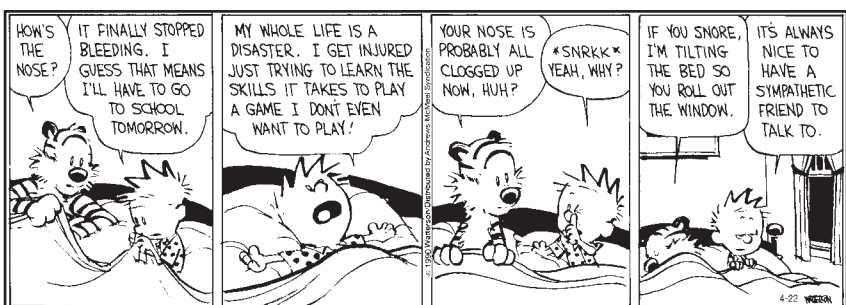
Acclaimed director and lead actor Choudhury Bikash Das, expressed his happiness saying - "I am really happy to have worked with such a wonderful team. I feel honoured that this film will be premiered in Moscow and am hopeful that it will be loved by all."

Vanessa Lien Frederique Bianchi, from France who has passionately co-produced the film said - "I'm very happy about this world premiere for *Adieu Godard*. It was a great experience to support this team."

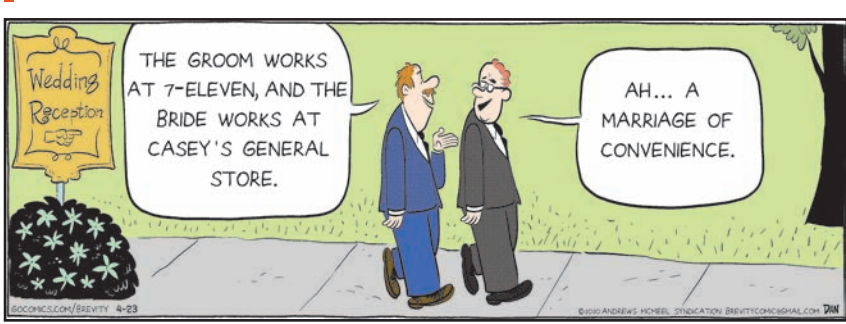
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

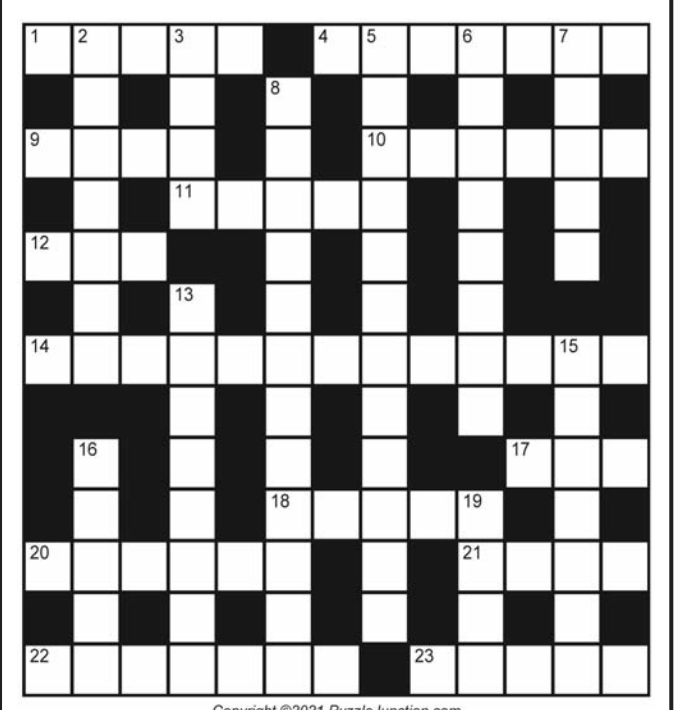


BREVITY



FUN post

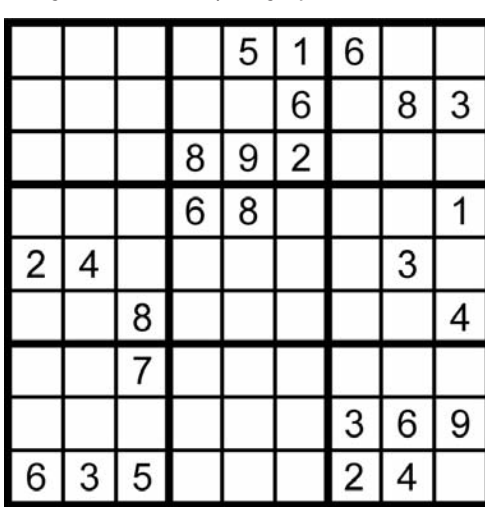
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Israeli port
 - 4 Beach problem
 - 9 Egyptian solar deity
 - 10 Fanatic
 - 11 Samoyed, e.g.
 - 12 Miss the mark
 - 14 Phenomenal
 - 17 Utmost degree
 - 18 Looked intently
 - 20 Papeete locale
 - 21 Coral formation
 - 22 Ladies' sun hats
 - 23 Former capital of Japan
 - Down**
 - 2 New Zealand flightless bird
 - 3 Sloughs
 - 5 Showy or exciting display (6-6)
 - 6 Not moving or circulating
 - 7 Perfume's purpose
 - 8 Earthquake specialist
 - 13 Type of slip
 - 15 Sanctum sanctorum
 - 16 Keyboard instrument
 - 19 Sturdy cart

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS



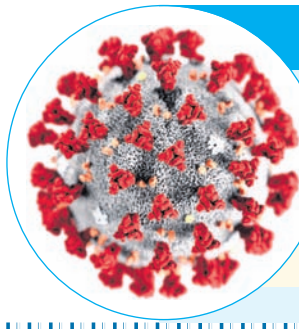
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



PARCHED BIRD

A pigeon quenches its thirst from a water pot at College Square in Cuttack, Sunday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	14,15,36,857	12,01,45,439	30,26,938
India	1,47,88,109	1,28,09,643	1,77,150
Odisha	3,68,258	3,46,134	1,944

Second wave of Covid more contagious, severe: Experts

MANISH KUMAR, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 18: Medical experts studying the trend of Covid-19 in the state claim that the second wave of the pandemic is more contagious and severe than the first wave owing to mutations.

Dr Swayam Pragyan Parida, Associate Professor (Community Medicine) at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Bhubaneswar said that the intrusion of several mutations in Covid-19 virus has made it more complex.

"There are more than 100 reported mutations of the virus. We are already seeing the highly contagious strains of UK and Brazilian varieties. Now we have a double mutated virus strain specific to the country which is causing more trouble in the second wave," Dr Parida said.

"Now we see that the transmission power of the virus has increased and thus we are seeing more infections. The severity of the cases has also increased. The attitude of irresponsible citizens has added to the woes. In many cases, the immunity garnered through the first wave also seems to be failing," she explained.

She also added that unlike the first wave, in the second wave, kids and youths are getting more infected with the virus. Other experts also claimed that the second wave is



People queuing up for RT-PCR tests at Capital Hospital in Bhubaneswar, Sunday

proving aggressive against the kids which were not much affected in the first wave.

"In the second wave, children between the ages of 1 year and 5 years are more likely to be infected. In India, people between the ages of 20 year and 40 years are also prone to the infection. But certain categories of people are being vaccinated by the government, which is not enough and the emphasis is on producing more vaccines," Dr Manoj Sahu, a gastroenterologist from the city said. Dr Sahu is working with the World Health Organisation (WHO) on hepatitis and Covid-19 disease.

Dr Braj Kishore Behera, a pediatrician from the city admitted that in the second wave, more kids have become victims of the disease. "But the symptoms seen in many kids are different. Covid infected kids show gastrointestinal issues like diarrhea, upper tract infections and pneumonia while in some cases clotting disorders in intestine are also reported which need urgent attention," he said.

He also advised parents to get vaccinated as early as possible to provide a protection and also shun socialization of kids, as of now, to prevent them from potential exposure to the virus.

Migrants return to Odisha amid lockdown fear

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 18: Gripped by fear of possible lockdown due to second wave of Covid-19, hundreds of migrants from different locations across the country returned Odisha by train, Sunday.

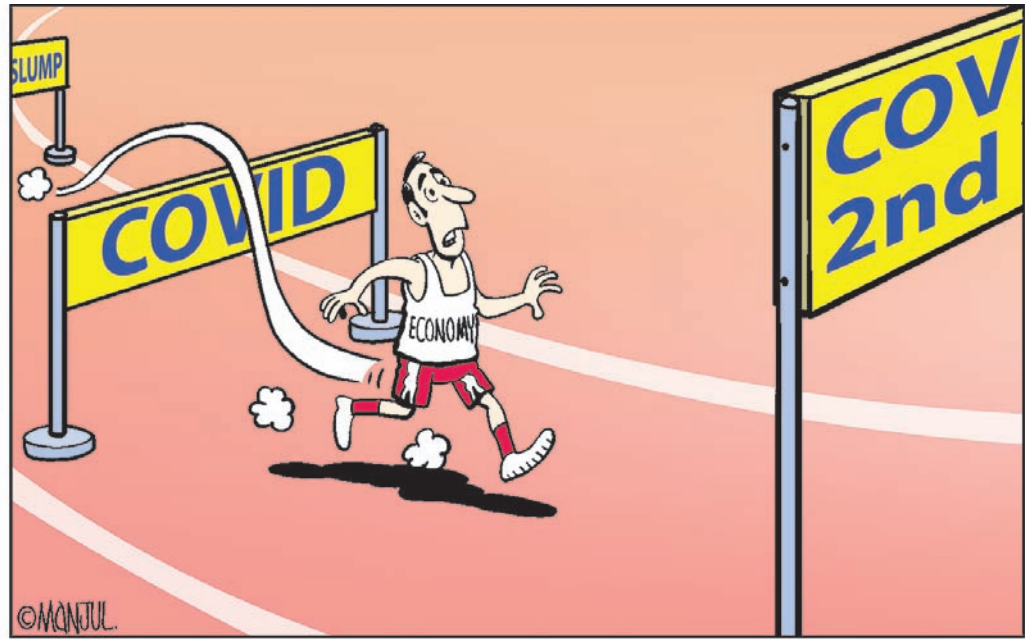
The capital city railway station had witnessed hundreds of migrants arriving and jostling for clearances to go out of the station Saturday. Those who had RT-PCR negative reports were allowed to leave the station premises. But those who did not have such reports were asked to go under quarantine and get their swab samples tested. They would be allowed to go out only if their reports came out to be negative.

At a time when the pandemic is getting worse day by day, the kind of fear gripping people was quite evident from today's scenes that unfolded at the railway station.

Meanwhile, ECoR administration has appealed to the public, especially the passengers and rail workers to follow Covid appropriate behaviour by means of wearing face masks compulsorily while in station premises and in trains during their journey. Railways will impose fines of up to Rs 500 from persons flouting norms in railway premises and trains.

Those who had RT-PCR negative reports were allowed to leave the station premises

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



State logs 3,664 fresh nCoV cases, two more deaths

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, April 18: Odisha's Covid-19 caseload mounted to 3,68,258 Sunday after 3,664 more people tested positive for the infection, while two fresh fatalities pushed the state's toll to 1,944, a senior health department official said.

Of the 3,664 new cases, 2,127 were registered in quarantine centres and the rest were detected during contact tracing. At least 10 districts recorded more than 100 new cases each, he stated.

Khurda district reported the highest number of fresh cases at 704, followed by Sundargarh at 340, Kalahandi at 324, Nuapada at 221, Bargarh at 210, Sambalpur at 199, Cuttack at 198, Jharsuguda at 183, Puri at 143 and Mayurbhanj at 119.

Malkangiri district recorded the least number of new cases at four. Taking to twitter, the Health and Family Welfare department said, "Regret to inform about the demise of two Covid positive patients while under treatment in hospitals." Both the victims were women. One was from Bargarh district, aged 75 years, and the other from Sundargarh, aged 32 years, the health department official said.

Odisha currently has 21,436 active cases, while as many as 3,44,825 patients have so far recovered from



Swab sample being collected from a servant of Lingaraj temple

Khurda reported the highest number of fresh cases at 704, while Malkangiri recorded the least number of new cases at four

the highly infectious disease. Fifty-three other Covid-19 patients have died due to comorbidities. The positivity rate stands at 3.84 per cent. Over 95.99 lakh samples have been tested so far, including 34,450 Saturday.

PLANS IN PLACE AGAINST BLACK MARKETING

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 18: Y K Jethwa, the chairman of the state level committee that was formed to prevent hoarding and black marketing of Covid medicines and medical supplies, had a detailed discussion with the Drug Controller, Odisha Sunday.

A strategy was chalked out to intensify enforcement drive throughout the state to prevent any hoarding of essential Covid supplies.

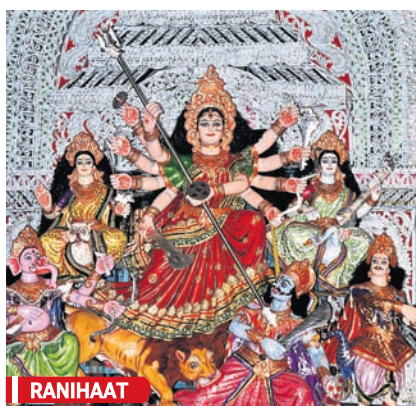
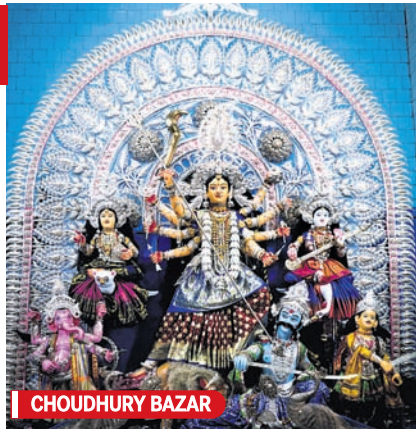
Joint flying squads, surveillance teams and surprise checking teams comprising enforcement wing of Drug Controller, Police, Special Task Force of Crime Branch etc. are going to be joining the Joint Enforcement mechanism. Sharp vigil and intelligence are going to be the integral parts of the strategy.

Raids, searches and seizures, and actions under criminal laws against unscrupulous elements have been finalized as countermeasures for hoarding and black marketing of Covid essential goods.



FESTIVAL AMID PANDEMIC

Preparation for Basanti Durga puja reached its last phase at several mandaps in the Silver City of Cuttack, Sunday. The puja committees are all set to organise the festival with strict adherence to the Covid-19 norms



Thunderstorm alert for 16 districts

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 18: The Regional Meteorological Centre here Sunday issued thunderstorm warning for as many as 16 districts of Odisha.

As per the MeT prediction, thunderstorm with lightning and gusty surface wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph is very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Jajpur, Angul, Dhenkanal, Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Gajapati, Ganjam, Nabarangpur, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Boudh and Rayagada during the next 24 hours.

The centre has stated that some districts in South, North and Western Odisha will experience thunderstorm till April 21. Thunderstorm with lightning and gusty surface wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph is very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Jajpur, Angul, Dhenkanal, Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Gajapati, Ganjam, Nabarangpur, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Boudh and Rayagada April 19, said the Met centre.

Thunderstorm with lightning is likely to occur at one or two places over Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Balasore and Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Khurda, Puri and Ganjam April 20, it added.

SJTA converts Nilachal Bhakta Niwas into Covid Care Centre

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 18: In view of the surge in Covid cases, the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) Sunday decided to convert the Nilachal Bhakta Niwas on Grand Road in Puri into a Covid Care Centre for Srimandir servants as well as officials. The administration of the 12th century shrine took to Twitter to say, "In view of the present COVID situation, today @krishan_kumar09, Chief Administrator, Shree Jagannath Temple Administration has decided to convert Nilanchal Bhakt Niwas on Grand Road, Puri, into a COVID Care Centre. This facility will be set up for Sevayats and officials (sic)."

Necessary arrangements for manpower and medical supplies were being made with the support of the Chief District Medical Officer of Puri, it added. Notably, the Holy City reported 149 Covid cases, Sunday. The Pilgrim Town has witnessed 129 cases Saturday and 114 infections April 16.

Meanwhile, a massive sanitisation drive was undertaken in and around the shrine, Sunday in accordance with a revised standard operating procedure (SOP) issued by the temple administration April 16.

Apart from the temple complex, the Fire Services personnel along with the Puri Municipality officials sanitised



Srimandir being sanitised thoroughly, Sunday

OP PHOTO

the areas near the Lion's Gate, barricades, shoe stands and nearby areas, sources said.

According to the new SOP, the shrine will remain open for devotees on all days of the week except for Saturdays and Sundays when sanitisation will be carried out as it would help break the Covid chain. However, the rituals of the temple will be carried out by the servants as per schedule.

All devotees coming in from other states will have to produce Covid-19 negative reports generated within 96 hours of their entry. Alternatively, those who have received both doses of vaccine can produce the vaccination certificate for entry into the shrine, said the new SOP.

Moreover, all devotees will be required to bring their photo identity cards for identification at the shrine entrance. They could enter the temple through the Lion's Gate in queue passing through barricades and must exit through other three gates.

It is mandatory for the devotees to follow Covid-19 norms, including social distancing and wearing of facemasks on the temple premises, said the SOP, adding that those flouting the norms will be fined if required, and will be refused entry to the temple. The shrine reopened in December last year, after remaining out of bounds for devotees since March 20, 2020.

sf | SUNDARAM HOME Regd Office: No. 21, Pattulos Road, Chennai - 600 002. Corporate Office: 46, Whites Road, Chennai - 600 014. Branch: A/108, 1st Floor, Banadev Bhawan, Saheed Nagar, Khurda Dist, Bhubaneswar - 751 007. PH : 0674 - 254 4677

SALE NOTICE

Whereas the Authorized Officer of Sundaram Home Finance Limited, formerly known as Sundaram BNP Paribas Home Finance Limited., under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with Section 13(2), issued a demand notice calling upon the Borrower to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of notice.

The Borrower and Co-Borrower having failed to repay the amount within the statutory period, the Authorised Officer in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 13(4) of the said Act in accordance with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, had taken the actual possession of the property described herein below.

Public are hereby informed that the property more fully described in the table hereunder will be sold under Rule 8 & 9 of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 in "AS IS WHERE IS", "AS IS WHAT IS" and "WHATEVER THERE IS" CONDITION, by inviting sealed tenders from the public up to 17.00 hrs on **04.06.2021**. Those who want to participate in the auction sale can forward their bids only by RPAD in sealed covers to the undersigned on or before 17.00 Hrs. on **04.06.2021**. Tenders received after 17.00 Hrs. on **04.06.2021** and thereafter will be rejected. The sealed tenders received by RPAD up to 17.00 Hrs. on **04.06.2021** will be opened on at 17.30 hrs. at the place mentioned hereunder. The successful bidder has to pay the balance amount within 15 days from the date of receipt of intimation. The sale shall be completed only on deposit of the Balance amount as stated above.

S. No.	Name and Address of the Borrower & Co-Borrower	Secured Debt (Rs.)	Reserve Price (Rs.)	Place for Title Verification
1	Mr Nilakantha Dash (Borrower) , At - Mandar Bagicha, Po-Bhawanipatna, Bhawanipatna, Bhubaneswar-766001 Also at: Dharmagarh, Kalhandi, Kalhandi-766015. Also at: Mouza Jagamara, Khata No. 1133/2347, Mandakini Duplex, House No. 10, Plot No. 1582 (P), Bhubaneswar-751030 Mrs. Sunanda Dash (Co-Borrower) , At - Mandar Bagicha, Po-Bhawanipatna, Bhawanipatna, Bhubaneswar-766001	Rs. 89,63,841/- (Rupees Eighty Nine Lakhs Sixty Three Thousand Eight Hundred and Forty One Only) as On 19.04.2021 (include Rs. 16,14,717/- as on 19.04.2021 For File No.66200031 + Rs. 73,49,124/- as on 19.04.2021 For File No. 66200032)+Future Interest + Statutory Expenditure + Legal Expenses + Incidental Charges.	Rs. 75,00,000/- (Rupees Seventy Five Lakhs Only)	Sundaram Home Finance Limited A /108, 1st Floor, Banadev Bhawan, Saheed Nagar, Khurda Dist, Bhubaneswar - 751 007. Place for Opening of Tender M/s. Sundaram Home Finance Ltd., Sundaram Tower, No. 46 Whites Road, Royapettah, Chennai-600014. Date of opening the Tender 04-06-2021 @ 17:30

Description of Property: All that piece and parcel of the property admeasuring 1663 Square Feet (1826 Square Feet of built up area), comprised in Hal Khata No.1133/2347, Plot No.1582(P), Kismat: Gharabari. Situated at Duplex House No.10, Mandakini Complex, within Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation area, Bhubaneswar, District: Khordha, Tahasil: Bhubaneswar, P.S.Khamdagiri, Thana No.38, Mouza: Jagamara, Status: Sthitiban, under D.S.R.O.Khurda, Bhubaneswar and S.R.Office: Khandagiri.**Bounded by:** North: Boundary, South: House No.9, East : Road, West: House No.7. Which is more fully and particularly described in Title Deed No. 1081110687/2011.

Note : The intending purchasers are requested to verify the documents and participate in the auction after satisfying about the title to property. Refund will not be given after sale confirmation in case if there arises any dispute regarding the title.

For detailed terms and conditions of the Sale of Property of Mr. Mr Nilakantha Dash Loan Account No.66200031 & 66200032, please refer to www.sundaramhome.in/uploads/files/sale_notice/66200031_66200032.pdf

Date: 19.04.2021 for Sundaram Home Finance Limited
AUTHORISED OFFICER

No shortage of hospital beds in state, says govt

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 18: The state Health department Sunday claimed that there was no shortage of beds and health care facilities to tackle the rising threat of Covid-19 in the state. It also claimed that works are also in the pipeline to increase hospital beds.

"We have directed all the Collectors to increase bed strength to upto five times more than what we had last year. It is not possible for us to increase the numbers of ICU in haste because it needs a lot of setups like gas pipeline and others. It will require time," Dr Niranjana Mishra, State Public Health Director said.

He also added, "The hospital beds are divided in categories like general bed, oxygen bed, ICU bed and ICU with ventilator bed. Norms say that six out of every 100 beds should be reserved for ICU. Oxygen support beds will be increased. These oxygen support beds are called HDU (High Dependent Unit)."

The official said that the department would take only critical patients in ICU to reduce its crowd. This has been planned to be increased in phased manner. The government is also negotiating



with the private hospitals, he said.

"In general ward we are seeing 25 per cent occupancy, there is 60 per cent occupancy in ICU and only 18 per cent of the ventilators are in use now. There is no critical situation in Odisha in terms of bed and oxygen availability. There is no case of crisis now in the state," Mishra assured.

He also said that influx of Odia communities from high burden areas might pose new risks to the state. "There is a worry that if Odia communities living in Maharashtra and Gujarat come back to Odisha

There is no critical situation in Odisha in terms of bed and oxygen availability
NIRANJANA MISHRA | STATE PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTOR

out of panic, there would be challenges. We are already seeing rise in cases of the disease in districts close to Chattisgarh due to the higher case load there," he said.

When asked about the issue of oxygen supply in hospitals, he said there is no shortage now. "There is formation of a vertical group to monitor the availability of oxygen in the state. We will work towards ensuring availability of oxygen 10 times the current demand."

The director said that the intrusion of double mutation varieties of the virus has increased the infection rate across the state.

SAFETY FIRST



Fire Services personnel carry out a mock drill at a private college in Cuttack, Sunday

OP PHOTO

Sishu Bhawan: Defunct water kiosks irk attendants

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, April 18: Defunct and ill-maintained drinking water kiosks and tube wells at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Postgraduate Institute of Pediatrics (Sishu Bhawan) here are adding to the woes of the patients and their attendants.

Many attendants have blamed the callousness of the hospital authorities for the inconvenience in getting drinking water amid the scorching heat.

Ailing children from across the state are usually admitted to Sishu Bhawan for advanced treatment. Several drinking water kiosks have been set up on the childcare institute premises to cater to the needs of the patients and their attendants, sources said.

However, most of these drinking water kiosks have either turned defunct or developed glitches due to poor maintenance. Several taps of a kiosk in front of the surgery ward of Sishu Bhawan have come off while the facility has been filled with garbage, sources said.

Similarly, a water kiosk at the advanced care centre of the childcare hospital is out of service due to glitches in its freezer. Moreover, most of the taps at the kiosk have been damaged since last many days.

On the other hand, the hospital authorities have failed to ensure cleanliness near a few tube wells and kiosks.

"Most of the drinking water kiosks at Sishu Bhawan have been set up with MPLADS funds and assistance from private entities. These kiosks have turned defunct due to poor maintenance. We are facing problems in collecting drinking water," rued Raghunath Swain, an attendant.



Ill-maintained and defunct drinking water kiosks at Sishu Bhawan



MOST OF THESE DRINKING WATER KIOSKS HAVE EITHER TURNED DEFUNCT OR DEVELOPED GLITCHES DUE TO POOR MAINTENANCE.

SEVERAL TAPS HAVE COME OFF WHILE THE FACILITY IS FILLED WITH GARBAGE

MANY ATTENDANTS HAVE BLAMED THE CALLOUSNESS OF THE HOSPITAL AUTHORITIES FOR THE INCONVENIENCE IN GETTING DRINKING WATER AMID THE SCORCHING HEAT

Echoing the same, another attendant Tiki Dehury said, "We have been deprived of cold water amid the prevailing hot weather. The authorities have failed to maintain the water kiosks." Sishu

Bhawan superintendent Gyanendra Behera said they have informed the Public Health Engineering Organisation to repair the defunct water kiosks. "We will take steps to ensure cleanliness at the water kiosks," he added.

Delay in mini stadium work resented

POST NEWS NETWORK

Konark, April 18: Delay in the construction of a mini stadium on the premises of Bhagabati Mahavidyalaya at Konark in Puri district has caused resentment among the students as well as locals.

The alumni association of Bhagabati Mahavidyalaya (College) has urged the authorities of Konark Notified Area Council (NAC) and the district administration to take steps to expedite the mini stadium construction.

The Sports department had sanctioned funds for the mini stadium during the tenure of former MLA Surendra Sethi. In the first phase, the Puri district Sports department had provided Rs 20 lakh to Konark NAC for construction of the sports facility.

The NAC authorities had engaged a private contractor for the construction work after inviting tender for the same. Construction work for the sports facility was initiated last year, sources said.



"The private contractor has not done anything except constructing the boundary walls for the mini stadium. The civic authorities of Konark have not taken any step to expedite the construction work. They have failed to utilise the funds allocated for the project," said a few locals. Konark NAC executive officer M. Srinivas said they have asked the contractor to expedite the mini stadium work. "The funds sanctioned for the project would be utilised soon," he added.

Teams formed to inspect Covid care facilities

The state government has taken steps to expand the capacity of treatment facilities like number of beds, HDUs and ICUs in government as well as private hospitals

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 18: The state government Sunday formed expert teams, which would visit & monitor the functioning of Covid Care facilities.

The expert teams are constituted both at medical college level and state level which will visit the established Covid facilities and monitor them for provisions of optimal Covid management.

The state level team includes Special Secretary of Health and Family Welfare department as the chairman, professors and HODs of Medical colleges and hospitals of the districts. The medical college level teams shall be formed by the deans and principals of the concerned medical colleges in consultation with the superintendents of the attached hospitals and HODs of Pulmonary medicine, Microbiology and Anesthesiology.

The state level team shall inspect and supervise the Covid hospitals based on the feedback received from medical college level teams. The college level teams will

inspect and supervise the Covid hospitals on sites in the districts tagged to them with prior information to the CDMS and PHOs of the districts that will facilitate the inspections.

The teams shall observe and assess the protocols followed for screening the cases, isolation and quarantine mechanisms, methods of sample collection, management of positive cases, management of patients in ICUs etc. During the on-site inspections, the teams will assess the adherence to the different guidelines on management and infection prevention control practice in the hospitals and appropriate use of the facilities.

The teams will submit the report to Directorate of Medical Education and Training (DMET), Odisha through the deans and principals of the colleges.

As Covid-19 cases are on the rise, the Odisha government has taken steps to expand the capacity of treatment facilities for people of the state. These include expansion of the beds, HDUs and ICUs capacity in the government as well as private hospitals.

PIPLI BYPOLL

Routray favours candidature of Mangraj's wife

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 18: Congress leader and Jatani MLA Suresh Routray Sunday favoured the candidature of Ajit Managaraj's wife. Ajit Managaraj was contesting the Pipli bypoll but succumbed to Covid-19 infection recently.

He said, "We have around 4-5 prospective candidates for the Pipli bypoll. There are names of Congress leaders like Manas Acharya, Nishikant Mishra, Poorna Swain. But many party-men believe that the wife of deceased Congress leader Ajit Managaraj is a well educated person and a good human being. She is popular and had worked with

However, I do not know her wish as of now. We will also need the approval from the All India Congress Committee (AICC) and the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC)

SURESH ROUTRAY | JATANI MLA

Mangaraj in the poll."

He also said, "If she agrees to contest the election, it will be good. However, she is in grief due to the death of her husband and her mother in law. But she is best suited for the post. Her consent to fight election is awaited. She will complete the incomplete works of her husband." Routray however said that there was support base for her. "However I do not know her wish as of now. We will also need the approval from the All India Congress Committee (AICC) and the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC)," he said.

WASSUP TODAY

BHUBANESWAR

Inauguration of self-operated honey filter at Odisha Khadi and Village Industries Board, Bhipampur, Gandamunda, 11.30am

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

BRAINSTORMING SESSION



MP Subash Singh speaks at the general body meeting of the Insurance OBC Employees' Welfare association at the Press Club of Odisha in Bhubaneswar, Sunday

OP PHOTO

Car used for gangster Hyder's escape seized from Telangana

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, April 18: The Commissionerate Police Sunday claimed to have seized a car in which gangster Sheikh Hyder had fled to Telangana following his escape from police custody at SCB Medical College and Hospital here April 10.

The Telangana Police seized the car and handed it over to the Commissionerate Police following the arrest of Hyder from Sangareddy district April 15. The Commissionerate Police Sunday brought the seized car to Odisha and parked it on the premises of the Mangalabag Police Station here, said a police officer.

The Commissionerate Police is now searching for the two-wheeler that was used in Hyder's escape from SCB, he added.



The seized car

According to sources, Hyder had fled the hospital on a motorcycle. Midway, a car registered in the name of Trilochan Sahoo of Khordha district picked the gangster.

Police source said Hyder had abandoned the car after entering Telangana border and as per his

plan, he went to Sangareddy district on a two wheeler.

The gangster was brought back to Odisha April 16 and produced before the JMFC Court in Cuttack. The court had allowed the Commissionerate Police to take the gangster on a 7-day remand for interrogation into the escape case.

However, the police remand was put on the hold as the gangster tested positive for Covid-19 Saturday. He has been kept in the isolation ward of Choudwar jail, sources said.

The Mangalabag police, meanwhile, arrested three persons, including a girl, on charges of assisting Hyder in his escape from police custody. The arrested girl has been identified as Archana Parida, 18, of Bhogara in Balasore. Parida had acted in a few music albums, sources said.

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FOLK CHARM



Artists present 'Pala' to highlight the various welfare programmes of the Odisha government at a village under Boinda block in Angul district

NGT wants report on illegal sand mining in Jajpur dist

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur, April 18: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the state pollution control board (SPCB) to form a special committee and probe into the alleged irregularities in sand mining at the Kharasrota river bank in Masudpur mouza under Vyasanagar tehsil in this district, a report said.

The matter came to the fore after a division bench comprising Justice B Amit Shalekar and judicial member Saibal Dasgupta passed an order in this regard, April 15. The committee after conducting the probe will submit a report May 17, the date scheduled for next hearing in the case.

The committee will comprise of the district collector, deputy director of mines (DDM), a senior scientist from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change department and from the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB). The committee will look into the loss arising out of sand mining from the ghat, environmental and other damages done to the riverbed. The committee can take the help of police if the need arises, the bench pointed out while delivering the order.

The order was passed after the NGT admitted a petition filed by advocate Shankar Prasad Pani on behalf of Pinak Ranjan Das, a native of Masudpur village adjoining the Kharasrota river in Vyasanagar



FILE PHOTO

FACT FILE

The committee will comprise of the district collector, deputy director of mines (DDM), a senior scientist from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change department and from the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB)

THE ORDER WAS PASSED AFTER THE NGT ADMITTED A PETITION FILED BY ADVOCATE SHANKAR PRASAD PANI ON BEHALF OF PINAK RANJAN DAS, A NATIVE OF MASUDPUR VILLAGE ADJOINING THE KHARASROTA RIVER IN VYASANAGAR TEHSIL, FOR HEARING

THE ILLEGAL SAND QUARRYING AND TRANSPORTATION IS NOT ONLY CAUSING LOSS OF REVENUE TO THE STATE EXCHEQUER BUT ALSO DISTURBING THE NATURAL EQUILIBRIUM OF THE RIVER. IT HAS ALSO SERIOUSLY AFFECTED THE FLOW OF WATER IN THE RIVER AND WEAKENED AREAS NEAR THE BANKS

tehsil, for hearing.

According to the case diary, the petitioner has alleged that the roads in the villages have been damaged due to illegal sand transportation from the Kharasrota riverbed. He alleged that sand extraction and transportation is being done illegally overlooking the consequences that may arise out of it.

The illegal sand quarrying and transportation is not only causing loss of revenue to the state exchequer but also disturbing the

natural equilibrium of the river. It has also seriously affected the flow of water in the river and weakened areas near the banks.

Previously a committee formed under the direction of NGT had submitted a report on illegal quarrying September 2, 2020. However, the committee had failed to mention about the volume of sand extraction in its report. The report also did not mention about the penalty collected from the person illegally mining sand from the riverbed.

Former Patnagarh MLA Meher dies at 78



POST NEWS NETWORK

Patnagarh, April 18: Former MLA of Patnagarh Assembly constituency Bibekananda Meher died Sunday morning following prolonged illness. He was 78. According to family sources, the two-time MLA was suffering from kidney ailments and was undergoing treatment for the last two years. Meher's condition deteriorated Sunday morning. He was being shifted to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack, but succumbed on the way.

As the news broke, friends, relatives and people from different walks of life thronged his residence to pay their last respects to the departed soul.

Born in Patnagarh town, March 5, 1943, he started his political career in 1962 as a Seva Dal organiser. He unsuccessfully contested the Assembly Elections on an Utkal Congress ticket in 1972. In 1975, he was imprisoned during the emergency.

Meher was elected from Patnagarh Assembly constituency in 1977 and 1990. He became deputy chief whip in the Odisha Assembly in 1977.

Berhampur ITI unveils e-collection waste centre

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, April 18: An e-waste collection centre was inaugurated in the premises of Industrial Training Institute (ITI) here Saturday with principal Rajat Kumar Panigrahi being present as chief guest. Panigrahi said that the centre will be used to recycle defunct and unused electronic items of daily use. Usually these wastes are burnt but that can have horrible impact on environment and on health. Moreover, these wastes take the shape of a hill if they are dumped at one place without recycling them, he added.

The centre is aimed at raising awareness on e-waste recycling them and creating new usable items.

Man gifts lunar land to wife on birthday

POST NEWS NETWORK

Dhenkanal, April 18: Love knows no bound, love leads to innovation. Well this can be said about the man from Dhenkanal district who gifted a patch of land on the moon to his wife Nazia on her birthday, Saturday. According to a source, Mohammad Sajjan, an engineer by profession, purchased five acres of land on the moon.

"I had planned a unique birthday present to my wife and purchased the land after filing an application with the Lunar Society International. I am happy that the proceeds collected from the land deal will be used by NASA for child welfare," a delighted Sajjan said Sunday.



"I did not believe that my husband will go to this extent to surprise me. I am extremely happy and excited," Nazia said.

Notably, the engineer had to spend USD 519, amounting to Rs 38,000 approximately, for buying five acres of land on moon.

Ganjam officials told to stay in district

WORRIED OVER COVID SPREAD, COLLECTOR WARNS OF STERN ACTION AGAINST ERRANT OFFICIALS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur, April 18: As Covid-19 cases are spiraling fast in Ganjam district, the administration has directed all officials to stay at their headquarters. Collector, Vijay Amruta Kulange has issued a directive in this regard Sunday. In the directive, the Kulange said that



no officials will leave their positions at the headquarters without his permission.

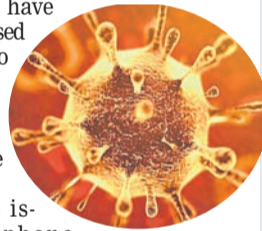
Kulange expressed concern over the rising cases of Covid-19. He said that amid this crisis, some officials have reportedly visited Bhubaneswar and Cuttack on weekends and other holidays for their personal work. He pointed out that officials are not attending their duties in a proper manner as they are going out of the district.

Unnecessary visits of officials to other places can also lead to the spread of Covid-19 in the district, he pointed out.

"In cases of absolute necessity, officials need to take recommendation letters of their departmental heads and the Collector. In case of violation of the order, stern action will be taken against the officials," warned Kulange.

Officials of all departments have been asked to strictly follow the instruction.

People have been advised not to go to office for their work. The Collector has also issued a phone number (9437563800) for people seeking to redress their official works. Since Saturday, night curfew has been imposed in 18 urban areas in the district.



8 PANCHAYATS IN SUNDARGARH SHUT DOWN

BADAGAON: Covid-19 positive cases have been fast increasing in all the panchayats under Badagaon block in Sundargarh district. Hence the administration declared Saturday shutdown in eight panchayats to prevent the spread of the pandemic. The panchayats where the shutdown has been implemented are Badagon, Itama, Tudalanga, Sahajbahal, Pamara, Bhoipalli, Barangakanthar and Raidihi. Pamara and Bhoipalli have en-

forced the shutdown from April 19 till April 21 while Barangakanthar is observing shutdown was from Sunday itself. It will continue till Tuesday. Meanwhile, 523 persons have been identified as Covid-19 positive in Sundargarh district during last 24 hours as the disease continues to spread its tentacles in the district.

The rapid spread of the disease has refused to abate in the district which is on the fringes of Jharkhand.

Chandahandi block to shut down for 5 days from today



NABARANGPUR: With the Covid-19 situation worsening in Nabarangpur district, and more in Chandahandi block, the administration has declared a five-day shutdown. The shutdown will be imposed from April 19. The Chandahandi block is very close to the border with Chhattisgarh.

The administration is worried as there are close to 50 roads connecting the block with the neighbouring state. Since the residents of the block have social contacts with people in Chhattisgarh, they frequently criss-cross between the two states.

Keeping this in view, the traders asked the district administration to enforce shutdown in the block to check the spread of virus. To force the administration into action, the traders have kept their shops shut this weekend.

Officials of the block adminis-

tration then consulted their higher-up counterparts before accepting the demand made by the traders. Nabarangpur district reported 81 new cases of COVID-19 Sunday.

BATTLE AGAINST COVID-19



With this, the district's caseload has gone to 6,701. Of them, 5,966 have recovered from the disease while 719 persons are currently undergoing treatment.

Machines snatch job card holders' work

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhadrak, April 18: Both the Central and the state governments have harped on the importance of effective implementation of MGNREGS projects in rural areas so that manual job opportunities can be created for migrants returning home and the rural populace during Covid-19 times.

But at many places of Bhadrak district machines are being used in MGNREGS projects while job card holders have been ignored.

Sadly, this concern of the government has allegedly been ignored during execution of projects in Baripada area. It has been alleged that when people bring these anomalies to the notice of the administration, concerned officials tactically remove data of the project from the websites.

According to reports, Rs 5,00,000 was sanctioned for renovation and beautification of the Baripada pond in 2020-21. The plaque (No 241001031) says that the work on the project was started by the concerned panchayat March 23.

However, the contractor who executed the work engaged machines instead of daily wagers. Some locals had taken pictures of the work and had drawn attention of the district administration through Twitter. Immediately after the post, all the data related to the project were removed from the website while information on the plaque was whitewashed, it has been alleged.

On the other hand, scores of local people have been facing shortage of work. Thus, they were deprived of their rights. Villagers

have demanded an impartial probe into the allegation and stern action against those who were involved in the pond project.

They pointed out that scores of labourers are sitting idle for want of work in the area. So such blatant violations of MGNREGS rules should be disciplined accordingly.

The villagers observed that use of machines has affected the scope of earning of the poor people in the area who depend on MGNREGS for their livelihood. There were instances of machines being used and fake rosters of workers being made MGNREGA work in the past. "A lot of workers do not get the work and wages they deserve. If machines are allowed for the work, it would only benefit the contractors," they noted.

As for the project, Bhadrak BDO said that it has not been approved by the block administration.

However, locals wondered how can a project be executed without proper approval. They asked as to why a plaque was put up near the MGNREGS project with a certain number. Asked about this issue, PD Madhusudan Das had earlier said that the allegation will be probed by the executive engineer. Bhadrak BDO had been asked to submit an investigation report to the administration, Das added.

Meanwhile, ombudsman in charge of MGNREGS project Lalita Sahu has conducted an investigation into the allegation. She talked to the panchayat executive officer, the GRS and the complainant in this regard. She said she would soon be submitting a report to the collector.

MGNREGS MESS

Outside traders lure kendu leaf pluckers

POST NEWS NETWORK

Malkangiri, April 18: Kendu leaf collection and selling is a major source of livelihood for many tribals in Malkangiri district. This year, production of kendu leaves has increased in comparison to that of the previous year.

Now, traders from other states and districts are camping to buy kendu leaves at throwaway prices. Many feel that in the process, the ignorant tribals will be deprived of the actual value of their produces.

The government has made provisions of kendu leaf procurement at the panchayat level. Before selling kendu leaves, the plucker need to register themselves.

According to reports, no kendu leaf plucker has done registration in Korukunda and Chitrakonda block. Sixty one of them have registered in Kalimela block; 22 in Khairiput; 24 in Padia; 24 in Malkangiri and 33 in Mathili block.



TRIBALS ON TARGET

As per guidelines, registration is done in the areas where they are supposed to pluck leaves. However, in some cases, tribals have been plucking leaves outside their respective areas.

Besides, nobody can buy or procure kendu leaves without licences. If case of violations, local sarpanch,

pachayat executive officers and BDOs will be held responsible. The government has made some provisions to ensure that pluckers get the right price, leaf plucking and collection go smoothly amid Covid curbs. There has been provision of leaf stocking at godowns and maintenance of accounts of

As per guidelines, registration of leaf pluckers is done in areas where they are supposed to work. However, in many cases, tribals have been plucking leaves outside their respective zones

leaf stock and sales. In Korukunda and Chitrakonda, no agency has registered for leaf procurement. In these two areas, people outside the district have been collecting leaves, it was alleged. The kendu leaf division has set up 780 stocking and procurement points in six ranges.

Locals demanded that action should be taken against traders procuring leaves illegally.

PANDEMIC WOES



Rapid spread of Covid-19 has severely hit smalltime businesses as a vendor selling bamboowares awaits customers at Paramanpur village under Atabira block in Bargarh district, Sunday

OP PHOTO



Be grateful for all ordeals they are the shortest way to the Divine.

THE MOTHER

ASEAN & Myanmar Crisis

The credibility of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will be tested on April 24 when leaders of all the 10 countries of the bloc will meet in Jakarta to tackle the crisis arising out of the military coup in Myanmar on February 1 and the bloody repression by the junta on the country's pro-democracy supporters. The head of the junta General Min Aung Hlaing is also scheduled to attend the mini-summit.

It was President Joko Widodo of Indonesia who initiated the move after an informal meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers on March 19 which issued an appeal to the junta to stop the violence that fell on deaf ears. Widodo's proposal for the mini-summit was supported by China and Russia, signalling ASEAN's greater role in coordinating a response to the grim situation threatening regional stability. Both the countries are veto-wielding members of the United Nations Security Council that previously blocked a call for sanctions against Myanmar's post-coup regime.

With chaos gripping Myanmar, the country is facing a bleak future. It embraced a hybrid democracy in which the military had a considerable say in the country's constitutional mechanism. It was taking baby steps to become a democratic nation under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi whose party National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in the 2020 November election, trouncing the party propped up by the junta.

While the USA, Australia and European countries have taken tough measures by way of sanctions against the junta following the coup, India's position has been ambivalent. It has stopped short of calling the military takeover a coup and even attended a military parade in Myanmar's capital city Naypyitaw on March 27 to mark Tatmadaw Day. Myanmar's military is called Tatmadaw.

Australia has suspended military cooperation with the Myanmar military and the Joe Biden administration has implemented a broad range of targeted sanctions against the junta and many of its businesses. Taiwan, which has significant investments in the country, has passed a parliamentary motion condemning the situation in Myanmar and called on the junta to restore democracy.

Southeast Asian states, which have some of the greatest leverage over Naypyitaw, are among the most to lose if Myanmar becomes unstable, with refugees flowing out of the country and conflicts spanning borders. But, they have, so far, done little to defuse the crisis. Many regional states have remained silent on the coup and the atrocities. The junta has sought to quell the anti-coup movement with lethal force, killing more than 720 people and detaining some 3,100 activists, journalists and dissidents, according to a local monitoring group. Hundreds have crossed the international border to take refuge in Mizoram. The state government immediately received the fleeing pro-democracy supporters and security personnel facing crackdown for ethnic affinities. Chief Minister Zoramthanga has called the military persecution a grave humanitarian crisis. The BJP government at the Centre is, however, doing diplomatic tightrope walking issuing directives to the bordering states to push back the people from Myanmar seeking shelter. India doesn't want to antagonise the junta fearing the latter may stop continuing to support efforts to contain insurgents operating from across the border.

The increasingly brutal and violent crackdown on the anti-coup protest movement triggered a chorus of international condemnation mounting pressure on ASEAN to take a leading role in addressing the crisis. The European Union is learnt to have agreed to impose sanctions on a fresh batch of 10 individuals linked to the coup and the ensuing crackdowns, along with the two large military-run conglomerates - Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) and Myanmar Economic Corporation - that have already been targeted by the United Kingdom and the United States. South Korean steel manufacturer POSCO also announced that it was severing its business ties with MEHL, becoming the latest foreign firm to reconsider its presence in Myanmar in the wake of the post-coup violence.

Myanmar has laid bare the ASEAN's shortcomings, threatening its much publicised claim to "centrality" in the region's diplomacy. The fact that it is holding a meeting over two months after the coup is being construed by some observers as a tacit admission of this inherent weakness of the bloc.

Even so, there are misgivings about any tangible outcome emerging out of the special meeting. This is partly due to the ASEAN's current structure and operating principles, which prize consensus above all else. Such a consensus is likely to elude the bloc in the case of Myanmar, as several individual ASEAN member states still insist on treating the crisis as the nation's own "internal affair." It must be added that an organisation like ASEAN, perforce, has to operate under the basic guideline umbrella of consensus. Without a united opinion, none of the member countries enjoy the economic and military strength to enforce a fragmented view.

When ASEAN foreign ministers met by video link to discuss the coup at the beginning of March, the resultant joint statement was disappointing. It failed to mention Myanmar until the eighth of the ten points contained in the statement. However, ASEAN's most important advantage is its potential ability to bring both sides to the negotiating table. But, if neither side is interested in negotiating, the other nine Southeast Asian nations can't do much about it. The mini-summit may end up according legitimacy to the coup for the willingness of the bloc to sit down with General Hlaing.

WORDSWORTH

Mononymous

If you are mononymous, you have become well known by one name only. Like Napoleon, Shakespeare, Einstein, Morrissey, Pelé or Cher. The parade of mononyms on the pop chart is getting monotonous: Beyoncé, Pink, Adele, Rihanna, Duffy, Akon, Usher, Mims, Eminem, Seal, Brandy, Joe et al. Estelle knows how to set herself apart from [the] mononymous pack. She put on a terrific show Friday at First Avenue in Minneapolis, one that suggested that she's the best all-around mononym to come along since Beyoncé (The Star Tribune, Minneapolis, 1 March 2009). Occasionally, the word is used to refer to sole authorship of a work, particularly in cases in which the hidden contribution of a collaborator is suspected. A famous case is the periodical Household Words: "The periodical is anonymous throughout," remonstrated Dickens, one day, when he had been suggesting to Mr. Jerrold to write for it. "Yes," replied the caustic wit, opening a number, and reading the title, "Conducted by Charles Dickens." I see it is — mononymous throughout" (The Life and Writings of Charles Dickens, by Phebe A Hanaford, 1871). The ending -onymous includes the Greek suffix -onym (from onoma, name), plus the Latin-derived adjectival ending -ous. Some words in -onyms are well known: anonymous, eponymous, pseudonymous and synonymous.

LOL

Get me off this train

One day a man took the train from Paris to Frankfurt. When he got in he said to the ticket man: "Sir, I really need you to do me a favour, I have to get down this train in Mannheim, but I'm very tired and it is for sure that I will fall asleep. So what I want you to do is that you wake me up in Mannheim. Here you have 100 francs for the favour. But I warn you sometimes when people wake me up I get really violent, but no matters what I do or say you got to get me out of this train in Mannheim. Is that clear?" So the ticket man agreed and took the 100 francs. Later as the man



had said he fell asleep, and when he woke up he realised

that he was in Frankfurt. He was so mad at the ticket man that he ran over and started yelling at him. "Are you stupid or something??? I paid you 100 francs so that you wake me up in Mannheim. And you didn't, so I want my money back!" While the man was yelling at the ticket guy, two other guys that were also in the train were looking at them, so one turns to the other and says to him: Man 1: "Look at this guy! He is mad!" Man 2: "Yeah! He's almost as mad as the guy they made get out of the train in Mannheim."

FOCUS POLITICS

ONE-NATION, ONE-PARTY



Anita Saluja

THE INCUMBENT GOVERNMENTS SHOULD LEARN A LESSON, LEST THE DAY IS NOT FAR-OFF WHEN THE BJP AGENDA OF ONE-NATION, ONE-PARTY WILL BE FULFILLED

India finally moving towards One-Nation, One-Party concept, much like the One-Nation, One-Election or the One-Nation, One-Ration Card? Slowly and steadily, the BJP is wresting power from the Opposition in almost the entire country, except those couple of states, where there is dominance of powerful leaders, who have made a name for themselves. Take the case of Amarinder Singh in Punjab or Naveen Patnaik in Odisha, it will not be easy to defeat them, but, who knows, if they will be the next target of the BJP, just like Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal!

Banerjee, at one time, seemed to be an invincible leader. The fighter in her had the ability to take head-on all her rivals, but this time round, it seems that she has been completely isolated. The BJP has succeeded in scaring her to such an extent that she seems to be nervous, vulnerable and defensive. Though she is still giving a tough fight, she is no match to the BJP's central leadership, having all the resources and power at its command. She may, or may not, be trounced, but surely the seats tally of TMC will come down drastically.

Where is the Opposition? Didi is to be blamed for not having the Congress on her side. At least, they would have kept-up the morale of the Bengal Chief Minister, if not adding seats to her kitty. But no, she went alone to fight the BJP, thinking that she, with her magic wand, could easily wipe out the strong presence of the duo - Narendra Modi and Amit Shah - from Bengal.

Though she has the moral support of RJD's Tejaswi Yadav and NCP's Sharad Pawar; it would have been much better if all regional satraps like SP's Akhilesh Yadav and BSP's Mayawati could have joined hands for the cause of Banerjee. Rallying all these leaders against the BJP would have made a difference for sure. For all non-BJP parties, it was difficult to choose between the Left-Congress combine and the TMC, but coming to the battlefield without any strategy can only be the hallmark of these parties.

The BJP, however, plans its election strategy two to three years in



Modi has not hidden his ambition of a Congress-Mukt Bharat. Slowly and gradually, he is moving towards his goal, decimating the 134-year-old party

back just because they had failed to deliver in keeping with the people's aspirations.

Modi has not hidden his ambition of a Congress-Mukt Bharat. Slowly and gradually, he is moving towards his goal, decimating the 134-year-old party. Whether it is Assam, Kerala or Pondicherry in none of the states one can be sure of Congress victory. Blame lies with the Congress leadership for its inability to impress the people.

Why only Congress? Even parties like SP, BSP and the Left have failed to expand their political footprint in the country. Where the BJP failed to make a mark, the regional parties like YSRCP in Andhra Pradesh and TRS in Telangana succeeded in forming their governments. What to talk about Naveen Patnaik, who single-handedly, through his popular freebies, has halted the entry of any national party in his state. The BJP has not set its sights on Odisha yet as Patnaik comes to their rescue in Parliament whenever the need arises. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu one of the regional parties, DMK or AIADMK, is always there to support them.

Having defeated the Congress in 2014 and 2019 at the Centre and having wrested several state governments from it, the BJP satraps

advance. BJP central leader Kailash Vijayvargiya has been stationed in the state for a couple of years, while frequent visits were made by the top-brass like Amit Shah and JP Nadda. An atmosphere in favour of the BJP is visible in the state, amid the chants of Jai Shree Ram.

Accusing the BJP always of polarisation would not help the Opposition to sway votes in its favour. All political parties, in fact, are emulating the BJP to this effect by wooing the majority and minority votes by their frequent visits to temples and mosques. Instead of revealing their Gotra or claiming to be Janneuhari, the parties should start concentrating on development measures and welfare of people.

Polarisation plays an important part in any election, but it cannot influence more than 40 to 50 per cent of a community's votes. For others, it's the work and performance of the incumbent government towards the development goals in the state which really matters.

Didi's report card, as per reports, is unimpressive on all parameters of development, the reason why the BJP has succeeded in making inroads into her stronghold. In fact, Didi, too, had frontloaded the 34-year-old Left Front government in its bastion a decade

where eyeing Bengal, which sends 42 MPs to Parliament. In the assembly of 294 seats, the BJP is aiming to secure 200 seats. From 2 seats, even if they increase the tally to three digits, it will help them to dig in their shoes in the state.

Agreed that Banerjee is a street-fighter; is strong enough to protect herself from the onslaught of the Opposition, but hurling invectives alone or delivering political counters is not a qualification in itself. Whether it is Didi or Dada, Bhatija or Bua, everyone has to deliver in the end, if he/she wants to continue to govern.

For Didi, the die is not yet cast, but everyone is aware that she is batting on a weak wicket. The reason is not that she did not play the Hindu Card successfully, or failed to counter BJP in arguments. She will, however, be blamed for bad governance, nepotism and for graft charges against her nephew and the syndicate.

The Opposition, the BJP in her case, can harm you only to some extent, but if your track-record is dismal, no one can save you. Your own loyalists will desert you and look for greener pastures. Senior leaders like Mukul Roy and Suwendu Adhikari left Mamata, as her nephew Abhishek Banerjee started calling the shots in the party through remote-control.

If your own party is strong and your performance is above board, no one can create fissures in it. Come May 2, we will know the fate of Mamata in Bengal and of Congress in Assam, where the BJP is in a straight fight. While Mamata is panicking, so is the Congress, which has kept its Assam MLA candidates in a hotel for fear of poaching. This may be a wise move, but can any other party dream of poaching the BJP MLAs? No, simply because the party is strong and is growing. It is high-time the Opposition learns lessons from the BJP and performs, instead of crying hoarse from the roof-tops. The incumbent governments should learn a lesson, lest the day is not far-off when the BJP agenda of One-Nation, One-Party will be fulfilled.

The writer is a senior journalist and political commentator based in Delhi.

SPECTRUM PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Time for quick decision on vax approval



Nikunja Bihari Sahu

THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN LATE TO DECIDE ON GIVING APPROVALS TO FOREIGN VACCINES AND THAT TO AT A TIME WHEN THE COUNTRY IS FACING AN ACUTE SHORTAGE OF VACCINES

In view of augmenting the shortfall of Covid-19 vaccines in the country at a time when the second wave of the pandemic is sweeping the world, the government is considering emergency approvals to some known foreign vaccines for entry into Indian market. Accordingly, vaccines cleared for use in the US, the UK, the EU and Japan or under WHO's emergency use listing will get fast-track approval in India potentially boosting the country's pandemic response and to fulfill its commitment of 'Vaccine for All' programme. If everything goes well, three vaccines made by Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson may enter Indian market soon for emergency use.

As per the recent recommendation of the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVAC), the vaccines approved by the reputed regulatory authorities of the world may be included in the country's vaccination programme skipping the local clinical trial phases and only adhering to the bridging clinical trials as per the provisions of

the Second Schedule of the New Drugs and Clinical Trial Rules-2019. As a pre-condition, the first 100 beneficiaries of such foreign vaccines shall be assessed for seven days of observation for safety outcomes before further immunisation takes place within the country.

India, the world's biggest maker of vaccines, has so far approved the Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield and Bharat Biotech's homegrown Covaxin doses for which the national vaccination has already commenced since January 16. A third vaccine, Sputnik V made by Russia's Gamaleya Institute, was also approved recently and a group of five Indian pharmaceutical companies has entered into contracts to produce the doses in India. Dr Reddy's Lab has the rights for distribution of the first 100 million doses in India of which early doses are expected to be available by the end of April.

Though India was the fastest in the world to vaccinate 100 million people, concerns have been mounting whether there are adequate supplies in the country to meet the

requirements of its vast population. While the daily production of the two Indian vaccines is around 25 lakh doses, the daily demand for vaccines in the country is around 32 lakhs. An estimated 85 crore doses of the Russian vaccine are expected to roll out per year once the production starts and the vaccine has been found to be 91.6 per cent effective against symptomatic Covid-19 patients. Hence, the approval to the Russian vaccine is going to be a game changer in the Indian scenario and expected to bridge the gap of vaccine production and demand in the country in days to come.

However, the government has been late enough to decide giving approvals to the entry of foreign vaccines in India and that to at a time when the country is facing acute shortage of vaccines and many of the inoculation centres in rural India are facing the risk of closure due to non-supply of doses. Pfizer had approached India for approval since last December and even the company was ready to supply the Cold Box to store the vaccine at -70 degrees C. But the Indian govern-

ment denied approval at that time on the ground of the non-feasibility of this low temperature conditions in Indian conditions to keep its cold chain going. Now, the question is whether a monitoring of only seven days in the post vaccination period to a limited number of people is sufficient to judge the safety of these vaccines in a surging pandemic. Similarly, the decision in favour of the Russian vaccine also appears to be sluggish although 59 countries around the world had already accorded emergency approvals since its introduction in last August in view of its high efficacy rate of around 92 per cent (in contrast to Covaxin 82 per cent and Covishield 80 per cent) and for the fact that its storage is quite easy at 2 to 8 degrees C making it very much suitable for Indian supply chain conditions. An early decision in this regard by the government might have prevented the worsening situation prevailing today.

The writer is Education Officer, Regional Science Centre, Bhopal.

Letters

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

OrissaPOST
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Zero preparation
Sir, Apropos the news item "State faces acute vax shortage; 1,073 sites shut", Orissa POST, April 18, the national health scenario fraught with accelerating Covid infections and disproportionate healthcare infrastructure - failing to handle the second wave is grim. It yet again exposed the spectacular unpreparedness and weakness in our creaky healthcare system. The deficiencies beginning with the non-availability of hospital beds - stretching into space shortage in graveyards and crematoriums has brought us back to square one. It is not as if the unexpected has happened. Global experience shows that second wave - more infectious and vicious than the first - was to be expected. The government itself made much of the fact that India is the vaccine capital of the world. What then led to the deplorable condition that when we needed the vaccine the most, they are in short supply? There is shortage, too, of oxygen, ventilators and testing kits. While it is true that the demand has gone up exponentially, a wise government would have prepared for the demand in anticipation of the inevitable by increasing production and capacity prior to the second wave hitting us. The administrative listlessness of the government can be seen in its inability to take stern measures in the face of the second wave. Why else would have permission been given to Kumbh Mela celebrations in Haridwar where some 40 lakh devotees took the plunge in the Ganga? How can the administration turn a blind eye to the flouting of Covid norms in state assembly election campaigns? The people pay the price for lapses and laxity of the government.

RIP Vivekanandan
Sir, It is unbelievable and shocking to note that our Tamil actor Vivek is no more. His unfortunate and sudden demise has descended on his fans, family and well-wishers like a pall of gloom. Like others, I too was thinking that he would recover from his medical condition. But the curse of death had a different plan taking his beautiful life at once. As an emotional person, I had literally let this statement run through my mind: "Let death die one day!" He has left a strong and beautiful message about the corona pandemic. Vivek had publicly stressed the need for following COVID protocols like wearing a mask just before his cardiac arrest. As a good environmentalist, he had been campaigning for planting saplings and saving trees until before his death. All his Tamil movies have strong social messages. Still, Vivek will live on through his movies and inspiring green activities.

P. Senthil Saravana Durai, MUMBAI

Beds fall short as cases surge in Guj

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, April 18: Gujarat Deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel Sunday admitted that the present requirement of beds and other healthcare facilities in the wake of the spike in coronavirus cases is more than the state administration's capacity.

Patel, who handles health portfolio, said though the state government is adding more facilities and beds at regular intervals to accommodate more patients, it fell short of demand.

"Over 9,000 new coronavirus cases are emerging in Gujarat everyday. Though we are adding new facilities and beds at regular intervals, it falls short against the demand as the inflow of coronavirus patients is much higher," Patel told reporters at a civil hospital campus here.

"Requirement for beds and other healthcare facilities in the present situation is higher than the health department and administration's capacity. In



Health workers move a stable patient to another hospital to make space for critical COVID-19 patients, at Government Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad, Sunday. PTI PHOTO

Over 9,000 new coronavirus cases are emerging in Gujarat everyday. Though we are adding new facilities and beds at regular intervals, it falls short against the demand as the inflow of coronavirus patients is much higher
NITIN PATEL | DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

view of the spike in cases, we are adding more beds to accommodate the patients," he said. Commenting on the long queue of ambulances carrying coronavirus patients outside the

civil hospital, Patel said it is the government's obligation to save each and every patient turned away by other hospitals. "Long queues happen because other hospitals refuse to admit patients. Such patients then come to us for treatment. Such queues are not a pleasant sight, but it is our obligation to save each and every pa-

tient. Till they are admitted in the hospital, till they are in ambulance, we try to keep them alive by giving oxygen," he added. Gujarat reported as many as 9,541 coronavirus cases and 97 deaths Saturday, the highest one-day case count and death toll for the state since the pandemic began.

Pharma firm executive held for black marketing of Remdesivir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Valsad (Guj), April 18: A top executive of a Daman-based pharmaceutical company and his aide have been arrested from Valsad district in Gujarat for allegedly black marketing Remdesivir drug, which is in high demand for the treatment of COVID-19 patients, police said Sunday.

The arrested duo is identified as Manish Singh, Technical Director of Daman-based Bruck Pharma, and his acquaintance Varun Kundra, who owns a furniture shop in Daman, said Valsad district superintendent of police Rajdeepsinh Zala.

They were arrested from Vapi town in Valsad district April 15 and 18 vials of Remdesivir injections were recovered from them, he said. Notably, Mumbai Police Saturday night questioned Bruck Pharma director Rajesh Dokania on information that at least 60,000 Remdesivir vials are being exported through air cargo, despite a ban on the export of the drug.

"Acting on a specific tip-off, Valsad police set up a trap after learning that Varun Kundra was selling Remdesivir injections at a very high price without any license.



"When one of our policemen approached Kundra posing as a relative of a patient, he agreed to sell one injection for Rs 12,000 and 12 injections for Rs 1.44 lakh. As soon as he showed one vial, other police personnel caught him. Kundra claimed that he purchased the drug from his friend Manish Singh," said Zala.

Kundra was then told to call Singh, a resident of Vapi, to the spot with six more vials of the injection for a customer, he said.

"Singh was caught with six injections as soon as he reached the spot," the SP said.

As per the preliminary investigation, Singh came in contact with Kundra when the former had visited his shop to purchase some furniture recently.

"Bruck Pharma has the license to manufacture and export Remdesivir injections," said Zala.

Since Remdesivir is in high demand, Kundra planned to earn a quick buck and acquired 12 injections from Singh which he planned to sell at a price much higher than the MRP, the police officer said.

"Singh did not have any license or doctor's prescription to sell or store Remdesivir injections. He had also planned to sell those six injections for profit. We arrested both the accused and recovered 18 vials," said Zala.

A case has been registered on the charge of cheating and other sections of the Essential Commodities Act, the Disaster Management Act, and the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, he added.

Raj slashes RT-PCR rates to ₹350

AGENCIES

Jaipur, April 18: The Rajasthan government has fixed the rate for RT-PCR diagnostic tests for Covid-19 conducted by private laboratories at Rs 350, slashing it by Rs 150 from the earlier rate of Rs 500 per test.

As per the orders issued state Health Secretary Siddharth Mahajan, "The new rate for RT-PCR diagnostic tests for Covid-19 infections has been fixed at Rs 350 with immediate effect."

The decision was taken after a

high-level meeting chaired by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot.

Forty-two more people died from coronavirus in Rajasthan Sunday as a record 10,514 cases surfaced, the highest so far since the outbreak of the pandemic in the state last year.

The infection has killed 3,151 people in Rajasthan, which has reported 4,14,869 infections so far, according to a health bulletin.

Meanwhile, shops and offices, except those dealing in essential services, remained closed due to a weekend curfew imposed by the

state government to check the coronavirus spread.

Two Congress MLAs—Amin Kagzi and Krishna Poonia—too tested positive for the virus. Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot wished them speedy recovery.

With fresh infections, the number of active cases in the state stood at 67,387, the bulletin said.

Of the 42 deaths Sunday, 13 were reported in Kota, seven in Jodhpur, four each in Jaipur and Udaipur, three in Bikaner, two each in Alwar and Churu, one each in Bharatpur, Dausa, Dungarpur, Ganganagar, Nagaur, Rajsamand and Sikar.

The maximum 1,963 infections surfaced in Jaipur, 1,695 in Jodhpur, 1,116 in Kota, 1,001 in Udaipur, 550 in Bhilwara, 546 in Alwar, 350 each in Ajmer and Bundi, 330 in Bikaner, 201 in Dungarpur and 197 in Sikar.

According to the bulletin, 3,084 more patients recovered from the infection in the state, taking the number of cured people to 3,44,331.



City streets near the Hawa Mahal wear a deserted look during weekend lockdown, imposed to curb the ongoing surge in coronavirus cases, at Badi Chaupar in Jaipur, Sunday. PTI PHOTO

'Medicine at your doorsteps' in this Rajasthan town

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, April 18: Amid the alarming spurt in the number of Covid-19 cases across the country, a small town in Rajasthan has set up an example by launching a 'medicine at your doorsteps' initiative under which the police, the administration, the local councillors and many other entities are working together to ensure those needing medical help get it at their doorsteps.

The project was launched in Dungarpur in the southernmost part of Rajasthan April 13 with the initiative of District Collector Suresh Ola, said Chief Medical Health Officer (CMHO) Rajesh Sharma.

The medicines are being provided to patients in different households suffering from serious ailments, seasonal disease, pregnancy related issues and so on, Sharma said. Besides medicines, hand gloves, medicines, sanitisers etc. are also being provided to the people at their doorsteps.

"Our team is available round the clock to serve the needy. We are serving them even during the night hours," he said.

The project has been a hit in the Dungarpur municipality area, following which it was started in the Sagwara municipality too, Sharma said. "With the number of Covid cases growing on a daily basis, we formed a team by roping in nursing students, private institutes, ANM workers, urban bodies and so on. We have also formed a WhatsApp group where the local councillors raise demands which



the collectors and the SP, who are also the group admins, take forward. We try to resolve the problems on the same day without causing any delay," he said.

"Looking at our initiative, Health Secretary Siddharth Mahajan said in a video conference that other cities should also follow our model. Cities like Banswara and Udaipur have already started similar initiatives," Sharma added.

District Collector Suresh Ola said that the second wave of Covid-19 has posed many challenges across the nation, with seasonal diseases making the matters worse.

"Those with comorbidities are frightened to visit the hospitals. They also face threat from the high-risk patients. Hence we launched this model by joining hands with the municipal teams and the medical department," Ola said. Under this initiative, a total of 22,724 members have been tested in 4,858 houses while 655 people have been given medicine kits, he added.

Desert salt farmers feel the heat from climate change

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Ahmedabad, April 18: Roshni Thakor left school to harvest salt from a sun-baked desert, a back-breaking trade practised by her ancestors for centuries but now threatened by climate change.

For eight months every year, farmers toil in scorching heat to pump out briny water from hand-made wells in a sparse corner of western Gujarat state.

A tonne of the resulting salt crystals fetches the meagre sum of Rs 300, but unpredictable rain-

fall, rising temperatures and frequent dust storms have slashed yields, and made it harder for Thakor and her family. "It's getting hotter and hotter here. My eyes burn and I often feel dizzy and sick," the 20-year-old told AFP, as her mother prepared tea over a wooden stove. Erratic weather has brought mounting losses for her family, but her father Raju says they must keep trying to eke out a living from their four salt pans. "I have no choice but to keep working here as I don't own any agricultural land. I don't have any other source of income," he said. India is the world's third-biggest producer of salt and nearly three-quarters of its annual output comes from Gujarat.

The Thakor family are among the tens of thousands of "Agariyas", or salt farmers, who spend most of the year living and working within the barren mudflats of the Thar Desert. They dig 50-foot wells with

shovels and their bare hands before using diesel pumps to direct water into large rectangular basins, where it evaporates and leaves salt crystals behind.

The work is both tedious and taxing. Farmers prepare the basins by stamping their bare feet to seal in the brine and stop it from seeping back into the earth, a process that leaves them vulnerable to painful foot infections.

'WE HAVE TO START ALL OVER'

Heat plays an important part in the process, with 24°C the optimal temperature for the formation of salt crystals, Raju said.

But climate change is making it harder to plan for the salt harvest and is delaying the onset of the farming season, in addition to bringing unbearable heat-waves to those working the desert lands. Deforestation and unplanned development have already trans-

formed India's monsoon season, with a recent government report warning that climate change was making rains unpredictable and more intense. "Salt production needs dry weather — if it rains suddenly, all our effort goes down the drain," said Raju Thakor. "The salt dissolves and we have to start all over again." The same government report warned that India faced a 4.4-degree rise in average temperatures by the end of the century.

Dhvanit Pandya, who runs a local salt farmer advocacy group, says the mercury has already risen



This AFP file picture shows labourers working on a salt pan as the sun sets at the Little Rann of Kutch region near Kharaghoda village, some 150 km from Ahmedabad.

by that much in the Thar Desert over the past decade, with daytime maximums now sometimes topping 54°C. Dust storms are also rising in frequency, muddying the salt pans and cutting sale prices.

"The traders slash the price by half if the salt is not of good quality," Pandya said.

Pandya estimated that farmers were now losing a quarter of their harvest each year because of sharp changes in weather patterns, pushing many families towards poverty.

'WE CAN BARELY MAKE ENDS MEET'

tors have farmed salt in the region for more than 500 years.

Their homes in the Gujarati desert, far from the state's population centres, are not connected to the electricity grid.

Fresh water in the desert is scarce, and the community's children spend most of the year out of school. A government initiative launched nearly a decade ago helped some salt farmers replace their diesel pumps with solar-powered motors to help lower their production costs. Pandya has credited the scheme with helping "slowly but surely" improve livelihoods.

The desert community is tight-knit, communicating across distances outside of shouting range by using mirrors to flash reflected sunlight at faraway shacks.

Most farmers there say they don't want to give up their trade, but acknowledge the work is becoming more difficult as the weather changes. Tejal Makwana told AFP she used to save nearly US\$700 from each farming season — more than enough to provide for her family for the rest of the year.

"But now we can barely make ends meet," she added. AFP



Heartfelt gratitude to Railway Minister, Piyush Goyal, who has given consent to run the Oxygen Express at the time of this crisis on the request of Madhya Pradesh

SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN | MADHYA PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER

24 HOURS CAMPAIGN BAN ON BJP'S SAYANTAN, TMC'S SUJATA

The Election Commission of India (ECI) Sunday banned BJP leader Sayantan Basu and Trinamool Congress leader Sujata Mondal from campaigning for 24 hours for their recent comments. The ban is effective from 7 p.m. Sunday to 7 p.m. Monday



of the day quote

I urge the people to follow COVID SOPs and extend their cooperation with the Corona Warriors in this fight against the deadly virus

MANOJ SINHA | JAMMU AND KASHMIR LT GOVERNOR



The development of Mansar Lake will become a model of development and will open more avenues for holistic development of the area, besides generating more employment opportunities for locals

JITENDRA SINGH | UNION MINISTER



The government offices with one-third strength will function only till 5 pm while shops/mandis/business establishments will be closed at 6 pm, an hour earlier than what was decided last week

NITISH KUMAR | BIHAR CHIEF MINISTER



Capital under Covid blanket

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 18: India's capital New Delhi recorded 25,500 coronavirus cases in a 24-hour period, with about one in three people tested returning a positive result, its chief minister said, urging the federal government to provide more hospital beds to tackle the crisis.

Less than 100 critical care beds were available in the city of more than 20 million people, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said Sunday, as social media was flooded with people complaining about lack of beds, oxygen cylinders and drugs.

"The bigger worry is that in last 24 hours positivity rate has increased to around 30% from 24%. The cases are rising very rapidly. The beds are filling fast," Kejriwal told a news briefing.

In a separate statement, the city government said it had informed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's federal administration about "the dire need of beds and oxygen" and beds were now being



A health worker inspects COVID-19 patients undergoing treatment at Shehna Banquet Hall, converted into an isolation centre

set up in schools. New Delhi, which has imposed a weekend curfew, is among the worst hit cities in India, where a second major wave of coronavirus infections is straining health infrastructure. Nationwide, India reported 261,500 new cases on

Sunday, taking the total number of cases to nearly 14.8 million, second only to the United States, which has reported more than 31 million infections. The country's deaths from COVID-19 rose by a record 1,501 to reach a total of 177,150. As cases rise across

Delhi govt files cases against 4 airlines

Cases have been filed against four airlines for failing to check the RT-PCR test reports of passengers arriving from Maharashtra, Delhi government sources said Sunday. These cases against the four airlines -- Vistara, Indigo, SpiceJet and Air Asia -- have been filed under the Disaster Management Act, they said. There was no immediate reaction available from the four airlines on the issue. The Delhi government had last week announced that it will be mandatory for anyone travelling to Delhi from Maharashtra to carry a negative RT-PCR report dated 72 hours prior to arrival. Travellers without a negative report will be placed in quarantine for a period of 14 days, it had said. "The cases have been registered against four airlines for not checking RT-PCR test reports of passengers coming to Delhi from Maharashtra," a Delhi government source said.

India, criticism is mounting over how Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration has handled the health crisis, as religious festivals and election rallies attended by thousands continue.

India's government relaxed almost all lockdown curbs of last year by the beginning of 2021, although some regions including New Delhi and the state of Maharashtra, home to financial hub Mumbai, have introduced localised restrictions. While

Mumbai remains under curfew on all days as per state guidelines, New Delhi has allowed cinema halls to operate at 30% capacity and people to move freely during weekdays.

"There is no option but to lockdown Delhi for 1-2 weeks," said Dr. Ambrish Mithal, a top doctor of endocrinology and diabetes at hospital operator Max Healthcare, adding that weekend curfews "won't do". "(The) situation is unmanageable at present," he said on Twitter.

AMERICAN EXPORT CONTROLS RISK INDIAN VACCINE PRODUCTION

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, April 18: Production lines in India, making at least 160 million doses of Covid vaccine a month, will come to a halt in the coming weeks unless America supplies 37 critical items, *The Economist* reported.

A report in *The Economist* said last week, the billionth dose of Covid-19 vaccine was produced.

It is a sign of how greatly manufacturing capacity has expanded over the past six months that the next billion doses could be produced by May 27th, according to Airfinity, an analytics firm. "Yet this ambition is at risk from American export controls on raw materials and equipment. Production lines in India, making at least 160 million doses of Covid vaccine a month, will come to a halt in the coming weeks unless America supplies 37 critical items," the report said.

Earlier, the world's largest vaccine maker, Serum Institute of India's (SII) Chief Executive Adar Poonawalla on Friday appealed to US President Joe Biden to lift the US embargo on exporting raw materials for Covid-19 vaccine production.

RAILWAYS TO RUN 'OXYGEN EXPRESS'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 18: The Railways will run 'Oxygen Express' trains over the next few days to transport liquid medical oxygen and oxygen cylinders across the country, the national transporter said Sunday.

Amid spiralling coronavirus cases in the country, the demand for medical oxygen in the country has gone through the roof. "Roll-on-Roll-off oxygen trucks getting loaded for Oxygen Express. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the Government of India is committed to doing everything possible to help COVID-19 patients," Railway Minister Piyush Goyal said in a tweet.

Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra state governments had earlier approached the Railways Ministry to explore whether liquid medical oxygen tankers could be moved by the rail network, officials said. On the receipt of the request from the two states, the Railways immediately explored

the technical feasibility of transportation of liquid medical oxygen. It has to be transported through roll-on-roll-off service with road tankers placed on flat wagons.

Empty tankers will begin their journey from Kalamboli and Boisar railway stations in and near Mumbai Monday to load liquid medical oxygen for Vizag, Jamshedpur, Rourkela and Bokaro

"Since the first empty tankers will move on April 19, we hope to begin operations of Oxygen Express over the next few days. We would be able to send oxygen wherever there is such demand. Green corridor is being created for fast movement of Oxygen Express trains," an official said.

A meeting was held between Railway Board officials and state transport commissioners and representatives of the industry on April 17 on issues related to transportation of liquid medical oxygen.

On April 18 a trial was organised by the Western Railway at Boisar where a loaded tanker was placed on a flat DBKM wagon and all the required measurements were taken.

The Railways have already placed DBKM wagons at Kalamboli and at other locations. The Railways is awaiting advice from Maharashtra to move the tankers.



How a holy river degenerated into sewage canal

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Agra/Mathura April 18: As Sri Krishna-Radha devotees in Braj Mandal celebrate the birthday of Yamuna Sunday, their hearts are filled with disgust and frustration to see the plight of the river, which is the life line of millions of people from Delhi to Agra.

Each day the faithfuls return from the ghats in Vrindavan and Mathura disappointed and hurt to see the Yamuna dying with pollutants and effluents that leave a trail of thick and toxic foam choking all forms of aqua life.

Pandit Jugal Kishor of the River Connect Campaign said, "Thousands of pilgrims who through the holy river feel miserably when they see the dismal condition of the Yamuna river, stinking and rotting with pollutants, dead fish and toxins flowing down from upstream industrial clusters in Delhi and Haryana."



Most go to take a holy dip or 'aachman' of the Yamuna, one of the holiest rivers of the Hindus, but the water of the river, which once Babar, the founder of the Mughal empire, described as 'better than nectar' fills them with disgust, said environmentalist Devashish Bhattacharya. The ghats along the

banks of the river are buried in polluted silt. In Vrindavan, the Yamuna today flows at least 30 metres away from the famous Keshi ghat. Yamuna faces two major problems, said Jagan Nath Poddar, convener of Friends of Vrindavan. "Lack of fresh water and high levels of pollution. Successive gov-

ernments have failed to address these issues. Without a minimum flow, particularly during the lean months, it is not possible to revive the river or to restore its pristine glory. Encroachments in the form of concrete structures on both sides are other issues," Poddar added.

On festivals when thousands of pilgrims visit the ghats after a darshan of Bankey Bihari in Vrindavan and a 'parikrama' of the holy Govardhan hill, the reaction is sharp and negative. "One hears only curses and abuses," said a local Panda Madhu Mangal Shukla.

In Mathura, the polluted effluents from hundreds of sari-dyeing units discharged in the river have only compounded the problem. After the construction of the Gokul Barrage, the river has distanced itself from the famous Gokul ghats. This obviously causes deep resentment and angry outbursts. "The water is not fit for a holy dip

or 'aachman'. Those who dare to enter the Yamuna downstream of Gokul Barrage return complaining of an itching and burning sensation," according to a 'panda' of Mahavan Radhey Guru.

Reduced to a pale, sickly drain, the glory and grandeur of the Yamuna that attracted the Mughals to build some of the finest monuments like the Taj Mahal, the Ram Bagh or the Fort and the Etamaduddaula along its banks will never return, lamented members of the River Connect Campaign who organised a low key birthday celebration of the Yamuna 'maiyya' at the Etamaduddaula view point park, in Agra Sunday morning.

Indeed, the dry and polluted river had turned into a sewage canal, despite tall promises by Modi, Yogi, Nitin Gadkari who had pompously announced ferry service for tourists from Delhi to Agra, Devashish Bhattacharya fumed.

RESTRICTIONS RETURN



Artists create awareness against spread of coronavirus, in Chennai

PTI PHOTO

8 states highly vulnerable to climate change, report says

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 18: Eight Indian states -- Jharkhand, Mizoram, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal -- are highly vulnerable to climate change, according to a national climate vulnerability assessment report.

These states, mostly in the eastern part of the country, require prioritisation of adaptation interventions, the report pointed out.

Lack of forest area per 100 rural population was found to be one of the major drivers of vulnerability for Assam despite the fact that the state has a forest cover of 42 per

cent, followed by low road density, the report said. In case of Bihar, the report cited poor health infrastructure to be the key vulnerability driver in 36 districts, followed by a high percentage of marginal and small operational holders in 24 districts.

The lack of implementation of the rural employment scheme MGNREGA, causing a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities, appeared as a key driver in 14 districts of Bihar, followed by a lack of women's participation in the workforce in 11 districts. Lack of crop insurance and rainfed agriculture were key drivers of vulnerability for Jharkhand. The re-

port, titled 'Climate Vulnerability Assessment for Adaptation Planning in India Using a Common Framework', which identifies the most vulnerable states and districts in India with respect to current climate risk and key drivers of vulnerability, was released by Department of Science and Technology (DST) Secretary Ashutosh Sharma.

Himachal Pradesh, Telangana, Sikkim and Punjab have been categorised as lower-middle vulnerable states. Uttarakhand, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Nagaland, Goa and Maharashtra have been categorised as states with low vulnerability.

STOP OXYGEN SUPPLY FOR INDUSTRIAL USE, HOME SECY TELLS STATES

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, April 18: Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla Sunday asked Chief Secretaries of states and administrators of Union Territories to issue necessary instructions to all authorities concerned to prohibit supply of oxygen for industrial purpose, except nine industries identified by the Union Health & Family Welfare Secretary.

"This is keeping in view the rapid rise in Covid-19 cases in



various parts of the country and the resultant rapid demand for medical oxygen, particularly in high-burden states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, etc," he said.

The letter follows the decision taken by the Centre, on the recommendations of the Empowered Group-II, that the supply of oxygen for industrial purposes by manufacturers and suppliers is prohibited (except in nine industries) forthwith from April 22 till further orders, so as to augment supply for medical oxygen in the country and to save precious lives.

national



In view of rapid increase in COVID-19 cases, universal vaccination is the need of the hour to protect lives
M K STALIN | DMK PRESIDENT

TEMPORARY JAILS AS QUARANTINE CENTRES

The Uttar Pradesh government is setting up temporary jails for keeping criminals, who are arrested or have surrendered, in quarantine till they test negative for Covid. This is being done to ensure that there is no spread of Covid among convicts and undertrials lodged in jails



of the day quote

Thank you Prime Minister for sparing a little time for Covid amidst the urgent war to conquer WEST BENGAL and annexe it to the BJP's empire
P CHIDAMBARAM | SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER

Modi demonstrating his role as a partisan party campaigner is more important than that of India's Prime Minister. That's why his priority is the election campaign, if any time is left, he does something perfunctory for TV images & headlines
SITARAM YECHURY | CPI(M) GENERAL SECRETARY

Looking at the deteriorating corona situation in the country, I want PM Modi to leave election management and start corona management. Elections will come and go, please save human lives first
RAGHAV CHADHA | AAM AADMI PARTY SPOKESPERSON

SHORT TAKES

Sharmila ends 72-hour fast

Hyderabad: Former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy's daughter Sharmila, who undertook a 72-hour hunger strike in solidarity with the unemployed youths of Telangana, ended her fast Sunday. On concluding her fast, Sharmila said, "No job notifications have been issued for the last seven years in the state. Forty lakh people are waiting for government jobs. Disappointed youth are committing suicide. Our party functionaries will continue the struggle in the Assembly constituencies till jobs are announced. Our party will come to power in two years in Telangana and we'll eliminate unemployment."

Three killed in chemical firm fire

Mumbai: Three people were killed and eight others injured after a fire broke out in a chemical company in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district Sunday morning, police said. The incident took place around 9.30 am in the unit located in Lote MIDC (Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation) area in Khed taluka, about 300 km from here, an official at Ratnagiri police control room said.

HK suspends flights connecting India

New Delhi: Hong Kong has suspended all flights connecting to India from Tuesday to May 3 amid a surge in COVID-19 cases in the country, aviation industry sources said Sunday. They said the Hong Kong government has also suspended flights to and from Pakistan as well as the Philippines for the aforementioned time period. The Hong Kong government's decision has come after 50 passengers of two Vistara flights this month were found positive for COVID-19 when tested on arrival.

Girl hangs self

Thane: A 15-year-old girl allegedly committed suicide at her residence in Bhiwandi town of Maharashtra's Thane district after her mother scolded her for playing a game on her mobile and also for watching TV, police said Sunday. The incident took place Saturday afternoon, they said. "The girl, a Class 10 student, was playing a game on her mobile phone and also watching TV at home. When her mother saw this, she scolded her and asked her to study instead," an official said.

Manmohan writes to PM on Covid crisis

AGENCIES
New Delhi, April 18: Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the COVID-19 crisis, stressing that ramping up vaccination was the key to battling the pandemic, and mooted steps to boost supply including invoking compulsory licensing provisions as in case of HIV/AIDS drugs.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, the veteran Congress leader said one must not look at absolute numbers but the total percentage of the population that has been vaccinated. "The key to our fight against COVID-19 must be ramping up the vaccination effort. We must resist the temptation to look at the absolute numbers being vaccinated, and focus instead on the percentage of the population vaccinated," he said in his letter.

Noting that India currently has vaccinated only a small fraction of its population, Singh said he is certain that with the right policy design, "we can do much better and very quickly". "There are many things we must do to fight the epi-



demic but a big part of this effort must be ramping up the vaccination programme," he said while making several suggestions. The former prime minister suggested that states should be given some flexibility to define categories of frontline workers who can be vaccinated even if they are below 45 years. Currently, people above 45 years of age are eligible for vaccination. He said some states may want to designate school teachers, bus, three-wheeler and taxi drivers, municipal and panchayat staff, and possibly lawyers who have to attend courts as frontline workers, and they can then be

Rahul suspends poll rallies in WB

Amid massive Covid surge in the country, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has suspended all his political rallies in West Bengal and asked other political parties to think about the consequences of holding big rallies in the middle of the raging pandemic. "In view of the Covid situation, I am suspending all my public rallies in West Bengal. I would advise all political leaders to think deeply about the consequences of holding large public rallies under the current circumstances," Rahul Gandhi said in a tweet. In West Bengal, three phases of elections are still left to be held, but due to the Covid surge, there has been a demand to hold rest of the elections in a single phase.



vaccinated even if they are below 45 years. The suggestions come a day after the Congress Working Committee met and discussed the efforts required to fight the COVID pandemic. Singh said the Centre should publicise vaccine dose orders placed and accepted for delivery over the next six months.

He said the government should indicate how vaccine supplies are to be distributed to states. "If we want to vaccinate a target number in this period, we should place

enough orders in advance so that producers can adhere to an agreed schedule of supply," he noted. The former PM said the government should indicate how this expected vaccine supply will be distributed across states based on a transparent formula. He suggested that the central government could retain 10 percent for distribution based on emergency needs, and states should have a clear signal of likely availability so that they can plan their rollout.

Fearing poaching, Assam Congress candidates to stay at a hotel

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Guwahati, April 18: Apprehending poaching by the rival party, the main opposition Congress in Assam Saturday assembled its candidates at a hotel here, party sources said, adding they would stay there till the results of the recently held Assembly election are declared May 2.

"Congress candidates would remain together at a hotel till the results of the Assembly elections were declared May 2," a party leader said.

AICC General Secretary and the party's Assam in-charge Jitendra Singh claimed that the "Mahajot (grand alliance) would secure a big majority in the 126-



FAITH AMID PANDEMIC



Devotees perform Ganga aarti in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

UNI PHOTO

NO NOD FOR WEDDING EVENTS IN INDORE

Indore is under corona curfew from April 12 to April 23 in view of the surge in cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Indore, April 18: The administration in Indore in Madhya Pradesh Sunday refused to grant permission for marriage functions, the 'muhurat' for which begins from Monday as per the Hindu 'panchang' (religious calendar), in view of the surge in COVID-19 cases.

District Collector Manish Singh told PTI that such events cannot be allowed at this point of time since the number of cases was spiking severely in Indore, adding that the focus was on securing people's health. Indore Hoteliers' Association president Sumit Suri said some 1,500 marriage functions



were scheduled in hotels and halls in the city but most stand cancelled now, which may hit the business by over ₹200 crore. The caseload in Indore district is 89,317, including 1,047 deaths, and the struggle for beds in reputed hospitals as well as shortage of medical oxygen and key anti-viral drugs continued. Indore is under corona curfew from April 12 to April 23 in view of the surge in cases.

5 DIE IN COVID HOSP FIRE, PROBE ORDERED

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Raipur, April 18: Authorities have ordered an investigation after five coronavirus patients died in a fire at the COVID-19 ward of a private hospital in Chhattisgarh's capital city Raipur, police said Sunday.

Raipur Collector Dr S Bharathi Dasan has ordered an investigation into the incident. Officials have been directed to conduct safety check at coronavirus hospitals in the city. The fire broke out at Raipur's Rajdhani hospital Saturday, police said.

"Five coronavirus patients died in the incident. One was charred to death and the others died due to suffocation," a police official said, adding a case of negligence will be registered against the owners of the hospital.

A supervisor saw smoke coming out of the ward and informed the hospital authorities, who



alerted the police. The fire brigade and hospital staff rescued the other patients.

"The fire broke out in the COVID-19 ward of Rajdhani Super Speciality Hospital located at Pachpedi Naka under Tikrapara police station at 4.30 pm and was brought under control by the firefighters in 20 minutes," Tikrapara

Station House Officer Sanjeev Mishra said.

When the fire broke out, there were around 30 patients in the ward, Mishra said.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel expressed grief over the incident and announced a compensation of ₹4 lakh each to the families of the deceased.



Vax price war now

Alarmed over the growing clamour for vaccines and a political crisis erupting over shortage of doses, PM Modi buckled under the pressure. All rule books regulating new vaccines prescribing rigorous trials were thrown to the winds and floodgates for foreign vaccines were opened in one go. But neither Pfizer nor Moderna are likely to come to India anytime soon. A frustrated Pfizer

had withdrawn its application, while Moderna did not even apply. Johnson & Johnson will take a longer time despite the Modi government allowing all of them to enter India by conducting trials on 100 persons only and clearing within a week. Insiders say except for Sputnik, hardly any international brand will come to India in the immediate future. Reason these companies have entered into long-term commitment for supplies with nations who had paid billions of dollars in advance. Secondly, Sputnik V is selling at \$10 per dose (\$20 for two doses) while Pfizer's \$1,300 is a single dose vaccine. Moderna demanded \$18 for its single dose while Johnson wanting \$850. Modi is bargaining hard when it comes to buying for the government. Even Sputnik is finding it difficult to lower its price band from the current ₹750. It is supplying Sputnik to 60 countries at ₹750 only. Hard bargaining is

going on. Serum is already crying for a raise of Covishield price of ₹150 per dose while Covaxin is selling at ₹210 a jab. Sputnik V may have been given permission. But the Russians are unwilling to lower the price and PM Modi will find it hard to pay more than ₹200-250 to Sputnik. Another option is to allow private companies to sell vaccines in the open market without raising the base price for Serum and Bharat Biotech. But it's a tricky situation.

Centre targets 50L jabs a day

The Centre may have struggled to undertake a 50 lakh jabs a day during the PM's 'Tika Utsav' call. But he has targeted to administer 50 lakh jabs a day anytime soon. PM Modi has signalled an ambitious target of giving 100 million doses in the next 40-45 days compared to the first

100 million jabs given in the past 85 days. Modi has conveyed to his officials that this target is achievable given the domestic vaccine production capacity. The Department of Personnel under PM Modi has issued a directive to ministries to push 30 lakh eligible government employees and millions in PSUs and banks to take the jab. India needs at least 600 million doses to vaccinate 30 crore persons including 3 crore Health & Front line workers by July-August. At present, Pune-based Serum Institute has a monthly capacity of 65 million doses of Covishield while Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech is producing four million doses of Covaxin a month. The government, however, is unruffled by the sudden noise in certain political quarters for vaccines. India has no desire to import Chinese vaccines. Therefore, a clamour for the vaccine is from 11 states who mismanaged covid handling. The PM is very firm in

this regard as there is a global shortage of vaccines and these can't be imported. The vaccination centers were deserted until the other day, and are flooded now. The situation may ease once Russia's Sputnik V and Zydus-Cadila see the light of the day anytime soon.

Govt plans to re-train 30L babus

After giving a dressing down to the 'Babus' on many occasions in the past, the Prime Minister wants 30 lakh government servants to be creative, responsive and technology enabled. In one of the biggest exercises after Independence to restructure and overhaul the functioning and improve skills of the Babus at all levels, the PM has constituted a high-powered three-member Commission and chosen a top honcho from the private sector to

head the newly set up Capacity Building Commission (CBC). Adil Zainulbhai a former chief of the Quality Council of India (QCI). Adil is 1977 batch of IIT-Bombay and a post-graduate from Harvard Business School and current President of HBS's alumni association in India. The PM has already inducted a woman from a private sector company to head the Public Enterprises Selection Board which hires top officers for all PSUs in the country. The PM is keen to make Babus more "accountable, creative, proactive, professional and technology-enabled." The PM had repeatedly emphasized the need to end the culture of working in silos and ensuring transparency. The CBC will coordinate with and supervise all the government offices and training institutes to monitor, evaluate and improve quality of the 30 lakh babus working in the Central government at various levels.

international



Please, I strongly hope that an increase of tensions is avoided, and, on the contrary, gestures are made capable of promoting reciprocal trust and favouring the reconciliation and the peace which are so necessary and so desired
POPE FRANCIS | HEAD OF VATICAN CITY

GERMANY TO MOURN COVID DEATHS IN NATIONAL SERVICE
German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will lead a commemorative event in Berlin Sunday in the presence of the country's leaders for all those who have died due to the novel coronavirus



of the day quote

The pause was to take a look, make sure we know all the information we can have within that timeframe, and also warn some of the physicians out there who might see people, particularly women, who have this particular adverse event, that they treat them properly
ANTHONY FAUCI | CHIEF MEDICAL ADVISOR, WH

As governor of Texas, I urge you to take immediate action to combat the dangerous and deadly Mexican drug cartels. These cartels bring terror into our communities
GREG ABBOTT | GOVERNOR, TEXAS, US

We are talking here about people who in some cases have worked for years by our side, at danger to their own safety, also have fought with us and made their personal contribution. I see it as a deep obligation for Germany not to leave these people behind unprotected
ANNEGRET KRAMP-KARRENBAUER | DEFENSE MINISTER, GERMANY

SHORT TAKES

Earthquake strikes Iran

Tehran: A magnitude 5.9 earthquake has struck southwestern Iran along the Persian Gulf. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries from the tremor Sunday. Iranian state television alerted on its broadcast, saying it was a 5.9 magnitude. A second aftershock quake of 4.5 magnitude followed it. The US Geological Survey called it a 5.8 magnitude earthquake, located at the port city of Bandar Genaveh. It described its depth at 10 kilometers. That's some 100 kilometers from Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant.

Wisconsin: Three dead in shooting

Kenosha: A shooting at a tavern in Wisconsin killed three people and seriously injured two others early Sunday, a sheriff's department official said. The shooting happened at Somers House Tavern in the Village of Somers, Kenosha County Sgt David Wright said. The suspected shooter was not immediately captured. Wright said the shooting appeared to be a "targeted and isolated incident," and authorities didn't believe the general public was in danger.

Eight killed in mosque shooting

Kabul: At least eight members of a family were killed after unknown gunmen opened fire on them at a mosque in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, officials said Sunday. Provincial governor Ziaulhaq Amankhail said the incident happened in police district nine of the provincial capital, Jalalabad, reports dpa news agency. "Initial findings show the incident happened as a result of a dispute over a private land," Amankhail added.

Quake jolts Miyagi prefecture

Tokyo: An earthquake measuring 5.8 on the Richter scale struck off Japan's Miyagi Prefecture Sunday, according to the authorities. The Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said the tremor occurred at 9.29 am, with its epicentre at latitude of 38.3 degrees north and longitude of 141.9 degrees east, and at depth of 50 km, reports Xinhua news agency.

US, China to cooperate on climate crisis

The agreement was reached by US special envoy for climate John Kerry and his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua during two days of talks in Shanghai last week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Seoul, April 18: The United States and China, the world's two biggest carbon polluters, agreed to cooperate to curb climate change with urgency, just days before President Joe Biden hosts a virtual summit of world leaders to discuss the issue.

The agreement was reached by US special envoy for climate John Kerry and his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua during two days of talks in Shanghai last week, according to a joint statement.

The two countries "are committed to cooperating with each other and with other countries to tackle the climate crisis, which must be addressed with the seriousness and urgency that it demands," said the statement, issued Saturday evening US time.

Meeting with reporters in Seoul Sunday, Kerry said the language in the statement is "strong" and that the two countries agreed on "critical elements on where we have to go." But the former secretary of state said, "I learned in diplomacy that you don't put your back on the words, you put on actions. We all need to see what happens."

China is the world's biggest carbon emitter, followed by the United States. The two countries pump out nearly half of the fossil fuel fumes that are warming the planet's atmosphere. Their cooperation is



key to the success of global efforts to curb climate change, but frayed ties over human rights, trade and China's territorial claims to Taiwan and the South China Sea have been threatening to undermine such efforts. Noting that China is the world's biggest coal user, Kerry said he and Chinese officials had a lot of discussions on how to accelerate a global energy transition. "I have never shied away from expressing our views shared by many, many people that it is imperative to reduce coal, everywhere," he said.

Su Wei, a member of the Chinese negotiation team, told state broadcaster CCTV on Sunday that a major accomplishment of the talks was "restarting the dialogue and

cooperation between China and the United States on climate change issues." Su said the two countries reached a consensus on key areas for future cooperation on climate issues. Biden has invited 40 world leaders, including Chinese President Xi Jinping, to the April 22-23 summit. The US and other countries are expected to announce more ambitious national targets for cutting carbon emissions ahead of or at the meeting, along with pledging financial help for climate efforts by less wealthy nations.

It's unclear how much Kerry's China visit would promote US-China cooperation on climate issues. Major emitters of greenhouse gases are preparing for the next UN

climate summit taking place in Glasgow, UK, in November. The summit aims to relaunch global efforts to keep rising global temperatures to below 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) as agreed in the Paris accord.

According to the US-China statement, the two countries would enhance "their respective actions and cooperating in multilateral processes, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement."

It said both countries also intend to develop their respective long-term strategies before the Glasgow conference and take "appropriate actions to maximize international investment and finance in support of" the energy transition in developing countries.

Xi announced last year that China would be carbon-neutral by 2060 and aimed to reach a peak in its emissions by 2030. In March, China's Communist Party pledged to reduce carbon emissions per unit of economic output by 18% over the next five years, in line with its goal for the previous five-year period. But environmentalists say China needs to do more.

Biden has pledged the US will switch to an emissions-free power sector within 14 years, and have an entirely emissions-free economy by 2050.

'Navalny could die at any moment'

Physician Yaroslav Ashikhmin said that test results show him with sharply elevated levels of potassium, which can bring on cardiac arrest, and heightened creatinine levels that indicate impaired kidneys

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Moscow, April 18: A doctor for imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who is in the third week of a hunger strike, says his health is deteriorating rapidly and the 44-year-old Kremlin critic could be on the verge of death.

Physician Yaroslav Ashikhmin said Saturday that test results he received from Navalny's family show him with sharply elevated levels of potassium, which can bring on cardiac arrest, and heightened creatinine levels that indicate impaired kidneys.

"Our patient could die at any moment," he said in a Facebook post. Anastasia Vasilyeva, head of the Navalny-backed Alliance of Doctors union, said on Twitter "action must be taken immediately."

Navalny is Russian President Vladimir Putin's most visible and adamant opponent.

His personal physicians have not been allowed to see him in prison. He went on hunger strike to protest the refusal to let them visit when he began experiencing severe back



pain and a loss of feeling in his legs. Russia's state penitentiary service has said that Navalny is receiving all the medical help he needs.

Navalny was arrested Jan 17 when he returned to Russia from Germany, where he had spent five months recovering from Soviet nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian officials have denied any involvement and even questioned whether Navalny was poisoned, which was confirmed by several European laboratories.

Navalny was ordered to serve 2 1/2 years in prison because his long recovery in Germany violated a suspended sentence he had been given for a fraud conviction in a case that Navalny says was politically motivated.

SOLITARY SOLDIER



An Israeli soldier walks in a field of buttercup flowers near Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak in southern Israel, just outside the Gaza Strip

Police crackdown on banned Islamist party TLP, 3 killed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lahore, April 18: Three workers of banned radical Islamist party Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) were killed and scores injured in a fresh operation launched by Pakistani security forces here on Sunday against the outfit that carried out violent protests to force the government to expel the French ambassador over a blasphemous caricature published in France last year.

Rangers and police Sunday morning launched the operation at the TLP headquarters (Chowk Yateem Khana) Lahore to remove thousands of workers camped there, blocking the main Multan Road.

During the operation, three TLP activists were killed and dozens injured. A senior police officer is among several law enforcers suffered injuries, a senior police officer told PTI.

"As the number of TLP supporters was in thousands the Rangers and police could not manage to disperse them in a three-hour operation," he said, adding that the law enforcers ended the operation fearing loss of more lives.

During the operation, the protesters also held a senior police officer, Omar Farooq Baloch, hostage and tortured him, he said.

In a video message released by the TLP, Baloch, who had head injury, urged the Imran Khan government not to kill fellow Muslims and abide by the agreement his government signed with the TLP over expulsion of the French ambassador.



Police have failed to recover Baloch from the TLP's custody so far despite having negotiations with it.

Punjab police spokesperson Rana Arif also confirmed death of three persons during the law enforcement agencies's operation. He said a dozen or so police officials were "brutally tortured" by the TLP workers.

"Today in the early morning, miscreants (TLP workers) attacked Nawankot Police Station (which is close to TLP headquarters) where Rangers and police officers were trapped inside the police station and Deputy Superintendent Police (Omar Farooq Baloch) was kidnapped and taken to the TLP Markaz (headquarters)," the Punjab police said in a statement issued here on Sunday afternoon.

"One oil tanker with 50,000 litres of petrol has been taken by the miscreants to the Markaz. The miscreants were armed and attacked Rangers and police with petrol bombs. Police and Rangers pushed them back and took back the possession of the police station. Police did not plan or conduct any operation against the mosque or seminary," the statement said.

Sikh community, lawmakers seek probe

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, April 18: Influential American lawmakers and Sikh community leaders have sought a thorough probe into the mass shooting at a FedEx facility in the US state of Indiana as a potential hate crime that killed eight people, including four Sikhs.

Indian-American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi Saturday called for investigation of potential anti-Sikh motivations in the incident that took place late Thursday night.

"While the Indianapolis and Sikh communities continue to mourn, and as the rest of our country mourns with them, investigators must also determine if this mass shooting was a hate-motivated attack in addition to serving as another example of the plague of gun

INDIANAPOLIS SHOOTING

violence which has beset our nation," Krishnamoorthi said.

The four Sikh community members who lost their lives are Amarjeet Kaur Johal (66), Jasvinder Kaur (64), Amarjit Sekhon (48), and Jaswinder Singh (68). Three of the deceased are women.

The violence began at 11 pm local time Thursday during shift change at the FedEx warehouse in Indianapolis - a time when the area was heavily trafficked with many employees arriving for or leaving after their shift.

The incident comes as the country has witnessed a recent wave of anti-Asian hate crimes during this pandemic after a broader increase in hate-

motivated crimes and violence against a range of American communities over the last half decade, Krishnamoorthi said.

"We do not yet know the motive of the shooter, and we may never know for sure what drove him to do what he did. We do know, however, that the FedEx facility he targeted was known for having a large workforce," said a joint statement issued by eight Gurdwaras of Indianapolis.

"Given everything our community has experienced in the past - the pattern of violence, bigotry, and backlash we have faced - it is impossible not to feel that same pain and targeting in this moment. We expect that the authorities will continue their full investigation and share what they learn when they can, and they will take this into account," it said.

'A very good weird': Israel drops outdoor mask order

REUTERS

Tel Aviv, April 18: Israelis went about barefaced Sunday after the order to wear masks outdoors was rescinded in another step towards relative normality thanks to the country's mass-vaccination against COVID-19.

With about 81% of citizens or residents over 16 - the age group eligible for the Pfizer/BioNTech (PFE.N), (22UAY.DE) vaccine in Israel - having received both doses, contagions and hospitalisations are down sharply.

But entry by foreigners is still limited and non-immune Israelis

who return from abroad must self-isolate, due to concern virus variants could challenge the vaccine. The Health Ministry said it had detected seven cases of a new Indian variant in Israel, whose potency was being assessed.

"We are leading the world right now when it comes to emerging from the coronavirus," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told reporters. "But we have still not finished with the coronavirus. It can return."

The police-enforced wearing of protective masks outdoors, ordered a year ago for non-exercise activities, was scrapped. But the Health



Ministry said the requirement still applied for indoor public spaces and urged citizens to keep masks to

hand. "Breathing Freely," read the cover headline of the mass-circulation daily Israel Hayom.

"Being without a mask for the first time in a long time feels weird. But it's a very good weird," Amitai Hallgarten, 19, said while sunning himself at a park. "If I need to be masked indoors to finish with this - I'll do everything I can."

atres remain off-limits.

"This is still a non-vaccinated population (children under the age of 16) that we want to safeguard," Health Ministry official Sharon Alroy-Preis told Israel's Army Radio.

Israel counts East Jerusalem Palestinians among its 9.3 million population and has administered the vaccines there. The 5.2 million Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and the Islamist Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip have been receiving limited supplies of vaccines provided by Israel, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, the global COVAX vaccine-sharing scheme and China.

business

of the day quote

Demand for skilled manpower is continuously increasing in the e-commerce sector and looking at this demand, our ministry is taking steps to skill people so that skilled manpower demand can be met for the sector

MAHENDRA NATH PANDEY | UNION MIN FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

We are a 7-yr-old SME-focused digital lending company. Our lending is based on our customers' digital track record in terms of digital payments such as debit and credit transactions. Based on this, we are able to assess their credit worthiness and then provide loan to them

ARUN NAYYAR | CEO, NEOGROWTH

While the exports of PVs had dropped by a whopping 58% in H1 FY21 due to the pandemic and resultant lockdowns, marginal improvement due to multitude of efforts by the OEMs in H2 FY21 led to the year closing with an overall decline in exports of PVs by 39%

RAJESH MENON | DIRECTOR GENERAL, SIAM

SHORT TAKES

M3M cuts debt by over ₹400cr

New Delhi: Real estate developer M3M group has reduced its debt by Rs 418 crore during the January-March quarter, as it repaid loans of banks and other financial institutions. Gurugram-based M3M group's debt has come down to around Rs 1,280 crore from Rs 1,700 crore, its Director Pankaj Bansal said. He said the company plans to retire the existing debt by March 2022.

Blinc to invest ₹100 crore

New Delhi: Venture capital firm Blinc Invest expects to operationalise a ₹100-crore Sebi-approved fund which it plans to invest in six startups in the next two-three years. The firm has approached Sebi for the approval of the fund and raised ₹30 crore in funding, Blinc founder and Managing Director Amit Ratanpal said. "We have closed raising of ₹30 crore and expect to operationalise the entire ₹100 crore in next six-seven months," Ratanpal said.

Irdai imposes ₹51L penalty

New Delhi: Regulator Irdai has imposed a penalty of Rs 51 lakh on four insurers, including SBI General Insurance Company, for violation of certain norms related to motor insurance. A penalty of Rs 25 lakh has been imposed on SBI General Insurance Company for not fulfilling regulatory obligations under the Motor Third Party business.

Adobe founder Geschke dies at 81

Los Altos: Charles "Chuck" Geschke, the co-founder of the major software company Adobe Inc. Who helped develop Portable Document Format technology, or PDFs - died at age 81. Geschke, who lived in the San Francisco Bay Area suburb of Los Altos, died Friday, the company said. "This is a huge loss for the entire Adobe community and the technology industry, for whom he has been a guide and hero for decades," Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen wrote in an e-mail to the company's employees.



Steel prices might take at least two years to cool down as its demand is consistently increasing. During the current financial year, the demand for steel in India is also expected to exceed the production numbers

VR SHARMA | MD, JINDAL STEEL AND POWER

TOYOTA PARTNERS WITH FUEL GIANT SASOL

Japanese automotive manufacturer Toyota has partnered with South African fuel giant Sasol to develop a green hydrogen-powered mobility ecosystem. The two companies announced the plan at an event organised by EE Business Intelligence and the British High Commission to South Africa



NBFCs seek extension of MSME restructuring scheme

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 18: Non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) have requested the Reserve Bank to extend the one-time restructuring scheme of MSME advances till March 31, 2022, as these players are unable to revive their businesses.

In February last year, the Reserve Bank had permitted one-time restructuring of existing MSME advances, classified as 'standard' without downgrade in the asset classification subject to certain additional provisioning and other compliances.

The time limit for implementation of the scheme was till December

31, 2020. In a recent letter written to RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, FIDC, an industry body of NBFCs, said due to the severe second wave of Covid-19, the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have not been able to revive their economic activities and are in urgent need of support from the lenders.

"Considering the challenging environment for MSMEs and lenders, it will be helpful, if the RBI extends the restructuring scheme till at least March 31, 2022," the Finance Industry Development Council (FIDC) wrote.

NBFCs primarily cater to the funding needs of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME), in-



cluding retail and wholesale traders. The industry body also urged the RBI to allow restructuring of cer-

Industry body FIDC also urged the RBI to allow restructuring of certain MSMEs loans that already have got the similar relief under the same scheme during the first wave of Covid-19, but are now facing challenges

of Covid-19, but are now facing challenges.

The FIDC has also requested the central bank to provide priority status lending (PSL) classification benefit for bank lending to NBFCs on a permanent basis. Earlier this month, the RBI extended the PSL benefit by six months till September 30, 2021.

The letter said under the on-lending model, only fresh loans granted by NBFCs are allowed PSL benefit and the existing unencumbered pools of eligible PSLs do not qualify for such classification benefit.

The industry body urged the RBI to allow bank refinance against existing unencumbered MSME pool

originated by NBFCs.

In a separate letter to MSME minister Nitin Gadkari, the FIDC requested to reinstate guarantee cover under Credit guarantee fund scheme for NBFCs (CGS-II) to 75% which was recently revised to 50%

Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTME) had framed CGS II for providing guarantees in respect of credit facilities extended by eligible NBFCs to micro and small enterprises (MSE) borrowers.

"We urge upon that the guarantee cover may please be reinstated to earlier 75% levels, particularly in these uncertain and stressful times," the letter said.

Future Retail lenders approve restructuring of existing debts

The board of the company, which now expects to recover from the financial stress with the resolution timeframe, has also approved the restructuring plan in its meeting held Saturday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 18: Lenders of the debt-ridden Future Retail Ltd have approved a plan to restructure the existing financial debt of the company under an RBI announced resolution framework for Covid-19 related stress.

The restructuring plan would now be forwarded for approval to an expert committee, formed by RBI under the chairmanship of KV Kamath, Future Retail Ltd (FRL) said in a late-night regulatory update Saturday.

As part of the resolution plan, the debt raised through the non-convertible debentures issued by FRL is also part of the existing debt and is proposed to be restructured, it added.



The board of the company, which now expects to recover from the financial stress with the resolution timeframe, has also approved the restructuring plan in its meeting held Saturday, it added.

"Board at its meeting held on April 17, 2021, has approved a resolution plan to restructure the existing secured financial debt from the bankers of the company as permitted under a resolution framework for Covid-19 related stress announced by the Reserve Bank of India," the filing said.

The said resolution plan which has supported by 28 lenders, which remains subject to the approval of the expert committee, under the chairmanship of KV Kamath con-

cluding retail and wholesale traders. The industry body also urged the RBI to allow restructuring of cer-

Second Covid wave could spark greater uncertainty: Niti VC

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 18: The country needs to prepare for "greater uncertainty" in terms of consumer as well as investor sentiments due to the second wave of coronavirus infections, and the government will respond with fiscal measures as and when required, Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar said Sunday.

While acknowledging that the present situation has become far more difficult than it was in the past due to rising coronavirus infections, Kumar remained hopeful that the country's economy will grow 11% in the current fiscal ending March 31, 2022.

India is grappling with spiralling number of Covid cases as well as related deaths, forcing many state governments to put in place restrictions on movement of people. According to Kumar, India was on the verge of defeating Covid-19 completely but some new strains from the UK and other countries have made the situation far more difficult this time around.

"Apart from their direct impact on some sectors like the services sector, the second wave will increase



Apart from their direct impact on some sectors, the second wave will increase the uncertainty in the economic environment which can have wider indirect effects on economic activities

RAJIV KUMAR | VICE CHAIRMAN, NITI AAYOG

the uncertainty in the economic environment which can have wider indirect effects on economic activities. So, we need to prepare for greater uncertainty, both in consumer and investor sentiments," Kumar said.

To a query on whether the government is considering coming up with a fresh stimulus, the Niti Aayog vice chairman said this question has to be answered after the finance ministry analyses both the direct and indirect impact of the second Covid wave.

Tata Steel, SAIL, AMNS supply oxygen to help out Covid patients

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 18: Tata Steel Sunday announced it is supplying up to 300 tonnes of medical oxygen on a daily basis to various state governments and hospitals for treatment of Covid-19 patients. Liquid medical oxygen or LMO is a crucial medical requirement for the treatment of coronavirus patients. "Responding to the national urgency, we are supplying 200-300 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen daily to various state governments and hospitals. We are in this fight together and will surely win it! @PMOIndia @TataCompanies," Tata Steel said in a tweet.

In a tweet Saturday, the country's largest steel-making company SAIL said it has also supplied over 33,300 tonne of LMO for the treatment of coronavirus-affected patients.



"@SAILsteel supplied more than 33,300 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen (#LMO) of 99.7 per cent purity of #Oxygen for #COVIDRelief from its integrated steel plants #Bokaro (#Jharkhand), #Bhilai (#Chhattisgarh), #Rourkela (#Odisha), #Durgapur and #Burnpur (#WestBengal)," SAIL said in a tweet.

'Pay-TV industry to reach \$12.3bn revenue by 2025'

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 18: The pay-TV industry in India will have a growth of 7% and reach to total revenue of \$12.3 billion (approx Rs 91,684 crore) by 2025, said a report. Besides, by 2025 over 96% of India's pay-TV homes will be digitalised and the base of the pay-TV subscribers would be expanded to 13.4 crore by then, said a report from advisory and consulting services provider Media Partners Asia (MPA).

It also estimates India's active Direct-to-home subscription will expand from 5.8 crore homes in 2020 to more than 6.8 crore homes in 2025.

"Meanwhile, cable's share of pay-TV subscribers will decline from 54% in 2020 to 46 per cent by

2025 while IPTV will pick up a small share after rolling out later in 2021," it said.

A subscription to a television service from a cable, satellite or telephone company is defined under pay-TV. This excludes Internet-based streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon.

Meanwhile, it also added that the regulations from the sectoral regulator TRAI continue to limit investment in pay-TV content, impacting ARPU growth and distribution upside.

According to MPA, total pay-TV industry revenue, including subscription and advertising, declined 10% Y-o-Y in 2020 to \$8.9 billion as the economic downturn post-Covid eroded advertising.

S Korea to invest \$38mn in illegal drone response tech by 2025

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Seoul, April 18: South Korea said Sunday it will spend 42 billion won (\$37.6 million) by 2025 to develop a response system against illegal drones amid growing security threats from the fast-developing technology.

A consortium of 23 companies and research institutes, which includes the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute, the Korea Aerospace Research Institute and aerospace and defense firm LIG Nex1 Co., will develop a response system that spots and neutralises the illegal unmanned aircraft, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT.



The ministry said such drones pose security threats to major public infrastructure and facilities, such as airports and nuclear power plants, given recent advances in technologies, such as artificial intelligence and swarm robotics.

The ministry said current response systems against illegal drones are ground-based tech-

nologies and that the consortium will develop an aerial system by developing patrol drones that can detect illegal counterparts and neutralise them by either physical means, such as firing a net, or by hijacking its control system, reports Yonhap news agency.

The ministry said it will work with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy and the National Police Agency for the project, with 6.6 billion won set aside for this year.

Fears about potential unmanned attacks have lingered for years in South Korea since South Korean military authorities discovered crashed North Korean drones in border areas, including the front-line island of Baengnyeong in 2014.

'Modern retail severely dented due to 2nd wave'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, April 18: The second wave has severely impacted the modern retail industry, said a statement by the Shopping Centres Association of India (SCAI). In a statement, the industry body noted that it has been urging the government to support the industry with financial waivers and allow shopping malls to operate once they reopen the other markets.

In order to supplement the government's effort in carrying out an extensive vaccination drive, SCAI has also approached the state governments to conduct the vaccination camps at malls.

"The industry body has also urged to treat mall employees as front-line workers and should be vaccinated on priority irrespective of their age," it said.

As a public infrastructure, with ample parking space, training rooms, among others, malls do have the requisite space to help the local ad-



ministration to carry out such an exercise that will likely benefit the larger cause of carrying out an extensive vaccination drive, as per SCAI.

With the situation turning grim, SCAI has reached out to all its mem-

WORRYING TIMES

- In order to supplement the government's effort in carrying out an extensive vaccination drive, SCAI has also approached the state governments to conduct the vaccination camps at malls
- With the situation turning grim, SCAI has reached out to all its members and has asked them to further strengthen all the SoPs and protocols
- The shopping centre industry is supporting nearly 1.2 crore livelihoods directly and indirectly who are associated with malls, retail, and manufacturing retail
- Nearly 80% of employees working at retail stores and restaurants belong to an economically weaker section

bers and has asked them to further strengthen all the SoPs and protocols, it added.

It also said that the local restrictions, closure of malls in few states, weekend curfews have impacted business, recovery, and em-

ployment associated with organised retail. Malls across India had recovered close to 90% of their business and 75% of their footfalls which drop drastically due to the local restrictions.

On an average during pre-covid

days, the industry was clocking Rs 15,000 crore per month and had reached the same during mid of March 2021, but, with the local restrictions, almost 50% revenue slashed, it said.

The shopping centre industry is supporting nearly 1.2 crore livelihoods directly and indirectly who are associated with malls, retail, and manufacturing retail. Most of the employees working in this sector are coming from other states.

Nearly 80% of employees working at retail stores and restaurants belong to an economically weaker section and their livelihood will be impacted the most.

During the last lockdown, the industry saw 25-30 per cent of jobs getting impacted, SCAI said, adding that by mid of March 2021, nearly 70-75 per cent of employees had rejoined. "The industry in its efforts retained the jobs which were lost due to the pandemic and will continue to bring back employment in the sector," it said.

India will become no. 1 EV maker in world, says Gadkari

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 18: Union minister Nitin Gadkari Sunday expressed confidence that lithium-ion batteries would be manufactured fully in the country in the next six months and India will become number one electric vehicle maker in the world in due course of time.



Addressing the Amazon's Smbhav Summit virtually, Gadkari further said that the government wants to encourage automakers to introduce flex-fuel engines in India and he is in the final discussion with manufacturers.

"India is moving ahead towards making electric vehicles. In due course of time we will be the number one electric vehicle (EV) maker in the world. All reputed brands are present in India," the Road Transport and Highways minister said.

Gadkari, who also holds the MSME portfolio, said indigenous battery technology will make EV the most effective means of transport. "India has got tremendous capability for making green power.. Within six months, I am confident that we will be in position to make 100 per cent lithium-ion battery in India, there is no shortage of lithium," he asserted.

RCB GO ON TOP OF POINTS TABLE WITH 38-RUN WIN OVER KKR

ABD, Mad Max maul Knights

AGENCIES

Chennai, April 18: Glenn Maxwell (78, 49b, 9x4, 3x6) was good but AB de Villiers (76 n o, 34b, 9x4, 3x6) was better as Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) thrashed Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) by 38 runs in their IPL match here Sunday. It was the third successive win for RCB propelling them to the top of the points table.

Batting first, De Villiers' master class and Maxwell's counter-attacking knock propelled RCB to an imposing 204 for four. In reply, KKR could only manage 166 for eight to lose their second game on the trot.

RCB smashed 56 runs in the last three overs, including 21 in the final six deliveries, thanks to de Villiers brilliant innings.

KKR were off to a brilliant start with leg-break bowler Varun Chakravarty (2/39) picking up two quick wickets including that of RCB skipper Virat Kohli (5). Kohli was sensationally caught by Rahul Tripathi running backwards from extra-cover.

Mixing aggression with caution, Maxwell and Devdutt Padikkal (25)

revived the RCB innings with a third wicket stand of 86 runs. The in-form Maxwell upped the ante when he cleared his front leg to hit Shakib Al Hasan over long-on for his first maximum in the sixth over.

After reaching 45 for two at the end of the power play, Maxwell shifted gears and raced to his half century in just 28 balls. Even Chakravarty was not spared by Maxwell as he smashed him for a six and four off successive balls.

Prasidh Krishna (1/31) broke the third wicket stand by dismissing Padikkal. It signalled the arrival of De Villiers in the middle and more misery for the Knights.

De Villiers toyed with the KKR bowlers and he finished off the innings in style by hitting Andre Russell for three fours and a six in the last over of the innings.

KKR were never in the chase even though they started off well. The extremely-talented Shubman Gill (21) and in-form Nitish Rana (18)

struck a few

fours and sixes before the former got out. In fact quite a few KKR batsmen got starts, but failed to convert those to substantial scores. Among them were Tripathi (25), skipper Eoin Morgan (29), Shakib (26) and Andre Russell (31).

KKR kept losing wickets at regular intervals and were tottering at 114 for five in the 14th over when purple cap holder Harshal Patel (2/17) dismissed

'Want to play for SA again'

Chennai: Versatile South African cricketer AB de Villiers said Sunday it will be 'fantastic' to make an international comeback ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup which will be played in India in October-November. "If I can slot in, it will be fantastic," De Villiers said after his match-winning innings for RCB. De Villiers, 37, said he is going to communicate with South Africa head coach Mark Boucher towards the end of the IPL. "I am absolutely interested, with regards to my form, my fitness, we have to get the best 15 together and we will plan accordingly. I will be speaking with Boucher towards the end of IPL," he added. Boucher had hinted Friday at De Villiers' possible international comeback.

BRIEF SCORES

RCB 204 for 4 (Glenn Maxwell 78, AB de Villiers 76 n o, Varun Chakravarty 2/39) beat KKR 166 for 8 (Andre Russell 31, Eoin Morgan 29, Kyle Jameson 3/41, Harshal Patel 2/17, Yuzvendra Chahal 2/34) by 38 runs.

Morgan. The KKR skipper hit one four and two sixes, but never looked threatening.

Russell provided some entertainment by hitting Yuzvendra Chahal (2/34) in the 17th over; the sequence of shots reading 6, 4, 4, 4.

Next, Kyle Jamieson (3/41) was played over mid-wicket for a big six by Russell, but it was already a losing cause then, with the asking rate well over 15 runs per over.

Dazzling Dhawan show fashions easy DC victory

AGENCIES

Mumbai, April 18: Shikhar Dhawan's (92, 49b, 13x4, 2x6) brilliant knock helped Delhi Capitals (DC) easily beat Punjab Kings (PKS) by six wickets in their IPL-14 match at the Wankhede stadium here Sunday. Chasing a victory target of 196 runs, Delhi cantered home scoring 198 for four with 10 deliveries to spare.

Dhawan was at his electrifying best, be it the straight six of Mohammed Shami (0/53 in four overs) or some of the short-arm jabs and pulls that he employed against the other PKS pacers. He was powerful on both sides of the wicket and Dhawan saw to it that the required run rate was under control. When he finally fell in the 15th over of the innings, DC needed a little over 40 runs for victory. Marcus Stoinis (27 n o, 13b, 3x4, 1x6) then took DC over the finish line to complete yet another fantastic win.



Shikhar Dhawan of DC plays the trademark pull shot during his match-winning innings against PKS, Sunday. BCCI PHOTO

TODAY'S MATCH

CSK

V S

RR

TIME 7.30 PM

Telecast: Star Sports channels

Earlier Mayank Agarwal (69, 36b, 7x4, 4x6) and PKS captain KL Rahul (61, 51b, 7x4, 2x6) put on 122 runs for the opening stand, to guide PKS to a challenging 195 for four. It should have been a 200-plus score for PKS, but the DC bowlers stuck to their task man-

fully to restrict the opposition.

DC skipper Rishabh Pant's decision to bowl after winning the toss backfired as Agarwal and Rahul took the attack to the opposition from the onset, hitting boundaries and sixes at will. While Agarwal was the aggressor of the two initially, Rahul upped the ante after a relatively sedate start. After 10 overs PKS were 94 without loss.

But DC dismissed both the batsmen in quick succession to make a comeback into the match. Agarwal was the first to depart, slicing a Lukeman Meriwala (1/32) delivery straight to Dhawan at sweeper cover in the 13th over. Rahul handed

a simple catch to Marcus Stoinis at mid-wicket off Kagiso Rabada (1/43).

Big-hitting Chris Gayle (11) failed to make a mark, perishing soon in search of a maximum. However, Deepak Hooda (22 n o, 13b, 2x6) and Shahrukh Khan (15 n o, 5b, 2x4, 1x6) provided the much needed big hits towards the end.

BRIEF SCORES

PKS 195 for 4 (Mayank Agarwal 69, KL Rahul 61) lost to DC 198 for 4 in 18.2 overs (Shikhar Dhawan 92) by six wickets.

SHORT TAKES

HI mourns demise of umpire Anupama

New Delhi: Hockey India (HI) mourned Sunday the demise of 40-year-old Anupama Panchimanda, a former international umpire, who died in Bangalore due to COVID-19-related complications. Anupama had officiated in several prestigious international tournaments including the 2005 BDO Junior World Cup (Women) in Santiago and the 2013 Women's Asia Cup in Kuala Lumpur. HI president Gyanendra Ningombam offered condolences to Anupama's bereaved family. "This (Sunday) morning we woke up to the sad news about Anupama Panchimanda's demise. We at HI extend our deepest condolences to Anupama's family members," he said.

Punia goes down tamely in final

Almaty (Kazakhstan): Deepak Punia's defence fell apart in front of his idol and Iranian legend Hassan Yazdaniharati as the Olympic-bound Indian settled for a silver medal while Sanjeet claimed a bronze on the concluding day of the Asian Wrestling Championships here Sunday. The Indian lost his 86kg final inside the first period by technical superiority as the Iranian's relentless attacks had the clueless Indian gasping. Sanjeet (92kg) almost blew away a commanding 11-2 position against Uzbekistan's Rustam Shodiev before winning the bronze play-off 11-8.

Nataraj sets new national record

Tashkent: Ace Indian swimmer Srihari Nataraj created a national record in 50m backstroke while winning his second gold of the Uzbekistan Open Championship here. The 20-year-old clocked 25.11 seconds to bag the top prize in the FINA-accredited Olympic qualifying event Saturday night. Indian swimmers enjoyed a rich haul of 29 medals - 18 gold, seven silver and four bronze medals - in the meet. Another Olympic hopeful, Sajjan Prakash also dazzled in the meet, notching up gold medal-winning performances in all four categories he participated in. However, he failed to better the Olympic mark. AGENCIES

ASIAN WEIGHTLIFTING CHAMPIONSHIP

Odisha girl Jhilli bags gold medal



Jhilli Dalabehera

AGENCIES

Tashkent, April 18: India's Jhilli Dalabehera clinched the gold medal in the 45kg category in a severely depleted two-lifter field at the Asian Weightlifting Championships here Sunday. Jhilli, a junior World Championship bronze medalist, lifted 69kg in the snatch and followed that up by 88kg in clean jerk for a total of 157kg to finish on top of the podium in all three categories of the gold level Olympic qualifier event which was postponed last year due to the pandemic. However, 45kg is not an Olympic weight category.

The silver medal went to Philippines' Mary Flor Diaz for

her effort of 135kg (60kg+75kg).

With the win, Jhilli bettered her silver-winning performance in the last edition. However, it was an underwhelming performance as she had lifted 162kg (71kg+91kg) at the same event in 2019.

The other Indian in the fray, Sneha Soren finished third in group B of the women's 55kg event. The 20-year-old from Odisha lifted a total of 164kg (71kg+93kg) in the four-woman field.

After lifting 68kg and 71kg, Sneha failed to lift 73kg in her final snatch attempt. In clean and jerk, she hoisted 93kg in her first try but couldn't manage 98kg and 100kg in the subsequent attempts.

SRH MENTOR POINTS OUT FAULTS BATSMEN MADE

Rotating strike important: Laxman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, April 18: Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) mentor VVS Laxman lamented that his batsmen could not rotate the strike when getting boundaries was tough against Mumbai Indians (MI) bowlers on a tough Chepuk wicket. He said that it was main cause for SRH losing the game by 13 runs as their batsmen struggled to score runs in the middle overs Saturday.

"It is (taking singles and twos) a very important skill. On these kind of slow wickets it is not easy to hit through the line. You can't rely on just boundaries and sixes," Laxman said after the end of the game.

"It's very important to keep the dot-ball percentage low and the only way you can do it is by manipulating the field by rotating the strike. That is one aspect of the game which is very important on these kinds of pitches. Unfortunately we were not able to do that especially when Rahul Chahar was bowling and even when other fast bowlers were operating in the middle overs," added the former Indian batsman.

Laxman said as the ball got old in the second half of the innings so playing aggressively was challenging. He also stressed the im-



portance of using the power play restrictions.

"The ball was just stopping on the wicket and it is two-paced. And also the spinners are extracting turn along with bounce. That is one of the aspects we definitely discussed," stated Laxman.

"If you see the way Jonny Bairstow and David Warner capitalised on the power play, it will be very important going forward especially when you are playing on slow tracks like what we are seeing in Chennai. To use the new ball, to use the power play restriction (is key), so that you put the other batsmen who are coming in later under less pressure," asserted Laxman.

CHELSEA STUN PREMIER LEAGUE LEADERS IN FA CUP SEMIFINAL

City's quadruple dreams dashed

AGENCIES

London, April 18: Chelsea ended Manchester City's quest for a historic quadruple of trophies as Hakim Ziyech's goal earned a 1-0 win to take the Blues into the FA Cup final here Saturday at the Wembley.

A damaging day for Manchester City also saw them lose Kevin De Bruyne to an ankle injury. It will certainly worry Pep Guardiola as they are just over a week away from the League Cup final against Tottenham Hotspur. Then follows their first leg Champions League semifinal against Paris Saint-Germain (PSG)

Chelsea were good value for another impressive win under Thomas Tuchel. They will be favourites for the German's first silverware in English football when they face May 15 Leicester or Southampton. "It was a very strong performance. I'm very happy and proud," said Tuchel. He has lost just twice in 19 games since replacing Frank Lampard in January. "We took the opportunity to show up on the



MOMENT TO CHERISH: Hakim Ziyech (extreme left) celebrates with teammates after scoring Chelsea's goal against Manchester City

highest level and see how we are. You can only win against City if you have everybody on the top level," Tuchel added.

The physical demands of City's bid for a clean sweep of trophies was shown as Guardiola made eight

changes from the side that beat Borussia Dortmund in midweek with goalscorers Phil Foden and Riyad Mahrez among those rotated. However, from the beginning, City looked a disjointed side. Timo Werner's cross was swept

home by Ziyech after just six minutes, but the goal was ruled out for offside against the German international.

City got to half time without any damage on the scoreline, but suffered a potentially huge blow to their hopes of still clinching a treble of trophies early in the second half. De Bruyne appeared to roll his ankle in a challenge with N'Golo Kante and was replaced by Foden.

"It doesn't look good, he has pain," said Guardiola. "Tomorrow (Sunday) we will do a test," he added.

City were still reeling from the loss of the Belgian midfielder when they were finally caught out by a Chelsea counter-attack. It was again Werner who raced through the City defence. Goalkeeper Zack Steffen was caught in no man's land as Werner squared the ball for Ziyech to roll into an empty net.

City took until the final 20 minutes to get going, but their best chance of sending the game to extra-time came from a corner as Ruben Dias headed over from close range.

COPA DEL REY TITLE FOR CATALAN GIANTS

Bilbao Messimerised as Barcelona triumph



THIS ONE'S FOR ME: Lionel Messi poses with the Copa del Rey trophy

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Barcelona, Apr 18: If Lionel Messi isn't happy at Barcelona, it was impossible to tell when he scored two goals in another masterful performance to brush aside Athletic Bilbao and win the Copa del Rey tro-

phy for the club. There has been speculation about Messi's future at Barcelona, but it took a backseat as the club celebrated. Messi's grin said it all when he received the trophy from Spain's King Felipe VI.

"This is a very special cup for me to lift," Messi said. "It is too bad we cannot celebrate it with our family and fans. But that is the situation we have to accept," he added.

Only some tenacious defending in its area kept Bilbao in the match until Barca erupted with four goals between the 60th and 72nd minutes. It was Antoine Griezmann who scored the first off a Messi prompt.

Then Frenkie de Jong headed in Jordi Alba's cross and Messi scored twice in quick succession to make it a memorable night for Barcelona. It was Messi's 35th career title in Barcelona.

For coach Ronald Koeman it was his first trophy for Barcelona. "Messi showed he is a born winner," Koeman said after the match.