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**PRIYANKA CHOPRA: NO ONE IS SAFE UNLESS EVERYONE IS SAFE**

## OVER 4L COVID CASES IN A DAY

SEVERAL STATES, INCLUDING PUNJAB, DEFER VACCINE ROLLOUT FOR 18+; CITE SUPPLY CONSTRAINTS

**NEWDELHI:** As India became the first country in the world on Friday to register over 4 lakh infections in a single day, several States have postponed the scheduled May 1 roll out of Phase III of COVID-19 immunisation for those between 18-45 years. The country reported 4,08,323 new COVID-19 cases until 11pm on Friday. As many as 3,464 new deaths were also reported on the day. Maharashtra reported 62,919 infections, followed by Karnataka (48,296), and Kerala (37,199). Maharashtra also recorded 828 casualties, followed by Delhi (375) and Uttar Pradesh (332). The country has so far reported a total of 1,91,63,488 cases and 2,11,778 deaths.

The figures do not include cases and deaths from Ladakh. The data are sourced from covid19india.org, an independent aggregator of daily figures from State health departments. As many as 2,97,488 new recoveries were recorded on April 30, taking the total to 1,56,71,536.

With the third phase of the coronavirus vaccination drive set to begin from Saturday, several states have said that they do not have enough vaccines to inoculate residents between the age group of 18-44, indicating that they are likely to miss the launch of the immunisation programme.



Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Assam, among other states, have already raised the matter of vaccine shortages, while Punjab, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are some of those that have said vaccinations will be delayed for adults. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said the capital will not join the wider vaccination drive as the required doses have not been received yet. He requested people in the newly added age group not to queue up at vaccination centres on May 1 as this might lead to violation of social distancing and create a law-and-order situation. The Tamil Nadu government

**CASES 19.2M**  
**DEATHS 212K**

Source: Our World in Data

also has deferred the rollout, as it has not yet received the required vaccines from the Central

government. Health secretary J. Radhakrishnan told mediapersons in Chennai that the Chief Minister had written to the Centre seeking 1.5 crore doses of Covishield and Covaxin.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said the inoculation will start from Saturday "as per the availability" of vaccine doses. Mr Thackeray said the State has the capacity to vaccinate each and every person but the problem is of vaccine supply.

In Punjab and the Union Territory of Chandigarh the rollout has been put on hold. The UT administration said it had not received vaccines — an issue

echoed by the Punjab government. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh announced deferring of the roll out, adding that vaccination at private health facilities will remain suspended from Saturday. The State government was trying to secure supply for 45 plus population from the Centre on priority and was also trying to strategise phase III vaccination.

The vaccination drive in Odisha faces uncertainty with State government not able to secure concrete commitment for required amount of vaccine.

Dwindling vaccine stocks have made it extremely difficult for Kerala to organise even regular vaccination sessions for the priority groups, making the wider immunisation exercise a non-starter. The State has just about 1.3 lakh vaccine doses left in stock and hence vaccination sessions are being conducted in a limited way in the State since the past two weeks.

The Andhra Pradesh government announced that it plans to use the allocated vaccine doses to first vaccinate those over 45. The Centre informed the State that 13.34 lakh doses including 9.91 lakh of Covishield and 3.43 lakh of Covaxin will be likely available with the manufacturers for purchase by the State during May. AGENCIES

## Demand for MGNREGS jobs doubles to 2.57cr in April

**MUMBAI:** Indicating massive reverse migration to villages amid the second wave of COVID-19, an SBI Research report on Friday said the demand for work by households under rural employment scheme or MGNREGS has almost doubled to 2.57 crore in April.

There is no official data on internal migration or reverse migration at the national level with a single source information centre.

The country has been topping the list of daily coronavirus infection caseload and death toll for more than two weeks now.

The latest numbers released by the Union health ministry this morning said the country recorded a new daily caseload with as many as 3,86,452 new infections in the past 24 hours, pushing the tally to 1,87,62,976, while active cases crossed the 31-lakh mark.

The death toll increased to 2,08,330 with 3,498 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am on Friday showed. The active cases have also jumped to 31,70,228, comprising 16.90 per cent of the total infections.

As cases soar everyday, the nation has been snapping at the seams as hospitals are over-crowded with patients gasping for breath as they don't have enough oxygen supplies, and so are crematoriums and burial grounds



“The demand for work by households under rural employment scheme (MGNREGS) has increased by 92 per cent to 2.57 crore households in April 2021 — the highest in any April since compilation of the data started in 2013 — so far, as against 1.34 crore in April 2020.”

for want of drugs. “The demand for work by households under rural employment scheme (MGNREGS) has increased by 92 per cent to 2.57 crore households in April 2021 — the highest in any April since compilation of the data started in 2013 — so far, as against 1.34 crore in April 2020.”

“This indicates the extent of reverse migration from the lockdown states to their native states,” SBI Chief Economic Adviser Soumya Kanti Ghosh said in a short note.

Last year's lockdown had all modes of movement fully snapped, forcing tens of thousands to leave the cities for their home villages on their foot. This had hundreds of them dying on their way under the scorching April-May summer heatwave. AGENCIES

across the major cities. More than 100 people have died for want of oxygen, while tens of hundreds are dying every day

## Hindustan Unilever net rises 13% in Q4

**NEW DELHI:** FMCG major Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) on Thursday reported a 13 per cent increase in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,190 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, riding on strong volume growth.

The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 1,938 crore in the same period of the previous fiscal, HUL said in a regulatory filing.

The company's consolidated total income stood at Rs 12,542 crore, as against Rs 12,235 crore in the year-ago period. For the fiscal 2020-21, the company said its consolidated net profit was at Rs 7,999 crore, as compared to Rs 6,756 crore in 2019-20, a growth of 18 per cent. Consolidated total income for FY21 was at Rs 47,438 crore, as against Rs 40,415 crore in FY20, the company said. “Our in-quarter performance was strong on both the top-line and bottom-line. Despite challenging times, in FY'21 our business ecosystem has withstood the disruption and demonstrated agility and resilience across the value chain,” HUL Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Mehta said.

He further said, “we have delivered on our multi-stakeholder business model. Our purpose-led brands and capabilities were further strengthened during the year and this positions us well to serve our consumers during this turbulent period.” The company's focus firmly remains behind delivering volume-led competitive growth, Mehta added. “The recent surge in COVID cases is of serious concern and ensuring safety and wellbeing of people remains our top priority,” he said adding HUL would continue to work closely with governments, health authorities and its partners to support the needs of the society and the nation to overcome this adversity. AGENCIES

## Reliance net doubles to Rs13,227cr

**MUMBAI:** Reliance Industries Ltd. on Friday said fourth-quarter consolidated net profit more than doubled to Rs. 13,227 crore, from Rs. 6,348 crore a year earlier, as revenue grew 13.6% to Rs. 1,72,095 crore.

For the year ended March 31, RIL recorded an 18.3% decline in revenue to Rs. 5,39,238 crore. Net profit (after exceptional items) increased 34.8% to Rs. 53,739 crore. The board announced a dividend of Rs. 7 per share.

“The decrease in revenue was primarily due to lower volumes and realisation across key products in O2C segment,” RIL said in a filing. “The retail segment also reported lower revenue, [affected by] the pandemic. This was partially offset by higher ARPU [average revenue per user],” it added.

Jio Platforms Ltd.'s fourth-quarter profit zoomed 47.5% to Rs. 3,508 crore. Revenue from operations rose 19% to Rs. 18,278 crore. Its value of services grew to Rs. 21,650 crore, from Rs. 17,993 crore. For the full year, Jio reported net profit of Rs. 12,537 crore. Its total customer base increased by a net 37.9 million



operations at the retail arm slipped 4.92% to Rs. 1,39,077 crore.

“The retail segment reported lower revenue, [affected by] the pandemic. This was partially offset by higher ARPU [average revenue per user]”

customers to 426.2 million. Jio clocked total data traffic of 62.5 billion GB, recording 28.9% growth.

Reliance Retail reported fourth-quarter net profit growth of 45% to Rs. 2,247 crore. Revenue from operations rose 20% to Rs. 41,296 crore. For FY21, revenue from

Annual revenue at its oil to chemicals business declined 29% to Rs. 3,20,008 crore on account of lower volumes and price realisation across key products. Sharp demand contraction in the first half impacted growth.

“We have registered robust recovery in O2C and retail segments, and resilient growth in the digital services business,” said CMD Mukesh Ambani. “Sustained high utilisation rates across sites and improvement in downstream product deltas as well as transportation fuel margins aided O2C earnings growth,” he added. AGENCIES

## Non-food credit grows 4.9%: RBI

**MUMBAI:** Non-food credit grew 4.9 per cent in March 2021 as against a growth of 6.7 per cent in the year-ago month, RBI data showed.

Credit growth to agriculture and allied activities accelerated to 12.3 per cent in March 2021 from 4.2 per cent in March 2020, the data on Sectoral Deployment of Bank Credit - March 2021, released by the Reserve Bank of India, showed Friday. Advances to industry decelerated marginally to 0.4 per cent in March 2021 from 0.7 per cent last year.

However, credit to medium industries registered a robust growth of 28.8 per cent in March 2021 as compared to



a contraction of 0.7 per cent a year ago.

Loans to micro and small industries decelerated to 0.5 per cent in March 2021 from 1.7 per cent a year ago, while credit to large industries contracted by 0.8 per cent as compared to a growth of 0.6 per cent a year ago, the data showed.

Credit growth to the services sector decelerated to 1.4 per cent in March 2021 from 7.4 per cent in March 2020, mainly due to deceleration in credit growth to NBFCs and contraction in credit to professional services.

Credit to the trade segment, however, continued to perform well, registering accelerated growth of 11.8 per cent in March 2021 as compared to 4.6 per cent a year ago, RBI data showed.

Personal loans continued to witness slowdown in growth during the reporting month. It decelerated to 10.2 per cent in March 2021 from 15.0 per cent a year ago. AGENCIES

## Agri law row: Farmers open for talks

**CHANDIGARH:** Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait on Thursday said the farmer unions are ready to discuss the three contentious agri laws with the Centre whenever it wants to resume talks but asserted the discussion would have to be about repealing the legislation.

Addressing a farmers' panchayat in Prem Nagar village in Haryana's Bhiwani district, he said the farmers have to carry on with their agitating for long, but they would “certainly not return to their homes without a victory”.

Haryana BKU chief Gurnam Singh Chaduni accused the government of failing to deal with the COVID-19 situation and said, “Those patients who do not get oxygen or beds in hospitals should be taken to the homes of the BJP MPs and MLAs.”

Tikait, who has in recent months addressed a series



of farmers' gatherings across Haryana, said the tillers have been agitating for more than five months near various borders of the national capital. “The fight will go on for long, for how many months one doesn't know. But one thing is confirmed that farmers won't return without winning it,” he said.

Tikait also said the agitation

has got support from people around the country, that includes traders, youth and other sections.

The BKU leader further said if the government wants to resume talks with the farmers' unions the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, which is spearheading the fight against the farm laws, is ready to do so. “When the government

wants to talk, Samyukta Kisan Morcha will talk. But there will be no talks if the government again sticks to things like suspending these laws for 18 months. We are firm that they have to take back these laws and any talks will start from that point only,” he said.

Tikait told the gathering that the protesting farmers will continue the agitation peacefully till the time their demands are met. He urged the villagers to form small committees to strengthen the agitation.

Cautioning them about the coronavirus pandemic, he asked the villagers to follow all COVID-related protocols like wearing masks, following social distancing norms and maintaining hygiene.

“Don't hide the disease if you get it, if anyone falls sick, get timely treatment and you will be alright,” Tikait said, adding, “Over here too we are following

all COVID-related protocols.” Slamming the government on the present COVID situation, Chaduni said, “What has the government been doing for the last one year? People are dying due to shortage of oxygen and beds.”

About the ongoing farmers' agitation, he alleged that more than 300 farmers have died but the government is adopting an adamant attitude. “We will not return to our homes, whether it takes five months or five years.”

He also attacked the ruling dispensation in the state, saying the Manohar Lal Khattar government has failed to build a medical college even when the Prem Nagar village panchayat had given their land for setting up the institute.

“Had the medical college been built it would have helped in corona times. But they do not have a budget for such things,” Chaduni said.

A complete **KNOWLEDGE CAPSULE**

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# Weekend lockdown in UT

DECISION ABOUT CHANDIGARH COMES HOURS OF HARYANA IMPOSES CURBS IN 9 DISTRICTS

**CHANDIGARH:** The Chandigarh Administration has decided to impose weekend lockdowns in the union territory along the lines of the ones invoked in Mohali and Panchkula—a development that comes a week after the administration went back on its decision to impose weekend restrictions within a week of enforcing them.

“There will be weekend corona curfew on Saturday and Sunday in Chandigarh too on similar lines as Mohali and Panchkula. Orders issued,” UT Adviser Manoj Parida said, as per an official statement.

“There shall be a weekend corona curfew from 5 am on May 1 till 5 am on May 3 in UT Chandigarh. No person shall leave their home or shall move on foot or by vehicle or travel or stand or roam around on any road or public places during the lockdown hours,” an order issued by Mandip Singh Brar, District Magistrate-cum-Chairperson, District Disaster Management Authority, UT Chandigarh, said.

In his order, he said a meeting to review the COVID-19 situation was held here on



Friday, in which it was decided that a “weekend corona curfew” should be imposed in Chandigarh.

Among various categories exempted include those tasked with law and order/emergency and municipal services, health, electricity, fire and telecom services. Shops dealing with supply of essential goods like milk, vegetables etc shall be allowed to remain open for home delivery up to 2 pm, the order stated.

There shall be no curbs on inter-state movement of essential and non-essential goods

while vehicles in bonafide inter-state transit shall be allowed to pass. All vaccination centres/testing centres/dispensaries and medical facilities shall remain open.

ATMs, hospitals, veterinary hospitals and all related medical establishments, besides dispensaries, chemist shops, pharmacies, ambulance services etc will continue to remain functional, the order said.

The kitchens of restaurants/eating places, hotels including food joints/courts in various malls can remain open for home delivery only up to 9

pm. Their staff shall be allowed to move on production of valid identity card issued to them by their respective establishment.

Pregnant women and patients getting medical/health services will be exempted from the lockdown restrictions.

Marriages with prior permission from Sub Divisional Magistrate concerned with the attendance of up to 50 persons shall be allowed. Funerals/last rites with attendance of up to 20 persons are allowed, it said.

During the weekend curfew, those going for appearing examinations and those on

exam duties will be allowed movement on production of admit/identity cards.

Those government employees working in tricity (Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula), shall be allowed transit on production of valid identity cards and duty orders.

Any breach of the orders shall invite action as per law, the order said.

Notably, weekend lockdown had been imposed in Chandigarh a fortnight ago, but the weekend restrictions barring night curfew were lifted last week. However, as the surge in COVID cases has continued, the administration again imposed the weekend lockdown.

UT Chandigarh on Friday recorded 724 fresh infections, taking the infection tally to 42,647. The death of 13 more persons took the toll to 478 in the city, according to a medical bulletin. Amid rising COVID-19 cases, the Chandigarh administration had on April 28 announced the extension of curfew period by three hours. The night curfew in Chandigarh, effective since April 29, starts from 6 pm till 5 am.

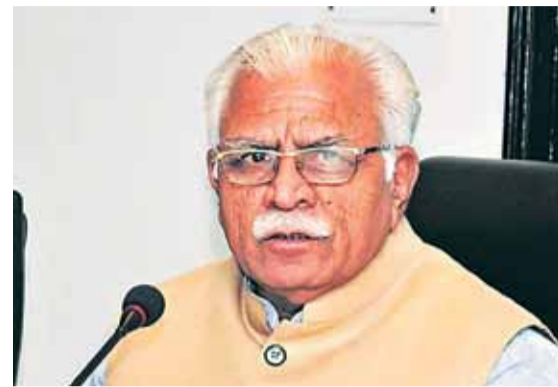
AGENCIES

## ‘All political parties need to unite in fight against Corona’

SATISH HANDA  
Chandigarh/Ambala

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar arrived at Ambala on helicopter to review health department arrangements to fight fast increasing cases of Corona virus, had a meeting with all Ambala district administration officers along with Ambala City MLA Aseem Goel in which Deepti Umashankar Commissioner, Ashok Sharma Deputy Commissioner, Y. Purankumar IGP, Hameed Akhtar SP, Dr Kuldeep Singh CMO were present. Chief Minister also inspected newly installed Oxygen Generation Plant at Civil Hospital Ambala City to start refilling oxygen in a day or so.

Addressing media persons, Khattar said there is no shortage of oxygen beds and Ventilator beds in hospitals in Haryana state and the only problem is transportation of oxygen cylinders, more over daily supply of oxygen in the state has been enhanced by the government. Khattar directed police officers to take stern action against those violating safety measures as well as violating section 144



during curfew and punish those involved in black marketing of oxygen and drugs. He directed CMO to get displayed the availability of vacant beds, oxygen beds and ventilator beds in all hospitals in the district.

Deputy Commissioner Ashok Sharma told Chief Minister that there are total number of 11 hospitals, which include five government hospitals and six private hospitals in the district treating Corona patients having facility for oxygen as well as ventilator beds. He said, there is provision for 750 oxygen beds in the hospitals. Chief Minister directed CMO Ambala to provide proper

treatment to all patients undergoing home isolation.

Addressing media persons at Chandigarh, Khattar made an appeal to all political parties in opposition as well as social welfare organizations to join hands and come forward to assist government to fight jointly against Corona claimed large number of lives in past few days. Information reveals, Corona positive cases have been recorded 6.33%, whereas death rate of victims suffering from disease has reached 0.87% which is a matter of concern. Khattar said, we have made atmosphere positive at this stage but need to save ourselves becoming positive.

## BPL families in Haryana get relief

SATISH HANDA  
Chandigarh

Due to epidemic outbreak all over in the country, industry as well as families below poverty line (BPL) in Haryana state have been worst affected in past over a year.

It is first time in the state since past six years, government has decided to reduce electricity tariff for industry in the state as well as domestic consumers with effect from month April onward this year. Information reveals, there are total number of 70,54,976 electricity consumers in Haryana and government has decided to charge fixed rate Rs 6.90 each unit under Times of Day (TOD) and Times of Use (TOU) schemes in order to bring relief to industry suffering from economic slow down and bring back on the track.

The rebate in electricity tariff will also be provided to domestic power consumers in the state suffered heavy financial losses in their earnings in past about

a year.

State government has also decided to provide electricity to immigrants grounds, grave yards, religious places, advocate chambers in the courts, railway DMRC and sll domestic consumers at subsidized rates offering 10 Paise rebate on each unit consumed by the consumers, besides fixed charge on industrial consumers reduced from Rs 170 to Rs 165 each KW.

Haryana state government has also offered facilities to families below poverty line in the state worst effected in past one year due to COVID-19 either faced financial losses in business or lost employment due to lockdown declared by the government or industrial sickness offering them essential commodities free of cost or at concessional rates under Antyoday Ann Yozna (AAY) scheme by the state government in which 5 kg wheat will be supplied to each member of BPL family in the state free of cost from ration depots for the month May and June 2021.

## 25% occupancy in Shatabdi trains



SATISH HANDA  
Ambala

As a result of increasing cases of Corona virus limited numbers of passengers are travelling in Shatabdi and special trains with only 25% occupancy and in most of the trains seats are seen lying vacant causing heavy financial loss to railways.

There was always a long

waiting list in Shatabdi and other special trains in Northern Railway and passengers had to wait for confirmed tickets Sameer Sharma PRO Ambala Rail Division told that most of the passengers are avoiding to travel in the trains due to fast spreading Corona virus at present and even Shatabdi trains are running with nearly 70-75% vacant seats.

A survey of nearly a dozen trains running in this area revealed, Golden Temple special train running between Amritsar and Mumbai usually remained over crowded with passengers in past now running with over 30% vacant seats these days incurring loss to railways.

Among other affected trains include train no. 12005 running between New Delhi to Kalka, 12006 running between Kalka to New Delhi, 2045 running between New Delhi to Chandigarh, 2046 running between Chandigarh to New Delhi, 2057 and 2058 Una Himachal Jan Shatabdi, 12014 Amritsar Shatabdi, 12029 and 12030 Swarn Shatabdi, 22443 New Delhi Vande Bharat, 22440 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Karta in which usually 75% seats remain unoccupied at present.

## HC verdict exposed nexus between Cong, AAP: SAD



**CHANDIGARH:** The Punjab and Haryana High Court’s verdict in the 2015 Kotkapura firing incident has exposed the “unholy nexus” between the Congress and the AAP to defame the SAD, Akali leader Maheshinder Singh Grewal alleged on Saturday.

He said the Congress-led government and its “collaborators were not interested in nailing the real culprits behind” the sacrilege and police firing incidents and “only playing politics on this most-sensitive issue”.

The high court ruled that the investigation into the Kotkapura police firing incident conducted by IPS officer Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh was not free from “blemish” and his “personal malice and malafide functioning was demonstrated on record”.

In the 89-page judgement made available on Friday, Justice Rajbir Sehrawat said that the officer indulged in “misuse of his official position to further his designs”.

Incidents related to the sacrilege of the Guru Granth Sahib had taken place in 2015 in Faridkot when the SAD-BJP government was

in power. Police had allegedly opened fire at a group of people protesting against the desecration of religious texts in Kotkapura.

In a statement, Grewal alleged that a “politically motivated, malicious and vendetta-driven” inquiry was launched by Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh in league with the Aam Aadmi Party into the sacrilege and police firing incident.

He further demanded the chief minister’s resignation. “Since the chief minister led the exercise by holding meetings to execute the Congress and AAP’s political agenda along with leaders like PPCC president Sunil Jakhar, MLA Navjot Sidhu and minister Sukhjinder Randhawa, he does not have any moral right to continue in office and should resign forthwith,” he said.

The Akali leader claimed that AAP was also “hand in glove” with the Congress in promoting and defending Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh. Grewal also demanded that a criminal case be registered against the IPS officer and he be arrested.

## NEWSBRIEF

### Farmers take out tractor march

**CHANDIGARH:** A large number of farmers in Punjab took out a tractor march in Patiala on Friday, claiming they were being offered much lesser compensation than the prevailing market rate for their land being acquired for the Delhi-Katra expressway. The farmers marched towards the Patiala residence of the Punjab chief minister, but police stopped them midway. Some of the protesters then blocked the road leading to the chief minister’s residence. Satnam Singh, a farmer who was part of the protest, told reporters that the compensation being offered by authorities concerned was not acceptable to them.

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### 11,000 liquor bottles seized

**CHANDIGARH:** The Haryana police on Tuesday seized over 11,000 liquor bottles that were allegedly being smuggled to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in two separate incidents, officials said. Acting on a tip-off, they impounded a truck from Rohtak district and seized 4,644 bottles of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) packed in 387 cartons. The consignment was found concealed under packets of potato chips, police said. The driver of the vehicle, Rajbir alias Raju, a resident of district Sonapat, was arrested, they said, adding that the seized liquor was to be smuggled from Rohtak to Bihar. In another incident, the police seized 6,372 IMFL bottles in Nuh district. The consignment was being smuggled in a truck from Sonapat to Uttar Pradesh.

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## Disqualified MLA seeks membership restoration

**CHANDIGARH:** Former Haryana Congress MLA Pradeep Chaudhary, who was disqualified following his conviction by a Himachal Pradesh court in a decade-old case, met Chandigarh speaker Gian Chand Gupta here on Monday seeking restoration of his membership.

During his meeting with the speaker, Chaudhary said the three-year sentence awarded to him had been stayed by the high court.

Chaudhary was sentenced to three years in jail by a Nalagarh court in Solan district of Himachal Pradesh following his conviction on January 14 in a case of assault, rioting and other penal offences.

“A court in Nalagarh in Himachal Pradesh had earlier sentenced Pradeep Chaudhary for three years. Today, he gave a certified copy of Himachal Pradesh High Court order. He has also given representation seeking his membership be restored,” the speaker told reporters after his meeting with Chaudhary.

“I will also go through the judgment, Secretary Vidhan Sabha will also go through it and it will also be sent to the state’s advocate general for legal opinion. After examining the judgment and after getting legal opinion from the AG, accordingly we will take the next step,” Gupta said when asked if the former MLA’s membership will be restored.

According to reports, Chaudhary had contended before the high court that since he had challenged the conviction awarded by the judicial magistrate, Nalagarh, before the Appellate Court and till the pendency of the



appeal, the sentence awarded to him by the trial court should be stayed. Allowing his plea, the court had stayed the sentence awarded to him. After Chaudhary’s conviction, the Kalka seat was declared as vacant from January 14 and a notification was also issued by the Haryana Assembly secretariat in this regard.

A sitting MLA stands disqualified automatically under the provisions of section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 following his conviction in any offence entailing a jail term longer than two years. The assembly speaker had then said that Chaudhary can appeal in the higher court and on the basis of the court’s directive, they will decide accordingly. Chaudhary had incurred disqualification under provisions of section 8 (3) of the Representation of the People’s Act, 1951, the notification stated.

Section 8 (3) of the Representation of the People Act states that a person convicted of any offence and sentenced to a jail term longer than two years would stand disqualified from the date of the conviction and would continue to be disqualified from contesting any election for a further period of six years after his release.

AGENCIES

## Industries to supply entire oxygen to DCs in Haryana

SATISH HANDA  
Chandigarh

In view of fast increasing cases of Corona virus in the state Haryana Home & Health Minister Anil Vij addressing state level COVID Care Committee said, decision has been taken that industries in the state producing oxygen will supply entire production of oxygen to state health department on the orders of deputy commissioners of every district in the state, failing which such units will be acquired by the state government.

He said, state government is providing 20 vehicles to the health department in every district to be used as ambulance vans to provide efficient services to the patients suffering from Corona. He said, supply of oxygen cylinders as well as movement of oxygen tankers will be made under the



supervision of police due to few cases of robbing oxygen tankers on the way reported in past some time. Vij said, scheme for cashless treatment in private hospitals for government employees suffering from Corona has also been introduced in the state with immediate effect.

Vij said, hospitals in Haryana state getting 162 ton oxygen against requirement of 270 ton and demanded extra quantity of oxygen from government in the centre. He disclosed that Haryana state is getting 50 ton oxygen ev-

ery day from Jamshedpur and Jharkhand steel plants to meet the requirement. He said, all government as well as private hospitals in the state has been directed to install their own oxygen manufacturing plants in their hospitals. He further added that all deputy commissioners in Haryana state has been advised to make provision for extra beds in private Banquet Halls, schools and private lodges with the assistance of social welfare organizations.

Vij said, Haryana state government has sent requirement for 20000 Remedesiver injections for the treatment of patients suffering from Corona, of these 1000 injections has already been received, another 3000 injections are under dispatch and out of total quantity of 20000 injections, 10000 injections each will be supplied to government as well as private hospitals in the state.

## HC directs authorities to take speedy action on Covid grievances

SATISH HANDA  
Chandigarh

A division bench of Hon’ble Punjab and Haryana High Court consisting of Justice Rajan Gupta and Justice Karamjit Singh, has disposed the application in the case titled Rishi versus State of Haryana and others.

In the final orders passed by the Bench, it has been directed that Secretaries, Legal Services Authority in every District would be member of Committee/Nodal Agencies comprising of Deputy Commissioner,

Superintendent of Police, Representative of Municipal Council/Corporation and Civil Surgeon formed for disposal of complaints arising of Covid situation.

The Bench while passing the order directed that meeting of the Committee shall be held on daily basis by way of electronic means, if necessary. It has been directed by the Bench that as and when a call is received on the helpline



number of by any of the Members of Committee, prompt response be given by the Administration.

Additional Advocate General, Punjab submitted that State has no objection to the formation of a committee on the similar lines and assigning a particular number in every District to consider the grievances of the public.

He, however, submits that a designated helpline number 104 has already been assigned which entertains all types of grievances of the public.

Standing Counsel for UT, Chandigarh submitted that in UT a war room is already in operation which is considering the complaints of the people.

A dedicated phone number is also functional. It was further brought to the notice of Hon’ble Bench that certain private hospitals are charging exorbitant fee and are fleeing the public. This is happening due to lack of control by the authorities. Accordingly, all the 3 States have given assurance that such grievance would be promptly looked into and punitive measures shall be taken against such private hospital and medical institutions, if the situation so warrants.

It has been further assured by all the three States that complaints/grievances will be promptly redressed in case a call is received on the designated helpline number. That apart, more personnel shall be deputed to attend such calls and PCRs/Beats in the nearby vicinity shall be activated. States have also assured that wide publicity of the designated helpline numbers will be done on the electronic and print media in order to make the public aware of the help available at

hand to instill confidence in public in the current pandemic situation.

Hon’ble Bench has also directed the States to depute officials of the municipal bodies/health authorities to ensure that mask etiquettes are followed by general public. Heads of the public as well as private institutions would sensitize the employees to wear masks in appropriate manner. It has been directed by the bench to take punitive action against the persons who wear the masks casually leaving their mouth and/or nose exposed and treat such persons on the same footing as those not wearing the mask at all.

Hon’ble Bench disposed off the petition on the basis of the assurance given by all the three States with liberty to the amicus curiae to seek revival of the petition, if necessary. States have been directed to file a status report regarding day to day developments in every District by way of a short affidavit in the Registry within a week.

## NEWSBRIEF

Congress candidate in Kerala dies of heart attack

**MALAPPURAM:** Senior Congress leader and Opposition UDF candidate from Nilambur V V Prakash died of a heart attack this morning, party sources said. The 56-year-old leader was also Malappuram District Congress Committee president. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi extended his condolences to the family. "The untimely demise of Malappuram DCC President & UDF Nilambur candidate V V Prakash Ji is extremely tragic. He will be remembered as an honest & hardworking member of the Congress, always ready to offer help to the people. My heartfelt condolences to his family," he tweeted. DCC sources said Prakash was admitted to a private hospital in Edakkara in the early hours of Thursday after he complained of heart-related discomfort, but was shifted to a facility in Manjeri as his condition worsened. He passed away around 5 am, they said. Prakash had undergone angioplasty a few months back. The Congress party was hoping to wrest the Nilambur seat from the ruling LDF alliance. The CPI(M) had fielded incumbent MLA P V Anwar. UDF leaders also expressed shock at his sudden demise. **AGENCIES**

75% turnout as UP panchayat polls end

**LUCKNOW:** Polling for the panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh ended Thursday with a 75 percent turnout in the final phase, marred by a group clash in Mathura and the deaths of two workers who fell ill while on poll duty. Lakhs of candidates were in the fray for over 7.32 lakh seats in gram panchayat wards, 58,176 in gram panchayats, 75,852 in kshetra panchayats and 3,050 in zila panchayats in the state-wide elections, held over four phases amid a surge in COVID-19 cases. In Thursday's fourth phase alone, over 5.27 lakh candidates contested for about 2.10 lakh seats in 17 districts. Officials said 75.38 per cent of the registered voters turned up, a polling percentage higher than the previous phases. The counting of votes will take place on May 2. In Mathura district's Barsana, eight people were injured when supporters of rival groups exchanged fire, police said. They have arrested six people from both factions. Additional Superintendent of Police (Rural) Shrish Chandra said polling was affected for some time at the Nehra village centre before they brought the situation under control. **AGENCIES**

## TIGHT RACE IN BENGAL

EXIT POLLS PROJECT BJP AHEAD IN ASSAM AND EXPECT LEFT COMBINE TO RETAIN POWER IN KERALA

**NEW DELHI:** Exit polls on Thursday forecast a tight contest between the incumbent Trinamool Congress and the BJP in the high-profile West Bengal assembly polls, while the ruling Left combine was projected to retain power in Kerala and so was the case for the saffron party in Assam.

Exit polls also projected DMK-led opposition alliance as a winner in Tamil Nadu, while the Congress-led alliance was seen losing the neighbouring Puducherry by some pollsters.

As the first exit polls began getting telecast soon after the eight-phase elections ended in West Bengal, the ruling TMC was seen in a tight contest with the BJP in assembly polls for the politically important state, while projections for the neighbouring Assam gave a clear edge to the BJP-led alliance over the Congress-led opposition. In West Bengal, the Republic-CNX polls gave the BJP a slight edge by projecting 138-148 seats for the party in the 294-seat assembly and 128-138 to the TMC.

However, Times Now-C Voter predicted a clear majority for the TMC by projecting 162 seats



for the party and 115 for the BJP. In Assam, India Today-Axis My India predicted 75-85 seats for the BJP in the 126-member assembly and 40-50 to the Congress-led opposition. Today's Chanakya predicted 70 seats for the saffron alliance and 56 for the Congress-led opposition. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the ruling Left combine and the DMK-led opposition alliance respectively were projected ahead of their respective rivals.

Jan Ki Baat exit polls, however, predicted a strong majority for the BJP in West Bengal, giving it 162-185 seats, against 104-121 to the ruling TMC.

Mamata Banerjee has an edge in what appears to be a tight race in Bengal, the BJP is likely to win Assam and the Left-led coalition may end a four-decade trend by retaining power in Kerala, NDTV's poll of exit polls predicts on state elections that were held alongside a

steep rise in Covid cases across the country. An aggregate of eight exit polls predicts that Mamata Banerjee may make it past the majority mark with 152 seats but her comfort factor will largely depend on how much she can widen the gap with challenger BJP after a series of defections before elections. The BJP's projected tally is 130, significant in a state where it has so far been an outlier. The Trinamool Congress

came to power in Bengal in 2011, ending 34 years of Left rule. In 2016, it retained power with an even bigger majority. This time, polls indicate that the Trinamool's tally will drop sharply with the BJP gaining at its cost.

In Kerala, the incumbent Left-led LDF front is likely to retain power with 87 of 140 seats and the Congress-led UDF will be a distant second with 51 seats, the polls say. If that proves right, it will be the first re-election for an incumbent in Kerala's see-saw politics. The BJP is set to make its presence felt in the southern state with two seats, the poll of polls says.

In Tamil Nadu, the polls predict a sweep for the opposition DMK and its allies; they are likely to win a staggering 173 of 234 seats, the exit polls say. The ruling AIADMK -- the BJP's ally - will end up with 58 seats in its first state election since the death of its charismatic leader J Jayalalitha in 2016, say the polls. MK Stalin's DMK had scored big in the 2019 national election and hopes to return to power this time after two terms in the opposition. **AGENCIES**

## Deaths under-reported: Rahul



**NEW DELHI:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday alleged that the truth about the pandemic is shrouded and deaths are being under-reported.

"Shroud the truth. Deny oxygen shortage. Under-report deaths. Government of India (GOI) is doing everything.....to save his fake image," he said on Twitter.

He shared the front page of "The New York Times" showing a picture of cremations being conducted and headlined, "As Covid ravages India, true toll is undercounted".

Rahul Gandhi earlier alleged that the "system has failed" and it is the duty of the party to provide help to fellow citizens suffering due to the sudden spurt in COVID-19 cases in the country. His comments came on a day Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his "Mann Ki Baat" radio programme said the second wave of the CO-

VID-19 pandemic has shaken the country and assured the people that the Centre was working with all its power to help the states.

"System" failed, so it's important to do Jan ki baat," Gandhi said on Twitter. "In this crisis, the country needs responsible citizens. I request my Congress colleagues to leave all political work -- just provide all help and ease the pain of our countrymen," he added.

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said "hiding data" and not sharing the total number of infections and deaths is doing a disservice to the nation. He said the data, however serious it may be, makes us aware and alert, and urged for a "course correction". "The Modi government has bungled up. If Modi government has abandoned its people and abdicated its duty, please do course correction and let us work together," he told reporters. **AGENCIES**

## 'SC should've intervened during rallies, Kumbh'

**MUMBAI:** The Shiv Sena on Saturday said the COVID-19 situation in the county wouldn't have worsened had the Supreme Court taken timely cognisance of election rallies in West Bengal and the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar.

The party's remarks come after the apex court's order asking the Centre for a national plan on oxygen supply and vaccination amid the pandemic.

"It is good that the court has stepped in. However, had there been a timely intervention about election rallies and road shows of the prime minister, home minister and other leaders in West Bengal and the religious congregation in Haridwar, people wouldn't have been left to die in agony," the Sena said in an editorial in its mouthpiece 'Saamana'.

Citing the death of 25 COVID-19 patients in a hospital in Delhi due to oxygen shortage, the party asked who should be held responsible for the situation, if not the Centre.

"This is the situation in the national capital. Who is responsible for this situation if not the central government?" it said, highlighting that a leading British daily had described the scenario as "India's descent



to Covid hell". Had the Centre focused on tackling the second COVID-19 wave instead of the Assembly polls in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry, the situation would not have deteriorated, it added. The Uddhav Thackeray-led party also condoled the loss of lives in hospital tragedies in Bhandara, Mumbai, Virar and Nashik.

"Modi and his colleagues wanted to turn India into a heaven. Today, we see only crematoriums and burial grounds. There are mass funeral pyres and hospitals themselves are on fire along with the patients. Is this a hell?" it stated.

Meanwhile, speaking to reporters, Sena leader and Saa-

mana's executive editor Sanjay Raut blamed the country's top leadership for the health crisis.

"Our leadership is not willing to go beyond winning elections and politics. They feel this is the ultimate success. Had the focus been on tackling the pandemic, we wouldn't be in such a situation," the Rajya Sabha member said. Referring to the scenario in Maharashtra, Raut said Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray was leading the battle against coronavirus from the front. "He hasn't gone anywhere to address election rallies. He is fighting, sitting in Mumbai and giving directives. Thackeray is not indulging in politics," he added. **AGENCIES**

## 'EC to blame for second Covid surge'

**CHENNAI:** The Madras High Court on Monday castigated the Election Commission over the Covid-19 second wave in the country, holding it "singularly" responsible for the spread, called it the "the most irresponsible institution" and even said its officials might be booked on murder charge.

The EC allowing political parties to organise rallies and meetings led to the spread of the pandemic, the court said. "Were you (living) on another planet," the Bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy asked EC officials.

The Bench made the stinging observation on a PIL by Karur AIADMK candidate and Transport Minister MR Vijayabaskar for the April 6 Assembly poll, seeking a direction to the authorities to ensure fair counting of votes on May 2 observing the Covid-19 protocol. When the EC counsel told the



judges that all necessary steps were underway, the Bench shot back saying by allowing the political parties to take out rallies and meetings, it (the EC) paved the way for the resurgence of the second wave of the deadly virus.

Irked over the submission of the EC counsel that all precautionary measures would be taken at the counting centres, the Chief Justice replied the EC must be "singularly" held responsible for the second wave of the pandemic in the country. The Bench said the EC officials might be booked under murder charges. The judges also orally warned that they would not hesitate to stop the counting of votes on May 2. **AGENCIES**

## Former Lt Gen Saha forays into politics

**KOLKATA:** Fondly called the 'People's General' for his humanitarian work in Kashmir valley, former deputy chief of army staff, Lieutenant General Subrata Saha (Retd.), who is contesting as BJP's candidate for Rashbehari assembly constituency felt his foray into politics would be a continuation of his life in public service.

Saha, a member of National Security Advisory Board, also said his desire to serve Bengal has driven his entry into politics. "For me, this is continuation of public service, 40 years of my life I have given to serving the nation through the Army, the former General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Srinagar-based 15 (Chinar) Corps, said.

Saha has been credited with undertaking several initiatives which earned him thanks from the Kashmiri people, including relief and rescue operations during a devastating flood in the Srinagar valley in September, 2014.

"Even if you are on the borders, actually you are doing public service," Saha, who retired as Deputy Chief of Army Staff, told PTI.

"When I go around meeting people here, there are so many people who tell me with a lot of love and affection, that it is because of people like you that we are able to sleep securely in our homes," he said.

The founding director general of Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers, Saha said he had simply changed his platform for doing public service, from the Army to politics.

Asked why he chose BJP to enter the political arena, he said a desire to do something for Bengal was always there within him and the saffron party offered him an opportunity to fulfil that desire.

"We have seen the decline of Bengal in front of our eyes," he said. He claimed that other states where BJP is in power are turning around admirably, and added there were enough reasons to feel inspired by the way BJP is delivering.

Saha, who commanded a Rifle Company on the Siachen Glacier in 1986 and led disaster relief operations in Odisha after the 1999 super cyclone, said that what is common in both politics and life in the Army is that the situation remains uncertain in both. Schooled at Sainik School, Purulia, he joined the National Defence Academy (NDA) in 1975, and was finally commissioned in the Assam Regiment in 1978.

"Situation is complex whether we are in the Army where you are dealing with the circumstances, the enemy, terrain, weather, potential allies of the enemy, so is the case over here, its very complex, particularly in West Bengal, where the situation is (also) very volatile," he said.

Alleging that the Left and the Trinamool Congress have destroyed the potential of the state over the last 44 years, Saha said "you cannot but get moved by the complete apathy of the powers that be here and on the positive side by the phenomenal resilience of the people." **AGENCIES**



## 'GNCTD Act won't alter duties of elected govt'



**NEW DELHI:** The centre on Thursday said the amendments to the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act will in no way alter the constitutional and legal responsibilities of the elected government in the national capital but would ensure better governance.

In a statement, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) also said the amendments will define the responsibilities of the elected government and the Lieutenant Governor (LG) and 'create a harmonious relationship' between the legislature and the executive.

The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Amendment Act, 2021 has come into force on Tuesday after being passed by the Lok Sabha on March 22, by the Rajya Sabha on March 24 and after the assent of the President of India on March 28. The Sections 21, 24, 33 and 44 of the Act were amended. The amendments to the GNCTD Act, 1991, in no way alter the constitutional and legal responsibilities of the elected government to take necessary action, in respect

of the subjects transferred to them in the State and Concurrent Lists of the Constitution of India, including subjects such as health, education, etc,' the statement said. The MHA said the objective of the amendment act is to make it more relevant to the needs of the capital, further define the responsibilities of the elected government and the LG and create a harmonious relationship between the legislature and the executive. "The amendments would ensure better governance in the NCT of Delhi and lead to improved implementation of schemes and programmes meant for the common people of Delhi," the statement said. The amendments are consistent with the existing legal and constitutional provisions, and are in line with the judgements of the Supreme Court on July 4, 2018 and February 14, 2019, it said. According to the legislation, the 'government' in Delhi means the 'Lieutenant Governor' and the city government will now have to seek the opinion of the LG before taking any executive action. **AGENCIES**

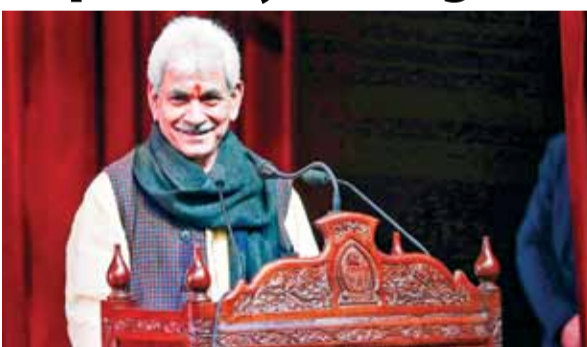
## Five J&amp;K gram panchayats bag national awards

**JAMMU:** Five gram panchayats in Jammu and Kashmir bagged the National Panchayat Awards-2021, an official spokesman said on Saturday.

Lt Governor Manoj Sinha extended his heartfelt congratulations to the best performing panchayats for bringing laurels to the Union territory.

Gram panchayat Kangroosa, block Kandi Rafiabab, Baramulla, and Gram panchayat Hakermulla, block Soibugh, Budgam won the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar (DDUPSP), the spokesman said.

He said gram panchayat Kootah, Hiranagar, Kathua was conferred with the Nanaji Deshmukh Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar (NDRGGSP), while gram pan-



chayat Panzgam A, block Reddi Chowkibal, Kupwara won the Gram Panchayat Development Plan Award (GPDPA). Gram panchayat Achabal A, block Nadihal, Baramulla bagged the Child Friendly Gram Panchayat Award (CFGPA), the spokesman said. The Lt Governor applauded the sarpanches and

other Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members for putting in outstanding efforts for effective and efficient delivery of public services for transformation of rural J&K.

"These PRIs would be role models for other panchayats and these achievements shall motivate others to follow their

## Book traces Uddhav's personal and political journey

**NEW DELHI:** Uddhav Thackeray's personal and political journey from a professional advertising photographer to chief minister of Maharashtra is the subject of a new book.

In "Trail of the Tiger", journalist Radheshyam Jadhav also looks at the Shiv Sena's "saffron to secular trajectory" under Uddhav's leadership.

He says Uddhav's long journey to politics was made possible only by Balasaheb's fervent followers.

"These Shiv Sainiks were willing to fight on the streets against the 'enemies' of Hindutva and Marathis. Balasaheb Thackeray had created a cult and handed it over to Ud-

dhav," he writes in the book, published by Bloomsbury. Uddhav had once said that using religion to stoke fire and win power is not his Hindutva and people killing each other is not Hindutva either.

The author says Uddhav appears to be tapping the potential for an alternate Hindutva narrative, like the Sena's, against the BJP's version in states other than Maharashtra.

"Uddhav's experiment with an alternative Hindutva may seem new but he is actually taking the path of his grandfather, Keshav Sitaram Thackeray. In 1921, Keshav Thackeray, a passionate social



reformer and writer, started a fortnightly magazine 'Prabodhan' (enlightenment), which earned him the title Prabod-

hankar," he writes.

"He was an ardent believer in Hinduism and in 1918, he joined activist Gajanan Vaidya

in establishing the Hindu Missionary Society to reconvert Hindus who had converted to Christianity and Islam. This reconversion campaign came at a time when most Hindus were against the idea," Jadhav writes.

The book begins with Uddhav's days in school and his youth.

It also talks about Uddhav's days at JJ School, where his 1981-82 batchmates recall him as a "down-to-earth, earnest youngster - lean, his shirt sleeves rolled up and a camera hanging down his shoulder - who took the local train like thousands of Mumbaikars". It tells in detail his rela-

tions with the BJP, his party's break-up with it and the alliance with the Congress and the NCP.

Jadhav says the Sena-BJP alliance survived 30 years despite ups and downs only because of ideological bonding but nothing holds the Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena together.

So, what does the future hold for Uddhav?

Jadhav terms Uddhav a Buccaneer politician, a leader who tries every formula, learns from it and moves forward.

"He is a tiger cub who can change his stripes and still be a tiger," he writes. **AGENCIES**

# Phased, flexible curbs decent way to fight Covid-19

**H**overing around 3.5 lakh daily infections, India's current wave of the COVID-19 pandemic raises serious concerns. Experts fear that the infection numbers may hit a million per day in May, with daily deaths nearing 5,000. The numbers reveal only a tiny fragment of the misery enveloping the country. The health-care infrastructure is stretched to breaking point in most parts of the country. Given this situation, more restrictions cannot be avoided. The challenge is in managing the pandemic with the least required and unavoidable disruption in economic activity. The lesson from the first lockdown that put the burden almost entirely on the poorest is that a better design for restrictions is essential. At the heart of managing any disaster is reliable information and trust in the government. Both seem to be deficient currently. The Centre appears to be eagerly watching and unhesitatingly intervening in some streams of information to deflect public attention from its own performance. However, there is little engagement with the States, the Opposition parties and the media. The Centre has viewed them with suspicion while the Opposition views the government as inept. All this is a replay of the responses last year, suggesting little learning. Lockdowns themselves cannot erase the pandemic, but they could give the government the breathing space to prepare. Ramping up of the health infrastructure must be taken up on a war footing. Going in for a shock and awe lockdown would cause more harm than good; but equally bad is the abdication of responsibility by the government. The Centre must work together with the States and the Opposition to design a flexible and phased scheme of restrictions that takes into account specific needs and concerns of various places, and sectors of the economy. The general public must be saved from chaos and miseries.



**MADIHA RAZA** WONDERS IF KUMBH MELA TURNS OUT TO BE A 'SUPER SPREADER' FOR CORONAVIRUS

# Reverring rituals amid pandemic

**T**he second wave of coronavirus infections is sweeping across India with a record spike of 3.46 lakhs new cases in the last 24 hours. Among other things, the Haridwar Kumbh Mela, one of the world's largest religious gatherings, is said to be contributing to the swift rise in Covid-19 cases in the country.

During this religious festival, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims gathered for a royal bath (Shahi snan) as part of their traditions. Ash-smearing ascetics and devoted Hindus bumped to take a dip in the Ganges hoping to wash away their sins. A devout Hindu believes bathing in the Ganges clears people of sins, and during the Kumbh Mela, it also brings salvation from the cycle of life and death.

More than one crore Indians took part in this event. Most of them could be seen flouting COVID Protocol and indirectly making themselves, their families and friends vulnerable to the infection. As per the reports, more than 1,000 people had tested positive for the COVID in two days as huge crowds of mostly maskless devotees descended on the Ganges River. A total of 1,701 people have tested positive for COVID-19 in the Haridwar Kumbh Mela area between April 10 and April 14, it was highlighted.

"It is already a super-spreader because there is no space to test hundreds of thousands in a cramped city and the government neither has the facilities nor the manpower," said a senior official in Haridwar.

A nearby Sachin International Hotel was converted into a COVID isolation centre. According to a hotel executive, all 72 rooms were packed with more than 150 patients. "We started taking in patients on April 5, and three days ago all our rooms got filled," the employee said.

Ironically, this open invitation to death amid corona crises is not being condemned



by the government nor by the spiritual leaders. On the contrary, Dharam gurus could be seen promoting this "super spreader event". "If I get COVID, the Ganga will wash it away, so not wearing a mask" Swami Vipulanand of Bairagi Akhada could be heard saying.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat, said, "there would be no 'rok-tok', - no restrictions - on pilgrims, and that with Goddess Ganga's blessings, faith will triumph over the disease (we have faith in God, He will defeat the fear of the virus) from the gathering apparently considers the event immune to coronavirus. On the day of the royal bath (shahi snan), Sanjay Gunjyal, Kumbh Mela Inspector General, said, "A stampede-like situation may arise if police tried to ensure social distancing at Ghats."

Kumbh Melas are held every 12 years. But this year, it was 'advanced' by a year, to 2021. The due date for the 'current' Kumbh at Haridwar was 2022, not 2021. But because of the astrological configurations

and compulsions, it had been preponed by one year.

Mahant Nayan Giri of the Juna Akhada, said death is inevitable, but "we must follow our traditions", while clarifying why he and his fellow holy men are not calling for a curtailment of the Kumbh Mela gatherings and why for him it is going to be business as usual at Haridwar.

The government's response to the festival raises a big question mark on its apparent double standard. Last year's Tablighi Jamaat was slammed and Jamaatis faced allegations that their three-day meeting in New Delhi led to the surge in Covid-19 cases.

About 3,500 members of Tablighi Jamaat were targeted by the entire nation. They were jailed for months and even charged with an attempt to murder. They were abused by the government-aligned media, which used offensive terms such as 'corona Jihad' and super spreaders". Does it not reflect hypocritical attitude?

What's the excuse today for allowing such massive gatherings when there are 12

lakh active cases in the country? To this, the Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat has an answer "Don't compare Kumbh to Markaz, because now people know they should wear masks".

The government that allows 35 lakh people to attend the mass gathering at Kumbh in a day at Haridwar recently said in the court said that only 20 devotees should be allowed to pray at Delhi's Nizamuddin Markaz at one time. The government is being called out on social media for double standards. Though, the Delhi High Court rejected the government's double standards saying if you don't limit numbers at other religious gatherings you can't do it here either.

For now, the government is also blaming the people for the irrepressible surge of COVID cases. The union health minister Harsh Vardhan said people became very careless about following COVID norms. He said there have been elections, religious gatherings, reopening of offices, no masks at weddings, in public transport or markets. Yes, it is people who are being careless but who allowed religious gatherings and elections?

Interestingly, the present government allowed the devotees to reach Haridwar without any concern that the event may turn out to be a "super spreader". Also, the government had arranged 25 special trains for them. On the contrary, last year lakhs of migrant workers got no trains for 40 days and walked home in agony and despair.

The pandemic has already exposed the failed healthcare system of the country. The big question is that whether India, despite being the world's largest maker of vaccines, strong enough to swiftly curb the Covid-19 surge? Beware, providing free passes to religious gatherings and political events may lead the nation towards serious health emergencies?



**JATINDER DESAI** HIGHLIGHTS THE PLIGHT OF HUNDREDS OF FISHERMEN LANGUISHING IN PAKISTAN'S JAILS

# The complex net of fishermen's misery

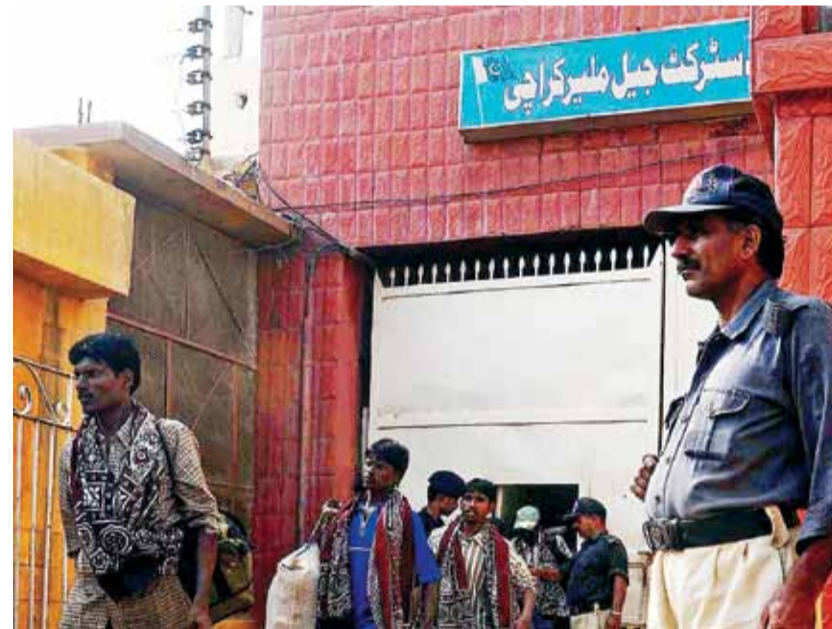
**R**amesh Taba Sosa, an Indian fisherman, is the latest victim of an inhuman and skewed system involving India and Pakistan, in which mortal remains of prisoners are not repatriated for months. Sosa died in a prison hospital in Malir Jail, Karachi, Pakistan, on March 26, 2021, but there is no guarantee when his family in Nanavada, near Kodinar in Gujarat, will be able to conduct his last rites.

Sosa was arrested in May 2019 when the fishing boat he was in allegedly entered Pakistani waters. His sentence in the Pakistani prison ended on July 3, 2019. However, not only was he not repatriated, but he was also not given consular access till his death. Sosa's case is one more statistic in a long story of insensitivity between the two governments that do not implement agreements. More than anything else, it is an issue of basic human rights.

India and Pakistan signed the Agreement on Consular Access in 2008. Though the deal has a few lacunae, it was significant. Section 4 of the agreement said, "Each government shall provide consular access within three months to nationals of one country, under arrest, detention or imprisonment in the other country." Further, Section 5 of the agreement stated, "Both governments agree to release and repatriate persons within one month of confirmation of their national status and completion of sentences."

## A long wait

More than 300 Indian fishermen remain in Pakistan's custody in Malir jail.



Consular access is an exception. Without it, the nationality of the person is not confirmed and the repatriation process cannot begin. Though the agreement does not state a time limit, there are numerous instances in which both countries have not confirmed nationality for as long as 18 months, during which the arrested men languish in jails.

Sosa's case has many precedents. A shocking case is of Vaaga Chauhan, an Indian fisherman, who died in custody in December 2015. His mortal remains reached his village in Gujarat only in April

2016. Chauhan's family went through unimaginable trauma and reached out to every resource for help.

Then, there is Latif Qasim Sama's case. Hailing from a village in Kutch near the International Border, he inadvertently crossed over to Pakistan in 2018. He was arrested and his sentence ended in April 2019. Latif still does not have consular access. His relative, Ismail Sama, returned from a Pakistan jail in January this year, though his sentence ended in 2016. Sama and Latif are not fishermen, they live near the International Border and inadvertently

crossed it. Ismail returned home after 13 years. Worse, his family was informed a decade after his arrest.

Fishermen from the Saurashtra region of Gujarat often get arrested when they unintentionally cross over into Pakistani waters. They suffer, and so do their families, who are now even more worried because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Sluggish mechanisms

Ideally, prisoners should be released and repatriated the day they complete their prison sentence. But this has happened in just one case, with Hamid Ansari, the only person who was released and repatriated on the day of completion of their sentence. Dharam Singh from Kashmir, who had unknowingly crossed over in 2003, spent 18 years in a Pakistani prison. He was eventually sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment, which ended in December last year. But he reached home only this month.

In 2007, India and Pakistan set up a joint judicial committee on prisoners comprising four retired judges from each side. The committee used to convene twice a year to meet prisoners. It made unanimous recommendations, including on the release and repatriation of fishermen and women prisoners. Its last meeting was held in 2013, after which it was discontinued. In 2018, efforts were made to revive it, but Pakistan is yet to nominate judges or call for a meeting. The delay is costing lives.

*Jatinder Desai is with the Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy*

## FIVE OBSERVATIONS

ON THE US-INDIA CLIMATE AND CLEAN ENERGY AGENDA 2030 ALLIANCE

- CUT GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS**  
The partnership raises expectations that the coming decade will see sustained financial and technological cooperation between the two countries to cut greenhouse gas emissions.
- INDIA RANKS THIRD IN CO2 EMISSIONS**  
India ranks third, behind the US and China, although its per capita CO2 emissions are less than 60 per cent of the global average, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi pointed out.
- INDUSTRIALISED WORLD STARTED IT**  
Many developed countries tend to view India's reluctance to commit to a net zero emissions target as recalcitrance, but the climate change crisis originated not here but in the industrialised world.
- FORWARD-LOOKING POLICY NEEDED**  
A forward-looking policy should, therefore, envision green development anew, providing funding and green technologies as compensation for the emissions space lost by poorer countries.
- KNOWLEDGE SHARING WILL HELP**  
For the India-US agreement to yield results, Joe Biden would have to persuade industry and research institutions at home to share knowledge and subsidise transfer of technologies.

**LETTERBOX**  
Readers' feedback adds value to the newspaper. Please email comments on reports, features and columns to [fwletters@gmail.com](mailto:fwletters@gmail.com). We will publish them on this page.

## THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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## BOOKS: REVIEW

# New e-book explores impact of climate change

**A** new e-book explains the impact of climate change and aims to motivate readers to reduce its outcome with the help of simple sustainable solutions.

"Climate Change Explained - for one and all", released on the occasion of Earth Day, is written by climate activist-author Aakash Ranison.

A mix of facts, data, and information about climate change, it picks topics like "Greenhouse effect, global warming, Carbon footprint" and talks about their effects on earth in the near future.

"Today, people might know the term 'Climate Change' but they don't really know how we humans are causing it and what we can do to stop it. With my book 'Climate Change Explained - for one and all' this is the gap I am trying to fill," said the 26-year-old author.

"My journey of sustainabil-

ity has been about spreading awareness about climate change and with this project supporting United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13, I hope I can make a difference and we all get to learn about how our daily habits are leaving an impact on climate change", he added.

According to the research conducted by his team for the book, India ranks fifth in the Global Climate Risk Index 2020, and the risk factor for the country is increasing every year through rising temperature, increase in sea level around Mumbai, forest fires, and plastic waste generation.

The profit made from these platforms will be donated to Spiti Ecosphere -- a social enterprise that focuses on creating sustainable livelihoods through conservation and development of economies.

"We no longer can ignore hu-

**A mix of facts, data, and information about climate change, 'Climate Change Explained - for one and all' picks topics like 'Greenhouse effect, global warming, Carbon footprint' and talks about their effects on earth in the near future**

man activities' impact on nature. We must make sustainable changes in our lifestyle. Aakash's book 'Climate Change Explained for one and all' will help everyone better understand the relationship between nature and humans and help live in harmony with it," said Ishita Khanna, founder, Spiti Ecosphere.



Climate Change Explained - for one and all  
By Aakash Ranison  
Blue Tribe  
30 pages; Rs20

Aakash Ranison was born in Indore, but for the last seven years, he doesn't have a home of his own and is constantly traveling to different places across the country. At the present moment, he is living in a small village called Nasogi in Himachal Pradesh. He managed to do his schooling, but never felt the need to go to an educational institution after that. The 25-year-old had cycled from Indore to Hyderabad to give a talk at Google a few years ago. And he says he loves the city and its Paradise biryani.

Aakash has travelled across India and other countries covering over 8,000 km by walking, 20,000 km by cycling, and 50,000 km by hitchhiking. He is also well-known for his three art installations. The first one was

made at Spiti Valley by a group of climate enthusiasts with plastic bottles left behind by visitors. The second art installation is the world's first-ever Marine Cemetery located at Bepore Beach in Kozhikode, Kerala, dedicated to nine endangered marine and riverine species. It is made up of 2,000 plastic bottles that had been collected from the beach. The recent art installation is called SUP (single-use plastic) DeathBed, which is made using 26 kg of plastic, the average amount of waste generated by an Indian in a year.

"Climate Change Explained - for one and all", exclusively available for free on climateaction.aakashranison.com, will also be available on Amazon, iBooks and Google Books at the cost of Rs 20 from May 10.

"Start with simple things first - by segregating waste at home, trying not to buy plastic, switching to a bamboo toothbrush, reusing and recycling whatever plastic you are already using, and composting food waste," informs Aakash, who just owns four pairs of clothes.

ALSO READ | GDP TO GROW AT 11% THIS FISCAL: ADB \* P7 | INDIAMART ACQUIRES STAKE IN SHIPWAY TECH \* P7

# Vedanta vows Rs 150 cr help

THE AMOUNT IS OVER AND ABOVE Rs 201CR SPENT BY THE FIRM IN 2020 TO FIGHT COVID-19

**NEW DELHI:** Vedanta on Thursday said its Chairman Anil Agarwal has pledged Rs 150 crore to help India in its fight against deadly COVID-19 second wave.

The amount is over and above Rs 201 crore that was spent by Vedanta Group in 2020, it said in a statement.

"Anil Agarwal...has pledged Rs 150 crore to help the country in its fight against the rapidly spreading second wave of COVID-19," Vedanta said.

The company will create additional capacity of 1,000 critical care beds in 10 cities across the country in an effort to support the Centre and states in this challenging times.

The critical care beds will be placed in state-of-the-art 'field hospitals' which will be attached to recognised and reputed hospitals.

Each facility will have 100 beds in an air-conditioned tent with full electrical support and designed specifically for COVID care.

The critical care facilities will have 90 beds equipped with life saving oxygen support



“

Vedanta Group has come forward to pledge Rs 150 crore towards our commitment to fight the pandemic and we stand firmly with our people and the government at this difficult time”

**ANIL AGARWAL**  
Chairman, Vedanta group

while the remaining will have ventilator support.

"I am deeply concerned and anguished to see the impact of the second wave of COVID-19 and loss of precious lives. Vedanta Group has come forward to pledge Rs 150 crore towards our commitment to fight the pandemic and we stand firmly with our people and the government at this difficult time," Mr. Agarwal said.

Additional capacity of critical care beds will be created in states like Rajasthan, Odisha,

Jharkhand, Goa and Delhi-NCR.

The company is targeting to set up and commission the first set of facilities within two weeks and the balance facilities will be increased within a month.

Vedanta has estimated this support for a minimum six-month period.

The company said it is also working closely with the government bodies and local administration to provide medical facilities and hospital care to those in need.

At present, Vedanta is supporting around 700 beds for COVID patients across its business locations, which will be increased to 1,000 in the near term.

Meanwhile, Hindustan Zinc, ESL and Sesa Goa iron ore business have stepped in to augment oxygen supplies to COVID patients as part of the Vedanta Cares initiative. Vedanta is a leading producer of metals, oil and gas.

In a separate development, the Supreme Court on Tuesday allowed Vedanta to operate its closed oxygen plant at

Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu, saying the order has been passed in view of "national need" for oxygen and there should be no political bickering over the generation of the gas by the company as the country is facing a "national crisis".

The apex court made it clear that Vedanta shall not be allowed to enter and operate its copper smelting plant under the garb of this order and that permission to operate oxygen plant would not create any equity in the company's favour.

A bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud, L Nageswara Rao and S Ravindra Bhat directed the Tamil Nadu government to form an oversight committee to oversee the functioning of the plant which would include District Collector and Superintendent of Police (SP) of Tuticorin, District Environmental Engineer, Sub-Collector Tuticorin and two government officials. The bench asked Vedanta to submit a list of technical and non-technical staff to the committee who are essential to run the oxygen plant. **AGENCIES**

# CAIT petitions Goyal against foreign e-commerce firms

**NEW DELHI:** Retailers association CAIT has petitioned Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal against foreign e-commerce companies allegedly flouting lockdown norms to deliver non-essential items and unfairly gaining market share at the cost of small merchants.

In a two-page letter to Goyal, Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) national general secretary Praveen Khadwal alleged that Amazon and Walmart-owned Flipkart were making "illegitimate financial gains" by supplying non-essential items such as mobile phones, kitchen appliances, electronics and accessories during the lockdown.

Amazon and Flipkart did not immediately comment on the CAIT allegations. Local lockdowns imposed in several parts of the country to contain the spread of COVID infection provide for the delivery of only essential items.

"The pandemic has hit the retail industry hard and since 2020, the industry has seen major upheavals. It is surprising to observe that while small and medium-sized businesses



(kiranas) are languishing, foreign e-commerce companies are growing exponentially at the cost of small business," CAIT said.

While restrictions imposed by the state governments to check the spread of COVID has meant that physical stores are not allowed to operate at all times, foreign e-commerce companies are delivering mobile phones, it said.

Quoting RedSeer Consultancy, CAIT said the e-commerce industry made sales of over USD 8.3 billion in 2020 compared to USD 5 billion in the previous year.

"It is important to prohibit

these foreign e-commerce entities from gaining market share at the cost and life of small and medium kirana stores in India because Kirana stores have formed the backbone of the industry over the years," it said.

"We pray for immediate action prohibiting these foreign e-commerce entities from ruthlessly destroying the Indian retail sector with their deep discounting and predatory pricing mechanism and trampling the lives of over 40 crore Indians." It also urged Goyal to issue guidelines on "what is permitted and prohibited for market e-commerce entities." **AGENCIES**

## NEWSBRIEF

Fresh warning of mobile tower installation frauds

**NEW DELHI:** The telecom industry, represented by associations COAI and TAIPA, on Thursday warned the public against frauds related to the installation of mobile towers on properties. While COAI is the representative body of telecom service providers, TAIPA represents telecom infrastructure firms. "The public is cautioned against certain companies, agencies, or individuals who are fraudulently approaching people and asking them to deposit money in their personal or company accounts in the name of tax for leasing their premises for installation of mobile towers," a joint statement by the associations said. It warned that the same individuals are also offering fake 'No Objection Certificates' for the installation of towers. **AGENCIES**

Top firms report more revenue than their competitors

**BENGALURU:** Leading enterprises that amplified their technology investments during the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly extended their growth advantage over competitors, said a study from Accenture on Wednesday. The research titled "Make the Leap, Take the Lead," revealed that technology undeniably became indispensable to business success and directly enabled companies to survive and thrive during one of the most disruptive times in history. By stepping up investments in cloud, artificial intelligence (AI) and other technologies, 'leaders' are now growing revenue at five times the rate of 'laggards,' exceptionally higher than the doubled growth rate Leaders reported just a few years ago, as per the report. **AGENCIES**

Porsche India sees 52% rise in sales

**NEW DELHI:** Porsche has reported a 52 per cent increase in its sales at 154 units in the January-March quarter this year as compared with the same period last year. Early indications of a revitalised luxury market are seen with the company realising its best quarterly results in India in the last seven years, the automaker said in a statement. This achievement makes Porsche one of the fastest growing luxury car brands in India this year, it added. "Despite the ever changing pandemic-related measures, we have managed to outperform our quarterly sales results of the past seven years and secured the highest first quarter order intake in five years. This drives our motivation for the coming months," Porsche India Brand Head Manolito Vujicic said. **AGENCIES**

## GoAir launches car rental service

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
Mumbai

GoAir today launched car rental services across 100 cities in India, including 25 airports on GoAir's domestic network as part of its bouquet of Value Added Services (VAS).

GoAir has also joined hands with Eco Europcar, a B2C (business to consumer) company having leadership position in the corporate rent a car service industry. Through this tie-up, the airline will provide hassle-free last-mile connectivity to its passengers with chauffeur-driven cars across the spectrum of economy, mid to luxury car segments along with Minivans for closed user groups.

GoAir passengers will be able to book chauffeur-driven cars simply by visiting GoAir's website (www.goair.in) and avail the following value add services: Airport Trans-



fers, Local Transfers and Inter-City Transfers.

Highlighting Internal feedback of passengers seeking hassle-free and comfortable last-mile-connectivity, Kaushik Khona, CEO, GoAir, said, "Today's announcement is a culmination of our joint efforts with Eco Europcar to offer door-to-door, convenient, safer and affordable experience to our customers. Through Eco Europcar, GoAir will be offering Chauffeur-driven cars from mid to luxury car segment including the likes

of Tata, BMW, Mercedes, Toyota Coaches, Tempo Traveller and last but not the least, Chrysler Stretch Limousines too."

Rajesh Loomba, Managing Director, Eco Europcar, said, "Together with GoAir, we will provide travellers with a comfortable travel experience and also owing to the deep sanitization process that we follow, coupled with best-in-class customer service and well-trained staff, we will enhance GoAir's value proposition of "Fly Smart" with "Drive Smart".

## Maire Tecnimont wins \$450m petchem deal

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
Milan

Maire Tecnimont consortium - comprising its subsidiaries Tecnimont and Mumbai-based Tecnimont Private Limited -- has been awarded an EPCC (Engineering, Procurement, Construction and Commissioning) Lump Sum US\$ 450 million contract by Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) for the implementation of a new Para-Xylene (PX) plant and relevant offsite facilities. The plant will be located in Paradip in the State of Odisha.

Pierroberto Folgiero, Maire Tecnimont Group Chief Executive Officer, stated: "We are really glad that our relationship with a prominent player such as IOCL keeps on growing



steadily with another strategic contract to boost the Country's natural resources transformation capacity with the best available technologies, thus ensuring environmentally best performing products and processes."

"As India is paving the way for a large wave of investments in the downstream

segment to meet the fast-growing domestic demand for plastic products and intermediates, we are best positioned to seize new upcoming opportunities -- thanks to our technological mindset as well as our historical local presence through our Indian engineering hub Tecnimont Private Limited," he said.

## Oxygen crisis hits glassware units

**SATISH HANDA**  
Ambala

Due to shortage of oxygen gas production of laboratory glass wares in nearly 2500 manufacturing units at Ambala supplying glass wares to educational institutes, research centres, laboratories and hospitals has been much affected. According to Kailash Dheer President Scientific Appliances Manufacturers Association (SAMA) Ambala, manufacturing of laboratory glass wares depends upon supply of oxygen gas as such manufacturers at Ambala are finding difficulty in getting oxygen cylinders but looking at the short supply of oxygen being used at the hospitals to save lives of patients suffering from Corona virus in hospitals claiming lives. Dheer said, association has decided to stop production of glass wares in view of heavy demand of oxygen in hospitals at present since life of a person is more important than manufacturing glass wares.

According to laboratory glass ware manufacturers at Ambala, price of oxygen cylinders has been dra-



stically increased up to 100% by the suppliers in view of heavy demand of oxygen in the hospitals as well as shortage of air and liquid oxygen as such manufacturing of glass wares at present has become uneconomical. According to laboratory glassware manufacturers, on an average a industry requires minimum four oxygen cylinders every day as such the total daily requirement of oxygen cylinders required by laboratory glassware manufacturing units in the town comes to be nearly 10000 cylinders.

According to information available with state health department Haryana, the graph of patients suffering

from Corona virus has fast increased by three times in the hospitals in the state in past 10 days and patients suffering from this dreaded virus are facing severe respiratory problems due to short supply of oxygen in many hospitals. Information reveals, demand of oxygen in KOVID hospitals has increased six times in past few days as such state health department officers are much worried over increasing cases of Corona virus witnessing 0.10% increase every day and death rate also fast increasing. According to information, over 5% patients admitted in hospitals require oxygen support in hospitals to remain alive after April 15 this month.

## Mumbai registers 80,718 properties

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
Mumbai

As many as 80,718 properties were registered in Mumbai alone - a growth of 114% against the same period last year (Sept. 2019 to March 2020.) during the stamp duty cut period between September 2020 to March 2021, according to data by Inspector General of Registration (IGR), Maharashtra.

While the second COVID-19 wave --coupled with the expiry of the stamp duty cut period -- had been expected to impact the monthly growth momentum of Mumbai's housing sector, the stamp duty cuts period instead witnessed consistent m-o-m growth in sales.

"Despite the stamp duty cuts in this period, the state government collected almost the same volume of registrations revenue as it did last year in the same period," Prashant Thakur, Director & Head - Research, ANAROCK Property Consultants said, adding "The total revenue collected stood at Rs 2,914 Cr between Sept. 2020 to Mar. 2021 period, while it was Rs 2,958 Cr in



the corresponding period a year ago."

"In short, the increased sales volumes -- aided by the stamp duty cut -- helped the government avoid severe revenue loss. Ever since the expiry of the stamp duty cut period from 1st April onwards, there has been a marked drop in property registration numbers. Besides the expiry of the stamp duty cut period, the second COVID-19 wave and ensuing restrictions aimed at curtailing the city's case load have contributed towards the declining numbers." "Clearly, the stamp duty cut

significantly stimulated housing demand in the city. The government would do well to seriously consider extending it to keep the property sales momentum - and registrations revenue - going."

"It is an apt time to consider such a move as the second wave has proved to be far more serious than the first one. Overall, the housing sector is better equipped this time around as more developers have developed digital marketing capabilities and the government has allowed construction activities to continue."

According to J.K. Bihani President Haryana Plywood Manufacturers Association, production of plywood has dropped to nearly 40% due to epidemic outbreak since there are no pending orders with the manufacturers at present and moreover labour problem has started due to most of the migrant workers are leaving for their native places fearing lock down declared by the government as such industry is likely to face problem further. Bihani said, there are nearly 360 units manufacturing plywood in Yamunanagar district, besides large number of saw mills and peeling units in the area as such nearly 350 truck loads were being despatched to Maharashtra, Gujarat, M.P, Bihar, West Bengal, Punjab and other states in the country which have now been reduced between 150 to 200 trucks daily.

Bihani told that Yamunanagar plywood industry suffered heavy losses due to farmers protest since all borders on way to Delhi were blocked by the agitators. He said, business is likely to be further affected in case lock down declared by the government.

## TVS Motor's revenue grows 53% to Rs. 5,322 crores in Q4

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
Chennai

**T**VS Motor Company witnessed Revenue from Operations growth by 53% at Rs. 5,322 crores for the quarter under review against Rs. 3,481 Crores reported in the fourth quarter of 2019-20. TVS Motor Company is a reputed two and three-wheeler manufacturer and the flagship company of the USD 8.5 billion TVS Group

During Q4 2020-21, two-wheeler sales in domestic market grew by 41% and international markets by 74%

ahead of industry growth of 24% and 33% respectively. In the month of March 2021, the Company -- for the first time -- crossed the 1 lakh units milestone for two-wheelers in International Business.

Operating EBITDA for the quarter stood at 10.1% against 7.0% reported in fourth quarter of 2019-20. Company reported highest ever Operating EBITDA of Rs. 536 Crores for the fourth quarter recording a growth of 119%, as against Rs. 245 Crores in fourth quarter of 2019-20. Profit Before Tax (PBT) was Rs. 387 Crores in the fourth quarter of 2020-21



-- a growth of 331% as against Rs. 90 Crores in the fourth quarter of 2019-20. During the current quarter, Company reported Profit After Tax (PAT) of Rs. 289 Crores -- recording a growth of 292% as against Rs. 74 Crores in the fourth quarter of 2019-20.

The financial year 2020-21 witnessed Revenue from Operations growth by 2% from Rs. 16,423 Crores to Rs. 16,751 Crores -- despite COVID-19 related lockdown during the Q1 of 2020-21.

Operating EBITDA for the year was higher at 8.5% -- com-

pared to 8.2% of last year -- despite country lockdown during the Q1 of 2020-21. The Company has been delivering improved EBITDA sequentially from Q2 onwards.

The PBT for year ended March 2021 grew by 10% at Rs. 826 Crores, as compared to Rs. 754 Crores reported during previous year. PAT for the year ended March 2021 was at Rs. 612 Crores as compared to Rs. 592 Crores reported during the year ended March 2020.

During the year, focused working capital management and improved operating performance helped the Company

to generate free cash flow of Rs. 1,887 Crores -- which was used to reduce the debt. Lean stock with the dealers also helped to unleash the blocked working capital across the supply chain.

The overall two-wheeler and three-wheeler sales including exports registered a growth of 47% at 9.28 lakh units in the quarter ended March 2021 as against 6.33 lakh units registered in the quarter ended March 2020. Motorcycle sales registered a growth of 54% at 4.31 lakh units in the quarter ended March 2021 as against 2.80

lakh units in quarter March 2020. Scooter sales for the quarter ended March 2021 registered a growth of 78% at 2.98 Lakh units against the sales of 1.67 Lakh units in the fourth quarter of 2019-2020.

The Company's total export of two-wheelers and three-wheelers registered a growth of 58% at 3.22 Lakh units in the quarter under review, as against 2.04 Lakh units in the quarter ended March 2020. Three-wheeler sales for the quarter under review was 0.41 Lakh units as against 0.43 Lakh units during fourth quarter of 2019-20.

ALSO READ | PRIYANKA: NO ONE IS SAFE UNLESS EVERYONE IS SAFE \* P8 | TOP UMPIRES MENON, REIFFEL PULL OUT OF IPL \* P8

# 'Clear Covid claims in 60 minutes'

## THE LATEST DIRECTION FROM THE INSURANCE REGULATOR COMES IN VIEW OF A DELHI HIGH COURT ORDER

**NEW DELHI:** Regulator IRDAI on Thursday directed insurers to decide on cashless COVID-19 treatment claims within 60 minutes of the receipt of final bill so that the hospital bed can be quickly made available to another waiting patient.

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) also directed all general and health insurers to communicate their decision on authorisation for cashless treatment for COVID-19 claims to the hospital within 60 minutes from the time of receipt of request along with all necessary requirements from the hospital.

The regulator issued this direction in view of a Delhi High Court order asking the regulator to tell insurers to communicate their cashless approvals within a maximum time period of 30 to 60 minutes so that there is no delay in discharge of patients.

In the wake of the second wave of COVID-19 and in line with directions of the High Court, IRDAI directed insurers that 'decision on final discharge of patients covered in COVID-19 claims shall be communicated to the network provider within a period of ONE hour from the time of receipt of final bill along



with all necessary requirements from the hospital'.

In an order dated April 28, 2021, the Delhi High Court had directed IRDAI to advise insurers to communicate their cashless approvals to the concerned hospitals/establishments within a maximum time period of 30 to 60 minutes so that there shall not be any delay in discharge of patients and hospital beds do not remain unoccupied.

The IRDAI's circular further said notwithstanding the outer limits of timelines specified, the insurers are advised to process

such requests promptly so that both authorisation for cashless treatment and discharge of the patient can be hastened to the maximum extent.

The insurers have also been asked to issue appropriate directions to their respective Third Party Administrators (TPAs) for ensuring compliance with the timelines.

The Delhi High Court Wednesday had said insurance companies cannot take 6-7 hours for approving bills of COVID-19 patients as it delays their discharge from hospitals

“Notwithstanding the outer limits of timelines specified, the insurers are advised to process such requests promptly so that both authorisation for cashless treatment and discharge of the patient can be hastened to the maximum extent”

and those in need for beds have to wait longer.

Justice Prathiba M Singh said if the court comes to know of an insurance company or a third-party administrator (TPA) processing insurance claims taking 6-7 hours for clearing bills, contempt action would be taken against them.

A few minutes after her order, a similar direction was passed by a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli which directed insurance companies and TPAs to ensure that time taken to grant approvals to bills was reduced to a reasonable amount as there were long queues of

people outside hospitals waiting for beds during the massive surge in COVID-19 infections.

Justice Singh said in her order that insurance companies or TPAs should not take more than 30-60 minutes to grant approval to the bills on receiving the request from hospitals and directed insurance regulator IRDAI to issue instructions in this regard.

The division bench, in its order, said delay in discharging patients was leading to delay in admitting needy patients and was causing more suffering to them.

The direction by the division bench came after it was informed by some hospitals and lawyers that delay in approvals by insurance companies and TPAs was resulting in delay in discharging patients and admitting new ones.

The bench was hearing several pleas with regard to lack of oxygen, medicines, beds and ventilators in the national capital and ramping up of testing. Justice Singh's order came while hearing several individuals' plea regarding non-availability of Remdesivir and beds for patients in dire need of the same.

**AGENCIES**

# RBI plans survey on bank mergers

**MUMBAI:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to conduct a customer satisfaction survey to find out the impact of the recent mergers of state-owned banks on banking services being availed by individuals.

Among other things, the respondents will be asked whether the merger was positive from the point of customer services. The choice before the customer will be to tick one of the following options -- strongly agree; agree; neutral; disagree; or strongly disagree.

The proposed survey will cover a total of 20,000 respondents from 21 states, including Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat. In all, there will be 22 questions.

Of the 22, a set of four questions has been drafted separately for assessing customer service and grievance redress issues of customers of branches of banks that have been merged with other banks in the year 2019 and 2020.

Among public sector banks, Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank were merged with Bank of Baroda; Oriental Bank of Commerce and United Bank of India with Punjab National Bank; Syndicate Bank with



Canara Bank; Allahabad Bank with Indian Bank; Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank with Union Bank of India.

Also, Lakshmi Vilas Bank was merged with DBS Bank.

The questions related to mergers are: "I did not face any problem in availing services after the merger"; "I faced problems in the following product(s)/service(s)/area(s)"; and "The nature of problem I faced in the product(s)/service(s)/area(s)".

The participants will also be asked: "overall, the merger has been positive from customer service perspective"; and options against this are "strongly

agree"; "agree"; "neutral"; "disagree"; and "strongly disagree".

While inviting quotations for conducting the "Bank Customers' Satisfaction Survey" from survey agencies, the central bank said the approved vendor will be required to conduct interview over phone with recording of customers of bank branches falling in identified states.

The RBI will provide the contact number of the customers of bank branches selected from the 21 states. The selected agency will have to complete the survey work and submit the report to the RBI by June 22, 2021.

**AGENCIES**

## NEWSBRIEF

### Norms set to appoint statutory auditors for banks, NBFCS

**MUMBAI:** The Reserve Bank of India on Tuesday issued guidelines for appointment of statutory auditors of banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCS), including housing finance companies. "Guidelines for Appointment of Statutory Central Auditors (SCAs)/ Statutory Auditors (SAs) of Commercial Banks (excluding RRBs), UCBS and NBFCS (including HFCs)" will be applicable for financial year 2021-22 and onwards. However, non-deposit taking NBFCS with asset size below Rs 1,000 crore have the option to continue with their extant procedure. The guidelines provide necessary instructions for appointment of SCAs/SAs, the number of auditors, their eligibility criteria, tenure and rotation, etc. while ensuring the independence of auditors, the Reserve Bank said.

**AGENCIES**

## Ceiling of 70 years set for MD, CEO of bank

**MUMBAI:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday fixed the tenure of MD, CEO and whole-time director (WTD) in a private sector bank at 15 years and prescribed the maximum age of 70 years for such functionaries.

These directives form part of the instructions issued by the RBI with regard to the chair and meetings of the board, composition of certain committees of the board, age, tenure and remuneration of directors, and appointment of the WTDs on Monday. The RBI said it would come out with a Master Direction on Corporate Governance in banks in due course. "Subject to the statutory approvals required from time to time, the post of the MD & CEO or WTD cannot be held by the same incumbent for more than 15 years.



"Thereafter, the individual will be eligible for re-appointment as MD & CEO or WTD in the same bank, if considered necessary and desirable by the board, after a minimum gap of three years, subject to meeting other conditions," the RBI said.

It added that during this three-year cooling period, the individual shall not be appointed or associated with the bank or its group entities in any capacity, either directly or indirectly.

With regard to upper age limit for MD & CEO and WTDs in the private sector banks, the RBI said that no person can continue on such positions beyond the age of 70 years.

**AGENCIES**

## RBI panel on ARCs invites suggestions

**MUMBAI:** The RBI Committee on Asset Reconstruction Companies, which will review the existing legal and regulatory framework applicable to ARCs, on Wednesday invited views and suggestions from stakeholders.

The suggestions could be given to the committee till May 31, 2021.

On April 19, RBI had set up a committee to undertake a comprehensive review of the working of asset reconstruction companies (ARCs) in the financial sector ecosystem and recommend suitable measures for enabling them to meet the growing requirements.

The central bank had constituted the Committee under the chairmanship of Sudarshan

Sen, former Executive Director, Reserve Bank of India.

As per the terms of reference of the committee, the panel will review the existing legal and regulatory framework applicable to ARCs and recommend measures to improve efficacy of ARCs. It will also review the role of ARCs in resolution of stressed assets including under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), and give suggestions for improving liquidity in and trading of security receipts. Besides, it has also been asked to review business models of the ARCs. The panel is scheduled to submit its report within three months from the date of its first meeting.

**AGENCIES**

## Karnataka Bank eyes 12 per cent growth

**NEW DELHI:** Karnataka Bank on Saturday said it is targeting to grow its business at 12 per cent to over Rs 1.42 lakh crore in the current fiscal year and will gradually increase the share of retail loan in its portfolio.

In a communication to shareholders, the bank said it strives to see 2021-22 as a year of excellence on the back of its healthy business growth. "Cost-Lite" liability portfolio and strengthened fundamentals.

"For the new Financial Year, the Bank is planning to grow its business at a moderate 12 per cent to take the total business turnover (i.e. total of Deposits and Advances) to around Rs 1,42,500 crore," it said.

As a realignment strategy in its advances portfolio, the private sector lender said it has been eyeing credit exposure of minimum 50 per cent to retail, 35 per cent to mid corporates and not more than 15 per cent to large corporates.

The intent is to minimise the concentration on large corporate borrowers and to ensure continued sustainability, it said.

"The bank has been moving towards the said direction in a sustainable manner. Besides, the yield on the retail and mid corporate advances has been better than the large corporates and also, the risk is widespread across the portfolio than that of concentration in the case of large corporate exposure," Mahabaleshwara M S, Managing Director & CEO, Karnataka Bank said.

He said COVID-19 came as a challenge in 2020-21 along with the



"M-cap related misleading campaign against the private sector banks, including our bank by a section of media".

Regarding the Supreme Court's order on not levying any interest on loans during March-August period of 2020, the lender said it already made ex-gratia payment of difference between compound interest and simple interest for these six months to the eligible borrowers in accordance with RBI directive.

In case of remaining accounts, the penal or compound interest charged on the borrower accounts may have to be refunded and adjusted towards next installment due within a reasonable time from the date of Supreme Court order dated March 23, 2021.

"Further, with the vacation of stay order, NPA marking has also resumed," it said.

Mahabaleshwara said in spite of turbulent banking environment and unforeseen hurdles, the bank has been able to sail through 2020-21.

On the way forward, he said the bank is striving hard to see Karnataka Bank among the top three in the peer group by focussing on a healthy, consistent, sustainable and remunerative business and by continuing the efforts in recovery process.

**AGENCIES**

## IOB offers retail loans on digital platform

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
*Mumbai*

Indian Overseas Bank has launched Retail Loans (home loan, personal loan & clean loan) on digital platform. The launch was presided by Partha Pratim Sengupta, Managing Director & CEO, Indian Overseas Bank in

the presence of Executive Directors A. K. Srivastava and Mrs. Srimathy S.

The loans are now being made available through various channels, i.e. the bank website (www.iob.in), Internet Banking and the Mobile Banking App. IOB customers can apply for these loans through the bank website,



mobile banking and internet

banking, while non-customers may apply only through the bank website. Applicants can apply for Housing Loans and Home Loans under the PMAY schemes (subsidy linked home loans) and will also have the option to switch over their home loans from other Banks to IOB. Applicants may also apply for

Two & Four Wheeler Loans and Personal Loans in easy steps, while Personal Loan to HNIs are also being offered at a discounted interest rate.

On submission of the application after accepting the terms & conditions of the loan, an In-principle sanction letter having a reference number will be generated and will be intimated to applicants through SMS / e-mail.

**AGENCIES**

## IRDAI suggests products for retail engineering

**NEW DELHI:** A working group set up by regulator IRDAI has underlined the need for standard insurance products to cover risks associated with various facets of retail engineering.

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) had set up the working group in November last year to revisit the existing engineering insurance products (retail) and recommend new suitable standard products in line with advancement in technology for the retail segment.

The working group has submitted its report in which it has made various recommendations

related to retail engineering products and also recommended certain standard covers to meet the needs of retail customers, IRDAI said on Thursday while inviting comments on it from stakeholders by May 20.

As per the report, the group has suggested simplification of policy wordings, in addition to a standard format and structure for the policy documents.

It said that better clarity of coverage, terms, and conditions in the policy document would help in "realigning the industry to meet customer expectations better and vice versa."

The existing engineering

“Better clarity of coverage, terms, and conditions in the policy document would help in realigning the industry to meet customer expectations better and vice versa”

product (tariff) wording developed almost two decades back, although comprehensive in nature, did not undergo revision or refinement in line with rapid innovations and developments,

said the report of the working group (WG). WG members felt that retail policyholders / customers were often unaware of the covers to be opted, the report said. On sum insured definition for retail segment for engineering products, it said: "Considering a near unanimous view from all stakeholders, WG suggests Sum Insured limit of up to Rs 50 crores is recommended for retail segment".

The group, as per the report, opined that the retail products with standard wordings with uniform coverage of a good range of essential covers are needed to give a comprehensive

protection boost to the SME and MSME sector entities and units.

The products should be offered by all Indian insurers without any changes or modifications, it said.

The panel has also suggested a separate section containing major precautions to be observed by insured, like immediate intimation in case of address change and increase in sum insured.

Modern engineering insurance in India has its roots in the British era and later industrial development during late 20th century. Post-Independence, the engineering classes of business were limited to commercial entities like industrial houses and contractors.

**AGENCIES**

## RBI joins network for greening financial system

**THE APEX BANK EXPECTS TO BENEFIT FROM THE MEMBERSHIP OF NGFS BY LEARNING FROM AND CONTRIBUTING TO GLOBAL EFFORTS ON GREEN FINANCE, WHICH HAS ASSUMED SIGNIFICANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

**MUMBAI:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday said it has joined the Central Banks and Supervisors Network for Greening the Financial System (NGFS) as a member.

The central bank joined the NGFS on April 23, 2021. Green finance assumed significance in the context of climate change.

Launched at the Paris One Planet Summit on December 12, 2017, the NGFS is a group of central banks and supervisors willing to share best practices and contribute to the development of environment and climate risk management in the financial sector, while mobilising mainstream finance to support the transition towards a sustainable economy.

The RBI said it expects to benefit from the membership of NGFS by learning from and contributing to global efforts on green finance, which has assumed significance in the context of climate change.

In coming months, the Federal Reserve is also expected to join the Network for Greening the Financial System, a group of 75 central banks set up to combat climate change by better understanding the risks it poses to economies.

"We have requested membership. I expect that it will be granted," Fed Vice Chair for Supervision Randall Quarles told a hearing before the Senate Banking Committee Tuesday. He said the Fed could probably join before the NGFS's annual meeting in April.

The NGFS requires its members be signed up to the Paris Climate Accord. President Donald Trump announced in 2017 that he was withdrawing the U.S. from the pact, but



President-elect Joe Biden has pledged to rejoin as he makes fighting climate change a key focus for his administration when he takes office in January.

The Fed signaled earlier this year that is expected

to become a member of the group at some point. It has been talking more about the threat of climate change, though critics often accuse the central bank of taking a back seat on the issue compared with the efforts of its major peers.

For the first time, the Fed also included the risks of climate change in its Financial Stability Report, released on Monday.

The agency noted that severe, abrupt storms could lead to market swings -- including instant changes in the value of real-estate harmed in a disaster. The trend toward higher global temperatures "adds a layer of economic uncertainty and risk" that the central bank is trying to incorporate into its thinking.

# GDP to grow at 11% this fiscal

**SURGE IN COVID CASES MAY PUT THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY AT RISK, ADB REPORT POINTS OUT**

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian economy is projected to grow at 11 per cent in the current financial year amid the "strong" vaccine drive, said ADB on Wednesday, while cautioning that the recent surge in Covid cases may put the country's economic recovery at "risk".

"India's economy is expected to grow 11 per cent in fiscal year (FY) 2021, which ends on March 31, 2022, amid a strong vaccine drive," ADB said in its flagship Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021 released on Wednesday.

However, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) cautioned that the surge in Covid-19 cases may put the country's economic recovery at risk.

For FY2022, India's GDP is expected to expand at 7 per cent, it added.

Further, it said the gross domestic product (GDP) of South Asia is expected to rebound to 9.5 per cent this year, following a contraction of 6 per cent in 2020, before moderating to 6.6 per cent next year (2022), it said.

ADB said the economic growth in developing Asia is set to rebound to 7.3 per cent this year, supported by a healthy global recovery and an early progress on Covid-19 vaccines. The projected resurgence follows a 0.2 per cent contraction last year.

"The region's growth is forecast to moderate to 5.3 per cent in 2022. Excluding the newly industrialized economies of



Hong Kong, China; the Republic of Korea; Singapore; and Taipei, China, developing Asia's economic activity is expected to grow 7.7 per cent this year and 5.6 per cent in 2022," said the report.

The report projects that most economies in developing Asia will see healthy growth this year and in 2022.

Developing Asia comprises 46 members of ADB list on the basis of geographic group. These include new industrialized economies, countries in Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The report said in China, strong exports and a gradual recovery in household consumption will boost economic activity this year.

China's gross domestic product (GDP) is forecast to expand 8.1 per cent in 2021 and 5.5 per cent in 2022. East Asia's

GDP is expected to grow 7.4 per cent in 2021 and 5.1 per cent in 2022, it said.

The report said rising exports are boosting some economies in Developing Asia amid strengthening global economic activity, including a rebound in manufacturing.

Progress on the production and delivery of Covid-19 vaccines has contributed to this momentum, but the pandemic remains the biggest risk for the region as potential delays in vaccine rollouts or significant new outbreaks could undermine growth.

Increasing geopolitical tensions, production bottlenecks, financial turmoil from tightening financial conditions, and long-term scarring like learning losses due to school closures are among other risk factors, said the report.

Growth is gaining momen-

## Lockdowns may not impact GDP

**MUMBAI:** Business activity has fallen by a fourth of the pre-Covid levels due to lockdowns imposed by states to contain the spread of the second wave of Covid-19, Japanese brokerage Nomura said on Tuesday.

However, it said the falling activity levels will have a muted economic impact and maintained its growth estimates for the year, saying the lockdowns present "downside risks".

As of April 25, the Nomura India Business Resumption Index (NIBRI) registered its steepest weekly fall in over a year of 8.5 percentage points to 75.9, which is 24 percentage points below pre-pandemic normal, the brokerage said in a statement.

It noted that as lockdowns take effect, mobility has experienced a significant hit and there are signs of the economic pain spreading to the wider economy in facets such as power demand, GST e-way bills, railway freight.

However, the impact still appears small compared to the first wave and other indicators like labour force participation rate have remained resilient. But with more states extending restrictions, sequential momentum is likely to remain weak over the next month, hurting GDP growth in April-June period.

"There are reasons to expect a muted economic impact. The experience from other countries suggests a lower correlation between falling mobility and growth. Parts of the economy like manufacturing, agriculture, or work-from-home and online based services should be resilient," it said, maintaining its 11.5 per cent growth forecast for 2021.

The brokerage said as the pace of vaccination picks up, which it expects from June, there should be another return of pent-up demand, in addition to other tailwinds like strong global growth, lagged impact of easy financial conditions, and front-loaded fiscal spending.

tum across developing Asia, but renewed Covid-19 outbreaks pose a threat to recovery, said ADB Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada.

"Economies in the region are on diverging paths. Their trajectories are shaped by the extent of domestic outbreaks,

the pace of their vaccine rollouts, and how much they are benefiting from the global recovery," Sawada said.

Disclaimer :- This story has not been edited by Outlook staff and is auto-generated from news agency feeds. Source: **AGENCIES**

## Britannia Industries profit drops 3% to Rs360 crore

**NEW DELHI:** FMCG major Britannia Industries on Tuesday reported a 3 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 360.07 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 31, impacted by rise in commodity prices.

The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 372.35 crore in the same quarter a year ago, Britannia Industries said in a regulatory filing.

Consolidated total revenue from operations during the quarter under review stood at Rs 3,130.75 crore as against Rs 2,867.70 crore in the year-ago period, a growth of 9 per cent.

The company, however, said it incurred higher expenses in the fourth quarter at Rs 2,701.87 crore as compared to Rs 2,488.88 crore in the corresponding period previous year. The cost of materials consumed stood at Rs 1,532.35 crore during the fourth quarter as against Rs 1,307.97 crore in the corresponding period previous fiscal.

Commenting on the performance, Britannia Industries Managing Director Varun Berry said, "On the commodity cost front, palm oil, packing material and dairy products witnessed sudden and steep increases while strategic buying helped the company manage the cost increases better. We



are evaluating the long term impact of these increases to action necessary price increases while ensuring competitiveness."

During the quarter, he said, "We continued focusing on the basic building blocks of our business, direct reach, rural distribution and brand building. Our cost efficiency programme for the year delivered the targeted results giving us strong cost leadership."

Berry further said in the fourth quarter the company implemented three transformational digital projects namely S4 HANA, an Online Dealer Management System and an Integrated Vendor Management System.

"The delivery of these projects necessitated shutdown of operations for a few days in March which impacted primary billing for the quarter," he added.

However, Berry said, "We

are confident that with all the core systems getting upgraded and integrated we are well poised to take our business efficiencies to the next level while leveraging the large amounts of data available to build business intelligence and analytics."

For the fiscal ended March 31, the company posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 1,850.59 crore as against Rs 1,393.60 crore in the previous year, a growth of 33 per cent.

Consolidated total revenue for FY21 was at Rs 13,136.14 crore as against Rs 11,599.55 crore, the company said.

"The year has been difficult and challenging in every possible way. Despite the adverse conditions, we managed to deliver good results in terms of topline growth, profitability improvement and market share gains," Berry said. **AGENCIES**

## Second Covid wave poses risks to growth: S&P

**NEW DELHI:** S&P Global Ratings on Wednesday said the second wave of Covid infections poses downside risks to India's GDP and heightens the possibility of business disruptions.

The second wave brings in uncertainty and a drawn-out Covid outbreak will impede India's recovery, it said.

"This may prompt us to revise our base-case assumption of 11 per cent growth over fiscal 2021-2022, particularly if the government is forced to reimpose broad containment measures," S&P said in a statement.

Last week another global

rating agency Fitch had projected India's economic growth in current fiscal at 12.8 per cent, while Moody's Investors Service had earlier this month said that the second wave of Covid infections presents a risk to India's growth forecast, but a double digit GDP growth is likely in 2021 given the low level of activity last year.

As per official estimates, Indian economy contracted 8 per cent in the 2020-21 fiscal, which ended March 31, 2021.

S&P said the country already faces a permanent loss of output versus its pre-pandemic path, suggesting a long-term



production deficit equivalent to about 10 per cent of GDP, it added.

"India's escalating second wave of Covid-19 infections is serious. In addition to the substantial loss of life and significant humanitarian concerns, S&P Global Ratings believes the outbreak poses downside

risks to GDP and heightens the possibility of business disruptions," it said. India reported a record 3,60,960 new infections on Wednesday, bringing its total to over 1.79 crore. Deaths also rose by a record 3,293 to 2,01,187.

S&P said, the high absolute number of infections in India also presents a significant contagion risk to other geographies and the outbreak is putting severe pressure on the country's health infrastructure.

"Strong economic growth will be critical to sustain the government's aggressive fiscal stance put forth within India's

latest national budget, and to stabilize its high debt stock relative to GDP. The pace and scale of the post-crisis recovery will have important implications for the sovereign credit rating," S&P said.

S&P, which currently has a 'BBB-' rating on India with a stable outlook, earlier this month had a forecast of 11 per cent for India's GDP this fiscal on account of fast economic reopening and fiscal stimulus.

It said the localised lockdowns currently in force disrupts daily work and related economic behaviour, which could drag out the recovery of revenue and earnings of some corporate sectors. **AGENCIES**

## Sebi issues new MF disclosure norms

**NEW DELHI:** Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday said mutual funds will have to make a disclosure about scheme risk-o-meter, performance and portfolio details to investors only for the particular plans in which they have invested.

This is aimed at enhancing the quality of disclosure with respect to risk and performance and portfolio of the schemes without creating information overload on the investor, Sebi said in a circular.

The new framework will be applicable with effect from June 1, 2021.

According to the regulator, mutual funds will have



to "disclose risk-o-meter of the scheme and benchmark while disclosing the performance of scheme vis-a-vis benchmark".

They need to send the details of the scheme portfolio while communicating the

fortnightly, monthly and half-yearly statement of the scheme portfolio via email.

The disclosures need to be made to the investor only for the schemes in which the unit-holders are invested as on the date on which the disclosures are stipulated, Sebi said.

In October 2020, Sebi revamped the product labelling on mutual fund schemes under the risk-o-meter by introducing the "very high risk" category to warn investors.

This was in addition to the existing five categories to measure risks - low, low to moderate, moderate, moderately high, and high. **AGENCIES**

## Major ports waive-off charges on Oxygen ships

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
Mumbai

With excessive requirement of Oxygen and related equipment becoming a priority due to Covid-19 in the country, the Government of India has directed all Major Ports -- including the Kamarajar Port Limited -- to waive-off all charges levied by Major Port Trusts (including vessel related charges, storage charges etc.) and accord highest priority in the berthing sequence to the vessels carrying consignments over the next three months.

The consignments include; Medical Grade Oxygen, Oxygen Tanks, Oxygen Bottles, Portable Oxygen Generators, Oxygen Concentrators, Steel Pipes for manufacturing Oxygen Cylinders and associated equipment.



Port Chairpersons have been asked to personally supervise logistic operations to ensure unhindered movement of such consignments for berthing of such vessel on top priority in

the port, unloading of oxygen related cargo, coordination with Customs and other authorities for speedy clearance/documentation and expeditious evacuation of oxygen

related cargo from port. In case the vessel is carrying other cargo/containers in addition to oxygen-related cargo, waiver of charges on pro-rata basis -- considering the overall cargo or containers handled at port-- should be provided for oxygen-related cargo to such vessels.

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways will monitor the details of such vessels, cargo and time taken in the port from the time vessel entered in the port limits to exit of cargo from port gate.

The Government of India is deeply engaged in handling the crisis related to the second wave of Covid-19 in the country and is taking all steps in this regard through appropriate and innovative measures, a Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways release stated.

## Haryana to regularize industrial units

**SATISH HANDA**  
Chandigarh

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar has framed a new policy in a meeting with the senior officers of four departments HSIIDC, State Industries, Local Body and Haryana Urban Development Authority framed a policy to regularize all industrial units located in non-confirming zones other than industrial areas in Haryana state since industry in Haryana state has been adversely affected due to Covid-19 in past about a year.

Chief Minister said, industry is back bone for the prosperity of a state as well as create sources of employment opportunity. Dushyant Chautala Deputy Chief Minister holding the charge of industry in the state was also present in the meeting. Khattar directed all con-



cerned officers that in case of a problem, it should be sorted out promptly. He said, a survey in this regard has already been completed in four prominent industrial towns Yamunanagar, Panipat, Faridabad and Rohtak in the state and according to the survey report there are total number of 4742 industrial units at Yamunanagar, of them 1413 industrial units are situated in confirmed zone whereas 3329 industrial units are situated in non-confirming zone.

The survey report reveals, there are 21460 industrial units in industrial town at Faridabad, of them 6048 industrial units are located in confirming zone and 15412 units situated in non-confirming zone. There are total number of 10805 industrial units at Panipat, which include 3318 industrial units in confirming zone and 7487 units in non-confirming zone. Survey also revealed, there are total number of 4176 industrial units at Rohtak, which include 783 units situated in confirming zone and 3383 units in non-confirming zone.

Chief Minister said, on the basis of survey report Commissioners Municipal Corporations in these towns have been directed to settle 5% cases of these industrial units on the basis of random sample verification within a week.

## Development not at the cost of environment: VP Naidu

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
New Delhi

"Development should not come at the cost of the environment and the world needs business leaders who can look beyond short-term profit alongside working for long-term sustainability," Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu said today while highlighting the importance of sustainable development and the fact that many B-Schools are making sustainability an integral part of their training and curriculum.

Naidu gave a clarion call for paying greater attention to global warming and the consequential increase in frequency of natural disasters, as this is impacting businesses as well.

He was speaking during the inauguration of the two-day, virtual Indian B-Schools Leadership Conclave themed "Indian B-Schools: Navigating a sustainable future by merging local & global best practices," jointly organized by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), USA and Education Promotion Society for India (EPSI). Over 20 thought leaders, deans, directors and policymakers in management education will deliberate various issues faced by educators in B-Schools in India and the world.

Noting the vital role of B-Schools in the economy and society due to future managers, leaders and innovators being groomed and trained there, he urged for education becoming socially-relevant



through young management students visiting nearby villages to study and identify rural India's business & social problems while also coming up with viable solutions for the same.

"India has more than 3400

India has more than 3400 Business schools with an enrollment of around one million students, but the +India Skills Report 2020+ pegs employability of MBA graduates at 54 per cent in India"

Business schools with an enrollment of around one million students, but the +India Skills Report 2020+ pegs employability of MBA graduates at 54 per cent in India, he said while urging the B-Schools to find solutions

an integral part of the overall make-up of a successful manager. Noting that in the post-Independence era, US institutions like Harvard and MIT helped Indian B-Schools, Naidu expressed happiness over the fact that currently many of top management faculty members in US B-Schools were born and educated in India. "I find this to be an excellent example of the interdependence between the two largest democracies of the world", he said.

While Covid-19 is forcing educators and students to adapt to the virtual communication mode, this sudden shift towards online mode of interaction also posed several challenges, he said while advising the faculty of B-Schools to focus more

on mentoring and guiding rather than lecturing and instructing. "Even in the virtual context, learners need to experience navigating their way in the new normal for learning critical thinking and independent decision-making skills", he added.

Dr. G. Viswanathan, President, EPSI, Dr. Anil D Sahasrabudhe, Chairman, AICTE, Dr. Geoff Perry, Chief Officer, Asia Pacific, AACSB, Dr. H Chaturvedi, Director, Birla Institute of Management Technology, Dr. Prashant Bhalla, Sr. Vice President of Manav Rachna International University, Vice-chancellors, Deans, Principals, professors and students from various Institutions were among those who attended the virtual event.

Vasudevan said the increase in GNPA is due to the impact of Covid-19. He said that with a provision coverage ratio at 58.59 per cent, the bank is well provided for any potential stress.

During the quarter, the bank wrote off Rs 171 crore in the microfinance portfolio.

The loan loss and provision for FY21 was Rs 375 crore as against Rs 247 crore in 2019-20.

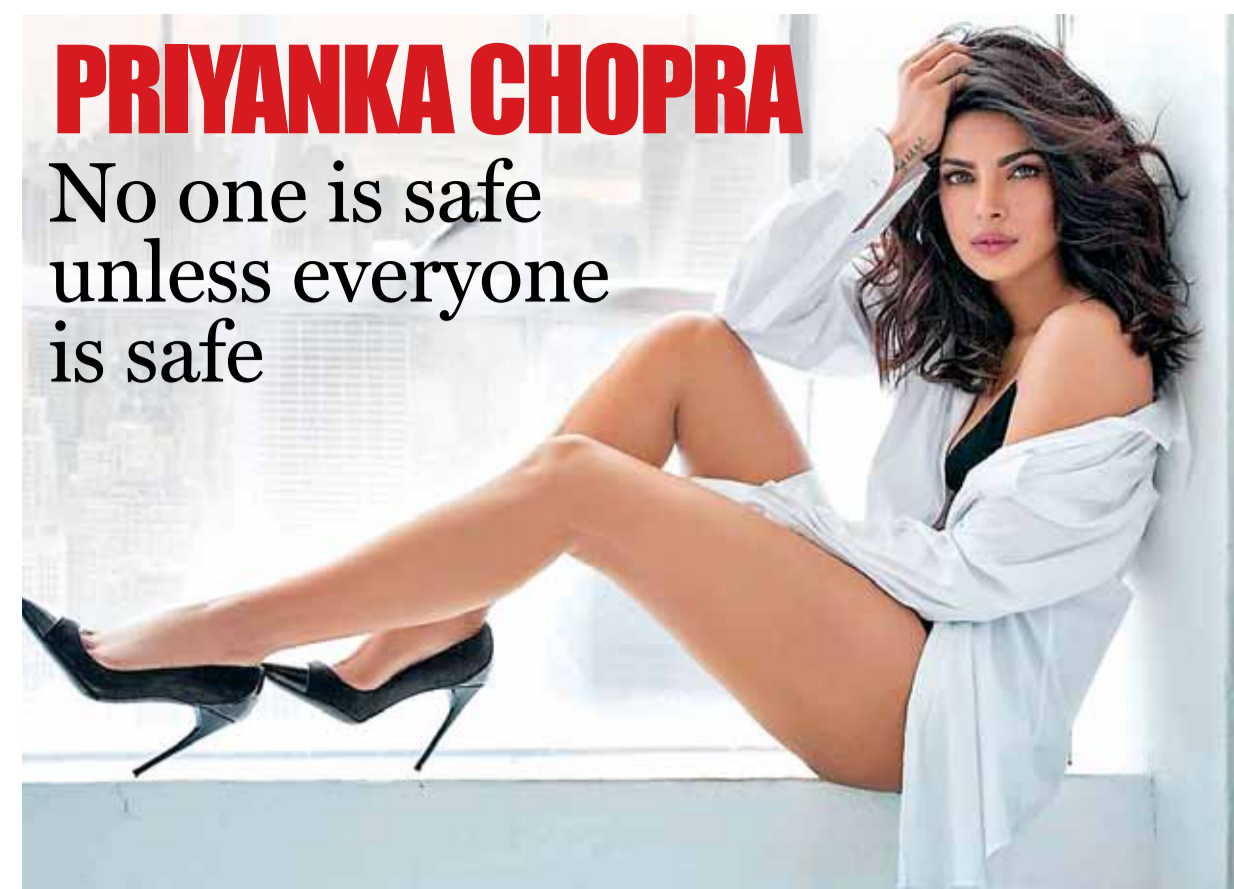
As of March 31, 2021, the total capital-to-risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR) stood at 24.18 per cent, with tier-I CRAR of 23.23 per cent and tier-II CRAR at 0.95 per cent.

Advances as of the March 2021 quarter stood at Rs 17,925 crore. It disbursed Rs 2,535 crore in the quarter.

AGENCIES

# PRIYANKA CHOPRA

## No one is safe unless everyone is safe



Whatever you can spare, truly makes a difference. Nearly 63 million people follow me on here, if even 100,000 of you donate \$10, that's \$1 Million, and that's huge.

"Your donation will go directly to healthcare physical infrastructure (including Covid care centres, Isolation centers, and oxygen generation plants), medical equipment, and vaccine support and mobilization."

She shared that no one is safe unless everyone is safe.

"Please please donate. Nick and I already have and will continue to contribute. We have all seen how far and wide this virus can spread, an ocean between us makes no difference. No one is safe unless everyone is safe. It's so heartening to see so many people stepping up to help in so many ways. We need to beat this virus, and to do that requires ALL of us. From the bottom of my heart THANK YOU!" she said.

AGENCIES

# POTPOURRI

## SHUBHANGI ATRE Dance is a form of meditation

Television star Shubhangi Atre, who is currently recovering from Covid-19, will not be able to celebrate International Dance Day with fervour on Thursday. She says dance is a form of meditation for her.

"For me, dance is a form of meditation too. It's an ecstatic experience. Dancing and meditation can be just like offering your prayers to the nature or divine powers. It makes you look and feel beautiful at the same time," Shubhangi said.

The actress, whose favourite form of dance is Kathak, idolises late Bollywood choreographer Saroj Khan and points out dancing relieves stress. "Dance is not only a wonderful way to express yourself but also a fantastic spare time activity one can enjoy. Dancing will definitely boost your mood, helps you to forget everything around you, and allows you to connect with yourself. It will bring of so much of positivity and relaxation," says Shubhangi, popular as Angoori Bhabhi in "Bhabhiji Ghar Par Hai".

AGENCIES



## SUNNY LEONE: IT'S TIME TO GET VACCINATED

Sunny Leone has urged everyone to fight Covid-19, saying it is time to get vaccinated.

Sunny posted a picture on Instagram where she is seen in a blue lace leotard paired with a tan jacket, smiling at the camera.

"Let's take the fight to #Covid\_19. It's time to get Vaccinated!! Vaccinate yourself and your loved ones to give everyone especially the

Frontline warriors a fighting chance against the pandemic!!" Sunny wrote alongside the image.

Sunny is currently in Kerala to shoot her upcoming film, the psychological thriller "Shero". It is directed by Sreejith Vijayan and will be released in Tamil, Hindi, Telugu and Malayalam.

She had recently shot for the reality TV show "MTV Splitsvilla" in the state.



## NATO begins Afghan pullout

BRUSSELS: NATO has started the withdrawal of its mission from Afghanistan following a decision by President Joe Biden to bring U.S. forces home, an alliance official said Thursday.

"NATO Allies decided in mid-April to start the withdrawal of Resolute Support Mission forces by May 1 and this withdrawal has begun. This will be an orderly, coordinated, and deliberate process," a NATO official told AFP.

Members of the U.S.-backed alliance agreed this month to wrap up their 9,600-strong mission in Afghanistan after Mr. Biden made the call to end Washington's longest war.

The decision — which delayed by several months a deadline agreed by former U.S. leader Donald Trump — came despite fears it could allow the Taliban



to regain power in the country.

The NATO official said the safety of the alliance's troops "will be a top priority every step of the way, and we are taking all necessary measures to keep our personnel from harm".

"Any Taliban attacks during the withdrawal will be met with a forceful response. We plan to have our withdrawal completed within a few months," the official said, refusing to give any

further details on the timeline.

Mr. Biden said the U.S. withdrawal would be completed by September 11, the twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on America that sparked its military involvement in Afghanistan.

Germany's defence ministry has said it planned to get its 1,300 troops out of the country by early July.

NATO's training and support mission, which includes around 2,500 U.S. troops and relies heavily on Washington's military assets, has personnel from 36 alliance member nations and partner countries.

The U.S. has said it is temporarily deploying extra troops to protect international forces as they withdraw and has prolonged the presence of an aircraft carrier in the region to support the pull-out.

AGENCIES

## Nebraska's 114-year-old oldest living American



A 114-year-old Nebraska woman who has taken the title of America's oldest living person says what she wants most is to eat with her friend after a year of pandemic restrictions.

Thelma Sutcliffe, of Omaha, became the nation's oldest living person and seventh-oldest in the world on April 17 when Hester Ford, a 115-year-old

woman, died in North Carolina, according to the Gerontology Research Group.

The Omaha World-Herald reports that Ms. Sutcliffe was born on October 1, 1906. Her longtime friend, Luella "Lou" Mason, said she is happy that the senior living centre where Ms. Sutcliffe lives is locked down, but "Thelma is as determined as ever to do what she

wants to do." Until visitors are allowed in the dining room, Thelma is taking all her meals in her room. Mason, who has Ms. Sutcliffe's power of attorney, calls the senior living centre 24 hours ahead of time to schedule visits.

"She asks me every time I visit, Are you going to eat with me today?" Mason recalled. "It breaks my heart that I can't." Ms. Sutcliffe's hearing and sight are fading, Mason said, but her mind is still "very sharp." Ms. Sutcliffe received her Covid-19 shots at the earliest opportunity, but testing for the coronavirus was a nonstarter.

Mason said Ms. Sutcliffe looked at the swab and said, "You're not going to be sticking that thing up my nose. You can tell Lou to stick it up hers."

AGENCIES

## IOA vice-president Gehlot no more



NEW DELHI: Indian Olympic Association vice-president Janardhan Singh Gehlot died in Jaipur on Wednesday after prolonged illness.

Gehlot, a former Rajasthan minister, was also the founder president of International Kabaddi Federation. He was in his 70s.

He was the head of the Amateur Kabaddi Federation of India for 28 years till

2013. He was also serving as the president of the Rajasthan Olympic Association at the time of his death.

"On behalf of IOA family, our heartfelt condolences to Gehlot family on the sad and untimely demise of IOA vice president and president of Rajasthan Olympic association Janardhan Singh Gehlot," IOA President Narinder Batra said in a statement.

AGENCIES

## Menon, Reiffel pull out of IPL umpiring



NEW DELHI: India's top umpire Nitin Menon and his Australian counterpart Paul Reiffel have pulled out of the IPL due to personal reasons. It is learnt that Menon, a resident of Indore, has left the IPL bio-bubble after his wife and mother tested positive for Covid-19.

Menon is the only Indian in the ICC elite panel of umpires and was recently praised for his work during India's home series against England.

"Yes, Nitin has left as his immediate family members have Covid-19 and he is currently not in a mental state to conduct games," a BCCI official told PTI.

In Reiffel's case, the Australian government imposing a travel ban from India in the wake of the rising Covid-19 cases led to his quick departure.

Menon is the second Indian to pull out after Indian off spinner Ravichandran Ash-

Yes, Nitin has left as his immediate family members have Covid-19 and he is currently not in a mental state to conduct games"

win, who withdrew from the tournament.

Three Australians Andrew Tye, Kane Richardson, Adam Zampa have left home due to the unprecedented health crisis in India.

However the BCCI is going ahead with the tournament and interim CEO Hemang Amin has assured all players and support staff that they remain safe in the bio-bubble.

The BCCI is likely to find replacements for Menon and Reiffel from its own pool of umpires.

AGENCIES

## Olympic-bound can train during quarantine

NEW DELHI: The Sports Authority of India on Thursday said Olympic-qualified athletes will be allowed to practice and spar in quarantine before they join their respective national camps from a break at home or a competition trip but grant of leave will become an exception now.

The latest move comes after several athletes at various national camps across the country tested positive for Covid-19. In case of Delhi's Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium,

Weekly RT-PCR tests are being conducted at SAI cen-

the national women's boxing camp had to be disbanded for now after detection of cases among pugilists and support staff.

"...in view of the need for Olympics-bound athletes to continue their training without disruption, SAI has now taken a decision to allow training even during the quarantine period in a controlled environment," the nodal body said in a statement.

Weekly RT-PCR tests are being conducted at SAI cen-



tres to keep a check on the infections.

"SAI in consultation with the Indian Olympic Association will decide on grant of leave to Olympics bound athlete & support staff. Leave will be granted only as an exception

by National Sports Federation and SAI as it has been observed that most athletes got infected while travelling," it added.

Athletes are required to go through a seven-day mandatory quarantine when they reach a SAI centre from a home break or a competition and to ensure that their training can continue during this period, the SAI said small groups would be formed.

"...small group of athletes, coach & sparring (training) partners will be formed where

ever possible for Olympic bound athletes. The athlete and this group will remain isolated from rest of the environment till quarantine period is over," the SAI stated.

SAI said training in a smaller group during quarantine period will also ensure that large scale transmission of the virus is prevented. "During the quarantine period, general fitness and monitored training on a staggered schedule would be allowed," it said. "...(they) would not be allowed to interact with

athletes/support staff in the bio-bubble until the test results of the whole group comes out negative at the end of the initial quarantine period of 7 days," it added. If any member of the group tests positive for the virus at the end of the quarantine period, the whole group will remain in isolation for another week. "The entire group would be allowed to merge with the regular training group already in the bio-bubble, once every member returns a negative result."

AGENCIES

## Brazilian students offer sustainable solution to India's climate challenge

DOMINICK RODRIGUES  
Mumbai

Brazilian Students emerged victorious in the India Climate Change Challenge by presenting a solution that highlighted using agriculture residue to generate biomass -- thus substituting carbon-intensive thermal power, reducing air pollution by preventing crop burning and encouraging wider gender participation.

The victorious student team "Green Winx, from Fundação Getulio Vargas in Sao Paulo, Brazil," included Alice Pralbaum, Sophia Hess, Gabriela Pinheiro da Rocha Campos, Victoria Rieser and Carol Zweig. "We spent countless nights learning different aspects about India, different financing methods and alternatives to measure impact, but it was incredibly worth it," Zweig said, adding "The experience was not only ex-



tremely enriching and inspiring, but also eye-opening to us as students."

UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School's Center for Sustainable Enterprise hosted the India Impact Challenge powered by Quantum Advisors from April 16-17 2021, which witnessed six teams from six countries - Brazil, France, India, Switzerland,

United Arab Emirates and the USA - making it to the finals weekend.

The India Impact Challenge had engaged students from around the world to create investment strategies to address the issues of climate change, while spurring equitable economic growth in India. Addressing the student green entrepreneurs for iden-

tifying the problem, evaluating solutions and zoning in on the best idea, Ajit Dayal, Founder, Quantum Advisors said, "It is now upto the asset allocators and owners of capital to start the process of funding your bold ideas from that 'Save The World' bucket."

The India Impact Challenge objective was to draw attention of global policymakers

and investment institutions on the need to shift the dialogue from a conversation dominated by efforts to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions in the developed world and shed light on potentially alarming levels of GHG due to the necessary and continued economic development in the emerging economies. Over the next 25 years, if developing markets don't attract capital to invest in GHG-reducing technologies and products as they continue on their path to higher GDP growth, the potential savings in emissions in the developed world could be nullified.

On the first day of the finals weekend, two teams with the highest scores made it to the final face-off, and in an unusual outcome, both teams tied with the same score, that triggered a huddle among the judges to vote for a winner. "I have not seen a final like that

before in a competition like this," exclaimed Jeff Mittelstadt (MBA '07), executive director of the Center for Sustainable Enterprise and professor of the practice of strategy and entrepreneurship at UNC Kenan-Flagler. "These student teams diligently addressed all the feedback they received on Friday during their Saturday pitches and it showed. What a 'photo finish'!"

The victorious student team "Green Winx, from Fundação Getulio Vargas in Sao Paulo, Brazil," was challenged to the final vote by "Ravi EV LLP" from UNC Kenan-Flagler which included Anagha Kalvade, Lauren Ma and Brandon Sjew. The other teams were fielded by XLRI Jamshedpur from India, University of St. Gallen (HSG) from Switzerland, BITS Pilani Dubai Campus from the United Arab Emirates, HEC Paris from France.