





## SHORT TAKES

## Over 1.6L challans for unauthorised parking issued

**New Delhi:** More than 1.63 lakh vehicles were prosecuted for unauthorised parking and 15,926 vehicles were towed away by traffic cranes in the posh areas of South Delhi in the first three months of 2021, the Delhi traffic police said on Sunday. As many as 61,832 e-challans for improper parking were issued on the spot while 1,02,127 notices were issued via the VOCA (violation on camera application) through mobile application to the registered owners of the vehicles found parked improperly, an official said. A total of 15,926 vehicles were towed away by traffic cranes due to unauthorised parking from January 1 to March 31 from the traffic police's southern range, which includes the posh areas of Defence Colony, R. K. Puram, Hauz Khas, Greater Kailash, Saket, Lajpat Nagar, and Vasant Vihar. Traffic police data showed that 2,976 vehicles were towed from Greater Kailash, followed by 1,872 vehicles from Saket, 1,861 from R. K. Puram, and 1,633 vehicles from Hauz Khas. "Maximum prosecutions are done in Greater Kailash because of crowded markets of M block and N block," an official said. "In Saket, there are malls, Metro station, and then a narrow road that leads to Max Hospital. So, a lot of prosecution takes place there to keep the road clear," the official said. "R. K. Puram circle also witnesses heavy rush due to hospitals and market places like Sarojini. Therefore, these roads need to be kept clear," he added. The maximum spot e-challans for improper or unauthorised parking in the last three months were issued in Saket for 8,800 vehicles followed by Kalkaji with 7,291 vehicles, R. K. Puram with 6,389 vehicles, and Sangam Vihar with 5,721 vehicles, according to data. Another set of fines issued via mobile application saw the Mehrauli traffic circle prosecuting a maximum number of 12,822 vehicles, followed by 12,553 in R. K. Puram, 12,174 in Hauz Khas, and 11,240 in Defence Colony. — PTI

## Man without mask misbehaves with cops, arrested

**New Delhi:** A man was arrested after he and his wife allegedly misbehaved with Delhi Police personnel when they were stopped for not wearing masks in central Delhi's Daryaganj on Sunday, officials said. A purported video of the incident was shared on social media platforms, wherein the couple could be seen misbehaving with police personnel when they were asked the reason for not wearing masks. Police have registered a case against Pankaj and his wife Abha, residents of Patel Nagar in central Delhi. Delhi has been witnessing a massive surge in coronavirus cases in the past few days. According to the police, the incident took place around 4.30 pm. The couple, travelling in a car, misbehaved with the policemen when they were stopped and asked the reason for not wearing mask. The woman misbehaved with the police personnel and said they would not pay fine and started arguing with them. They were taken to Darya Ganj police station and the man arrested, police officials said. — PTI

## JEE Main April session postponed, fresh dates to be announced soon

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Sunday announced that it has decided to postpone the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) Main April Session that was scheduled for April 27, April 28 and April 30 in wake of the ongoing coronavirus crisis across the country. Reiterating that the safety and well-being of the candidates is its topmost priority, the NTA said that fresh dates for the April session would be announced later and at least 15 days before the exam. It also said that the candidates can prepare themselves better for the examination during this period, adding that they can take the prac-

## 2 city hospitals face action for turning away Covid patients

**New Delhi, April 18:** The Delhi government on Sunday initiated legal action against two city hospitals for turning away Covid-19 patients, a day after chief minister Arvind Kejriwal warned them of strict action if found giving wrong information about availability of beds.

The Delhi government has sought legal action against two hospitals, one in South Delhi and another in Janakpuri, for putting out wrong information on the availability of Covid beds on the Delhi Corona app, an official statement said.

"The hospitals put out information saying that they have Covid beds available but later denied the same to patients, saying no beds were available," it stated.

Complaints for filing FIRs against the hospitals under the Disaster Management Act have been lodged at the concerned police stations, a government official said.

Mr Kejriwal, in a review meeting on Saturday, directed officials to take stern action against hospitals putting out wrong information about availability of beds.

He had said every hospital should ensure correct information on bed availability on the Delhi government app and also on LED boards there.

The app shows real time availability of Covid beds in hospitals. It is updated by each concerned hospital. The Delhi government has appointed senior officials at these hospitals to monitor bed

## Woman booked for assaulting lady doctor

**New Delhi, April 18:** A woman has been booked for allegedly assaulting a lady doctor of GTB hospital who had asked her to leave the ward where Covid patients were admitted, police said on Sunday.

The incident took place on Saturday when the lady doctor who was on emergency duty at a Covid ward in Guru Teg Bahadur hospital, they said.

The lady doctor, in her complaint, alleged that she was slapped by the wife of a Covid positive patient who was admitted at the hospital.

The woman was with her husband in the Covid ward. She was asked to leave as only patients admitted in the hospital are allowed but the accused started opposing and this led to an argument during which she slapped the doctor, police said. — PTI

availability. A complaint was received against a South Delhi hospital that it denied admission to patients claiming no beds were available although the app showed 239 unoccupied beds there, said the government statement. The app also showed availability of 93 beds at the Janakpuri hospital yet patients were turned down, it added. — PTI

## Chandni Chowk market to remain shut till April 25

**New Delhi, April 18:** Delhi's Chandni Chowk market will remain shut till April 25 in view of the exponential rise in Covid-19 cases, the traders association announced on Sunday. The Delhi Kirana Committee of Khari Baoli Market and the Chemical Merchant Association of Tilak Bazaar also announced closure of markets till April 21. "Today Chandni Chowk Sarv Vyapar Mandal in an emergency meeting with its members has decided to request its members to keep their establishment closed till April 25 in light of very serious condition of the virus spreading at a very large volumes. We will take a decision after assessing the condition on next Sunday," Chandni Chowk traders body pres-

ident Sanjay Bhargava said in a statement.

"The most alarming aspect is the galloping positivity rate and shortages of hospital beds, oxygen, ventilators and medicines and other medical facilities in use of the epidemic," he added.

Several market associations had on Friday called for strict enforcement of Covid-19 protocols and expressed that lockdown is not a solution. Keeping in view of the current scenario of Covid-19, a meeting was held amongst all major retail markets and suggested that there should be more strict enforcement of Covid-19 protocols during the day as well rather than just depending on measures like night curfew/weekend curfew and lockdown. — PTI



ITO Road wears a deserted look on the second day of weekend lockdown in New Delhi on Sunday. — G.N. Jha

■ 161 deaths, positivity rate 29.74%; almost every 3rd person undergoing test infected

## Delhi sees biggest daily jump with 25,462 Covid-19 cases

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

Delhi on Sunday recorded the biggest jump in its daily Covid-19 tally with 25,462 fresh cases, while the positivity rate shot up to 29.74 per cent — meaning almost every third sample being tested in the city is turning out to be positive.

Delivering more bad news in an unprecedented public health crisis sweeping not just Delhi but the entire nation, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said less than 100 ICU beds are available in hospitals in the capital.

Authorities reported 161 deaths due to the disease in the last 24 hours. A day ago, 24,375 Covid-19 cases and 167 deaths were reported in the city.

As the situation turned serious every passing hour, Kejriwal shot off letters to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal urging them to ramp up bed capacity in central government-run hospitals and to ensure "uninterrupted" supply of medical oxygen.

"The Covid situation has become very serious in Delhi. There is a huge shortage of beds and oxygen. I request that at least 7,000 out of 10,000 beds in central government hospitals in Delhi be reserved for Covid patients and oxygen be immediately provided in Delhi," he wrote in the letter to PM Modi.

Currently, only 1,800 of 10,000 central government hospital beds are reserved for Covid-19 patients, he said.

Kejriwal cited that less than 100 ICU beds are



Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal visits Covid care centre inside the CWG village in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

## 14-day quarantine for residents of Delhi returning from Kumbh Mela

**New Delhi, April 18:** Delhi residents who have visited the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar or are planning to do so will have to undergo compulsory 14-day home quarantine on their return and upload their details on an official website, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) said in an order.

The ongoing Kumbh Mela has been at the centre of controversy amid fears that it could be a superspreader event with lakhs of devotees attending the event as the second wave of coronavirus

surges uncontrollably.

The order issued on Saturday said that those who visited Kumbh Mela from April 4 onwards or those who plan to do so till the end of the religious congregation at Haridwar on April 30 will have to upload their personal details, ID proof, and dates of departure and arrival back to Delhi at the website [www.delhi.gov.in](http://www.delhi.gov.in).

"All residents of Delhi, who have visited or are going to visit Kumbh 2021 at Haridwar, shall be required to compulsorily home quarantine themselves for 14 days on

arrival to Delhi," said the order issued by Vijay Dev, the chief secretary and chairperson of the executive committee of DDMA.

If a person returning from Haridwar Kumbh fails to upload his particulars on the Delhi government portal, he will be sent to institutional quarantine centre for 14 days by the district magistrates concerned, the order said.

Violators of the DDMA order will be liable to be proceeded against under the Disaster Management Act 2005 and other legal provisions, it added. — PTI

available in Delhi now and said he spoke to Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday morning and stressed on the need of beds for Covid patients.

During a press conference, he said the Delhi

government in the next 2-3 days will come up with 6,000 beds with oxygen facility at Yamuna Sports Complex, Radha Soami Satsang Beas premises and schools. The Delhi government also directed

all nursing homes and private hospitals providing Covid-19-related treatment to reserve at least 80 per cent of their ICU and ward bed capacity for coronavirus patients. According to the order,

## Govt guidelines advises to set up Covid facilities in gated residential complexes

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

The Delhi government issued guidelines on Sunday for gated residential complexes to set up Covid facilities amid alarming surge in coronavirus cases.

The Directorate General of Health Services also issued guidelines for the resident welfare associations (RWAs), residential societies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in prevention and control of Covid-19 transmission in gated residential complexes.

It said the Covid care facility would be set up using the resources of the RWAs/residential societies/NGOs and would be a dedicated health facility for management of suspected, asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic or very mild cases residing in that particular residential facility.

"No intermixing of suspect and confirmed cases

▶ A DOCTOR residing within the gated complex or that provided by the NGO will facilitate daily medical examination of the admitted patients. Also, a caregiver designated by the RWA or the NGO shall be identified to provide care to the patients.

shall be allowed," it said in the order.

The guidelines said these facilities would not be meant for elderly people, children below 10 years, pregnant/lactating women, patients with comorbidities, adding that such patients should be admitted to the appropriate Covid Care Health Facility.

"The community living in gated complexes may like to create small Covid Care Facility within the residential complex managed either by the RWAs/Residential Societies or in collaboration with an NGO. This may be more acceptable to the residents and will help

reduce the burden on existing facilities for managing suspect/presymptomatic/a symptomatic/very mild cases of Covid-19," the guidelines said.

A doctor residing within the gated complex or that provided by the NGO will facilitate daily medical examination of the admitted patients. Also, a caregiver designated by the RWA or the NGO shall be identified to provide care to the patients.

The guidelines said the Covid care facility would be a makeshift one and it may be set up in a community hall, centre, common utility area within the premises of residential complexes or empty flats that are isolated location-wise from the rest of the occupied dwelling.

The Covid care facility should have a separate entry/exit and a separate toilet for suspected and confirmed cases with proper cleaning and supplies. "Entrance to have mandatory hand hygiene (sanitis-

er dispenser) and thermal screening provisions for caregivers," it said, adding that the beds shall be placed with spatial separation of at least 1 metre from one another.

"Adequate natural room ventilation shall be ensured. Putting up exhaust fans to vent out air from the facility (to open area) is desirable. For air-conditioning/ventilation, the guidelines of CPWD shall be followed which inter-alia emphasises that the temperature setting of all air conditioning devices should be in the range of 24-30 degrees Celsius, relative humidity should be in the range of 40-70%, intake of fresh air should be as much as possible and cross ventilation should be adequate, it added.

For cleaning and disinfection, the guidelines said that used linen, pillow covers, towels could be kept in disposable bags for 72 hours and then washed at the patient's home using commonly used detergents.

## Delhi high court to hear only urgent matters filed in 2021

**New Delhi, April 18:** In view of the alarming rise in Covid-19 cases in the national capital, the Delhi High Court on Sunday issued an office order stating that from April 19 onwards it will only take up "extremely urgent matters" filed this year.

The order issued by the High Court's Registrar General Manoj Jain also said that other pending routine or non-urgent matters and those cases filed or listed before the court between March 22, 2020 and December 31, 2020 shall not be taken up for now and would be adjourned en bloc.

"In case of any extreme urgency, the request in the pending matters may be made on the already notified designated link," the order said. — PTI

## 11 scholars given fellowships by NIF to chronicle today's India

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

The New India Foundation has just announced its award of 11 fellowships, the largest number in a given year. Featuring Anjum Hasan and journalist Sohini C., the line-up of scholars shows great potential. The fellowships will support non-fiction publishing projects, covering trajectories marked by post-Independence India in law, business, environment, politics and culture.

Filling a huge gap in good research on India's modern and contemporary history, the NIF fellowship is an outcome of conversations between historian Ramachandra Guha and Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani. So far, there have been about 50 of these awarded. The foundation was set up in 2004. Twenty-two books written by fellowship winners have been published.

They include Akshaya Mukul's Gita Press and the Making of Hindu India (HarperCollins, 2015), Rahul Pandita's Our Moon Has Blood Clots (Random House, India, 2013) and Anis Kidwai's In Freedom's Shade (Penguin India, 2011). In coming months, three more titles are slated for release, their authors being Kanoto Chopi, Rajshree Chandra and Pradeep Magazine. Since 2018, the foundation has also been presenting the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Book Prize, an annual award.

"The scholars are the greatest ambassadors of what the foundation can do," historian Srinath Raghavan, who is a trustee of the foundation alongside Nilekani, Guha, political scientist Niraja Jayal and Teamlease Services chairman Manish Sabharwal, told this newspaper. "NIF gives a serious platform to non-fiction writers. In so doing, it

underlines the paucity of such opportunities in India, as compared with the West." Prof. Raghavan is part of the jury that decided the fellowship winners. They were selected from a corpus of 900 applications. The award consists of an annual stipend of Rs 18 lakhs, editorial assistance and collaboration with publishers. "The pandemic year has truly been an exceptional one," said Prof. Raghavan.

Among this year's projects will be Hasan's "Shillong: First City of India's Northeast", Jayaseelan Raj's "The Egalitarian Paradox: Dalits and the State in Kerala", M. Mohsin Alam Bhat's "Constitutional Culture: Muslims and P o p u l a r Constitutionalism in India" and Sohini C's "The Losers: A History of Women Runners, and Running, in India". Good luck to all the writers!

the occupancy of ICU beds and ward beds for coronavirus patients in 115 private hospitals has reached "almost 100 per cent and 90 per cent" respectively.

Kejriwal said Delhi is facing "acute shortage" of oxygen for Covid-19 patients and alleged the quota of the city has been "diverted" to other states.

In his letter to Goyal, the Delhi CM urged him to ensure "uninterrupted" supply of 700MT of oxygen on daily basis and restore supply of 140MT of oxygen by a supplier INOX.

A private hospital in the city closely missed a tragedy in the city Saturday night due to shortage of oxygen, he said in an online briefing earlier on Sunday.

Kejriwal on Sunday visited Yamuna Sports Complex and Commonwealth Games Village where additional beds are being arranged for patients.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, along with Health Minister Satyendar Jain, paid surprise visits to Satyawadi Raja Harish Chandra Hospital, Burari Hospital, Radha Soami Satsang Beas and a DRDO-run facility to take stock of medical infrastructure.

Sisodia said that 5,000 oxygen-supported beds are being readied at Radha Soami Satsang Beas. Of these, 500 oxygen beds will become available on Tuesday.

On the second day of the weekend curfew, most of the shops in the city, barring those selling essential items, medicines, vegetables and fruits, remained closed while roads wore a deserted look.

## 2nd-highest French civilian honour for Guneet Monga

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

Oscar-winning producer Guneet Monga has added yet another feather in her cap: the honour of Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters. Ms Monga was honoured at the Embassy of France here by French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Dria for her contribution to world cinema.

"I am honoured and it feels great. Life has come full circle ever since my first French film *The Valley of Flowers* in 2004."

Asked about her dominating the space that has been predominantly a male bastion, she said: "There aren't very many producers from the space where I am coming from. There are not too many financiers, and then of course, gender can come into it." In the same breath she continues: "Equality is a global conversation. I think we need to be respected for who we are."

The 37-year-old filmmaker shared how she had been striving to champion women's empowerment through her work. "This award is dedicated in the honour of every girl with a dream." She then quickly makes it clear that just the way her body of work suggests she doesn't believe in any kind of "being in a box". "Please... I'd like to make films of any and every genre, and not restrict myself to a particular cinema."

Two other visiting film producers, Sreyashi Sen and Sandrine Brauer, were also felicitated. While Ms Brauer is the founder of the 50/50 Collective, Ms Sen is working on an upcoming Indo-French film project.



Guneet Monga



## SHORT TAKES

## Stalin urges PM to send 20L doses to TN

**Chennai:** DMK president M.K. Stalin urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to direct officials to send 20 lakh Covid-19 vaccine doses “requisitioned” by the Tamil Nadu government immediately and ensure supplies commensurate with the state’s population. In view of rapid increase in the number of people getting infected by Covid-19, ‘universal vaccination’ is the need of the hour to protect lives, the DMK chief said in a letter to the Prime Minister. Tamil Nadu would need more vaccine doses than allotted now to accomplish effective vaccinations, break the cycle of infection and flatten the curve, he said. Now, there was a ‘huge shortage of vaccines’ across the state and there ‘are news reports’ to suggest that the people who visit government hospitals for vaccination were returning for want of vaccine availability, Stalin claimed. — *PTI*

## BSY in hosp for Covid, stable now

**Bengaluru:** Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa who is undergoing treatment for coronavirus at a private hospital is now stable and recovering, his office said on Sunday. “The chief minister who was admitted in a hospital on Friday for COVID treatment is being monitored by a team of expert doctors. The health of the Chief Minister is stable and he is recovering,” the office of the chief minister tweeted on Sunday. Mr Yediyurappa is spending his time in the hospital reading his favourite books and is in touch with officials to give them necessary directions, the tweet further said. The CM had fever on Friday and when he got himself tested, the report came positive for coronavirus. Accordingly, he got admitted to the hospital. This is the second time Yediyurappa contracted coronavirus. — *PTI*

## HK suspends flights connecting India

**New Delhi:** Hong Kong has suspended all flights connecting it with India from Tuesday to May 3 amid a surge in Covid-19 cases in the country, aviation industry sources said on Sunday. They said the Hong Kong government has also suspended flights to and from Pakistan as well as the Philippines for the aforementioned time period. The Hong Kong government’s decision has come after 50 passengers of two Vistara flights this month were found positive for Covid-19 when tested on arrival. According to rules, all passengers who want to come to Hong Kong need to have a Covid-negative RTPCR result with them from a test done 72 hours prior to the journey. Earlier on Sunday, the Hong Kong government announced suspension of all Vistara flights on Mumbai-Hong Kong route till May 2. — *PTI*

## CENTRE NOD TO BOOST MEDICAL OXYGEN SUPPLY

**New Delhi, April 18:** The Centre has sanctioned installation of 162 pressure swing adsorption (PSA) plants in public health facilities in all states, the health ministry said on Sunday, as demand of medical oxygen goes through the roof amid spiralling Coronavirus cases in the country. The PSA plants manufacture oxygen and help hospitals become self-sufficient in their requirement for medical oxygen, while also reducing the burden on the national grid for its supply of medical oxygen. A total of 162 PSA oxygen plants have been sanctioned by the government for installation in public health facilities in all states, the ministry tweeted. “These will augment medical oxygen capacity by 154.19 MT.” Thirty-three of the 162 PSA plants have been installed — five in Madhya Pradesh, four in Himachal Pradesh, three each in Chandigarh, Gujarat and Uttarakhand; two each in Bihar, Karnataka and Telangana; and one each in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Puducherry, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, it said. Fifty-nine more PSA plants will be installed by April-end, while 80 more will be installed by May-end.

## ‘2nd Covid wave could spark greater uncertainty’

*Economy will grow 11% in FY22, govt will respond with fiscal steps if required, says Niti Aayog V-C*

**BIJAY KUMAR SINGH**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

The country needs to prepare for “greater uncertainty” in terms of consumer as well as investor sentiments due to the second wave of coronavirus infections, and the government will respond with fiscal measures as and when required, Niti Aayog vice-chairman Rajiv Kumar said on Sunday.

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

India is grappling with spiralling number of Covid cases as well as related deaths, forcing many state governments to put in place restrictions on movement of people.

According to Mr Kumar, India was on the verge of defeating Covid-19 completely but some new strains from the UK and other countries have made the situation far more difficult this time around.



Rajiv Kumar

▶ **RAJIV KUMAR** said India was on the verge of defeating Covid-19 but some new strains from the UK and other countries have made the situation far more difficult this time

▶ **HE REMAINED** hopeful that the economy will grow 11% in the current fiscal ending March 31, 2022

“Apart from their direct impact on some sectors like the services sector, the second wave will increase the uncertainty in the economic environment which can have wider indirect effects on economic activities. So, we need to prepare for greater uncertainty, both in consumer and investor sentiments,” Mr Kumar said.

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

“And as you have seen from RBI’s response, the expansionary policy stance has been continued and I am sure the government will respond with necessary fiscal measures also as and when it is necessary,” Mr Kumar said.

Earlier this month, the RBI left the benchmark interest rate unchanged at 4 per cent but maintained an accommodative stance to boost the economy.

In 2020, the Union government had announced the ‘Aatmanirbhar Bharat’ package to perk up the economy and the overall stimulus was estimated to be worth around ₹27.1 lakh crore, which was more than 13 per cent of the national GDP.

Regarding growth in the current financial year, Kumar said that various estimates suggest that it will be around 11 per cent.

In its last policy review, the RBI projected a growth of 10.5 per cent for FY’22 while the Economic Survey, tabled in Parliament earlier this year, estimated 11 per cent growth during the year.

— *PTI*



City streets wear a deserted look during weekend lockdown to curb Covid-19 cases in Agra on Sunday.

— *PTI*

## ■ Remdisivir, corona vaccines under strict watch

## Centre orders crackdown on profiteers &amp; hoarders

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

The Union home ministry is closely working with the police forces of all states and Union Territories to ensure a major crackdown on those indulging in hoarding and overpricing of essential medicines like Remdisivir, Corona vaccines, oxygen cylinder.

Sources said a team of senior officials set up by the home ministry has been monitoring the situation round the clock across the country.

The ministry has also assured the states that paramilitary forces can also be provided for their assistance to check misuse of corona medicines and vaccines.

“All state police have been directed to take stringent actions against hoarders or those selling essential medicines, oxygen or other corona related important health items

## 14-DAY ISOLATION MUST FOR KUMBH RETURNEES IN ODISHA

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO**  
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 18

Apparently worried over the sudden surge in Covid-19 cases, the Odisha government on Sunday made 14-day quarantine mandatory for Kumbh Mela returnees.

Several thousands of people, most of them from

western Odisha, had visited Kumbh mela at Haridwar in Uttarakhand.

“The whole country is witnessing a surge in the number of Covid-19 cases. Spurt in Covid cases in the neighbouring states specially Chhattisgarh is affecting the border districts of Odisha,” said director of public health Niranjana Mishra.

at a much higher price than what is prescribed by the government. In addition, raids are being conducted by respective state police during which Remdisivir and corona vaccines have been recovered,” remarked a senior ministry official.

The home ministry has also assured all states that there would be no shortage of paramilitary forces to assist the local police in

providing protection to frontline health workers like doctors, nurses and other staff at hospitals.

Home ministry officials admitted that maintaining laws and order at hospitals or other Covid facilities is a huge challenge since people are likely to get agitated in view of the high casualty rate or not getting proper facilities like bed or oxygen at hospitals.

## RSS again activates cadre to assist Covid-19 patients

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

From reaching out to senior citizens, who have tested positive for Covid-19 and have no family member to look after to connecting plasma donors to those needing plasma, the RSS has again activated its cadre as the country witnesses the second wave of the global pandemic.

The RSS has already launched Utkarsh App for connecting plasma donors and blood donors to the needy, under doctors guidance. RSS volunteers and counsellor are also reaching out to Covid-19 recovered people requesting

them to donate plasma. The social service wing of the RSS, Sewa Bharti, which had assisted and reached out to lakhs of needy during the last year’s lockdown period and had provided ration packets to more than 73 lakh families, has engaged its volunteers to prepare a list of senior citizens and students who are living alone.

The Delhi unit of the RSS will also be providing food to senior citizens and students who are COVID-19 positive, for which a helpline number will be issued soon. Such facilities will also be provided in other states.

## ‘Booth-level plan can wipe out Covid’

**New Delhi:** BJP president J.P. Nadda held a virtual meeting with state unit chiefs and office-bearers to work on “My booth corona free” mission. Mr Nadda asked party leaders to make sure that communication till the municipal level are open and those office-bearers should be on the field assisting people. He said it will be phase 2 “Seva he Sangathan” campaign launched by the party during last year’s lockdown.

## Rahul cancels poll rallies in West Bengal

*He also advises all other politicians to think about consequences of holding large public rallies*

**New Delhi, April 18:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday cancelled all his public rallies in poll-bound West Bengal following a rapid rise in Covid-19 cases in the country.

He also advised all other politicians to think about the consequences of holding large public rallies.

“In view of the Covid situation, I am suspending all my public rallies in West Bengal. I would advise all political leaders to think deeply about the consequences of holding large public rallies under the current circumstances,” he said on Twitter.

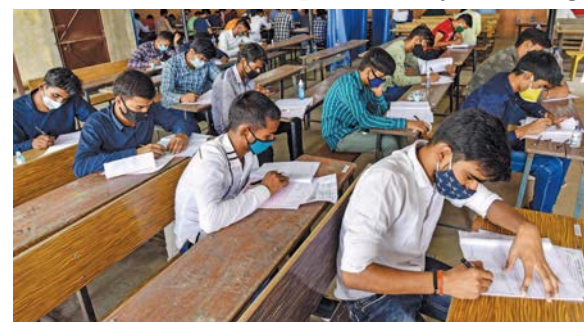
“One has seen such a

crowd of the sick and the dead for the first time,” he said in another tweet in Hindi, apparently referring to the large crowds at Bengal rallies of BJP leaders.

The Congress has been critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah for holding political rallies amid the rise in coronavirus cases in the country.

Senior Congress leader P. Chidambaram has accused the prime minister of shocking callousness for holding big political rallies in poll-bound Bengal amid the rise in Covid-19 cases.

He said the prime minis-



Applicants during National Defence Academy and Naval Academy exams in Prayagraj on Sunday.

— *PTI*

ter should be at his job, sitting at his desk and coordinating with chief ministers in handling the Covid pandemic.

Prime Minister Modi has been addressing public

rallies in West Bengal for the eight-phase assembly elections in the state.

Lauding Gandhi for cancelling his public rallies, Congress spokesperson Jaiveer Shergill said BJP

## Row over death of 10 Covid patients in MP govt hospital

*Deceased’s families claim deaths to lack of oxygen*

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY**  
BHOPLA, APRIL 18

Ten Covid-19 patients died reportedly due to lack of oxygen in a government hospital in Madhya Pradesh, triggering an outcry.

The incident took place in the medical college hospital in Shahdol late on Saturday night.

While six patients died around midnight on Saturday, four others passed away in the early morning.

“Six people admitted in the ICU died last night. The deaths were not due to lack of oxygen. There were 62 patients in the ICU. Overall, there were 255 Covid-19 patients in the Covid hospital last night. Out of them, 155 were on oxygen”, Milind Shiralkar, dean of the medical college hospital said on Sunday.

The hospital has its own oxygen plant.

He, however, said the oxygen pressure was going down in the system since Saturday evening. He has reported the matter to the local administration and sought liquid oxygen pillars to resume oxygen supply to the system.

However, no provision of liquid oxygen pillars was made till two in the morning.

Oxygen was supplied to the patients through oxygen cylinders, he added.

The dean said a probe was ordered into the incident.

Kin of the deceased, however, claimed some patients in the ICU were seen gasping for oxygen when the pressure in the oxygen supply system had gone down.

“I watched my brother dying due to lack of oxygen in the ICU”, Ravi Kumar Jaiswal whose brother was admitted in the ICU told visiting reporters.

State medical education minister Vishwas Sarang denied that lack of oxygen had caused the death of ten Covid-19 patients in Shahdol medical college hospital.

“I spoke to the hospital superintendent. He said there was no disruption of oxygen supply to the patients,” he said.

The minister, however, said a probe has been ordered into the incident.

Former chief minister and Congress veteran Kamal Nath slammed the Shivraj Singh-led BJP government for the death of 10 Covid-19 patients in the Shahdol medical college hospital.

“It is shocking that the patients died due to lack of oxygen. The state government is day in day out saying that there is no shortage of oxygen or the life saving drug Remdesivir in the hospitals. But, people are dying due to want of them,” he added.

## Man mows down 2 daughters under truck, kills himself

**Pune, April 18:** A 40-year-old man allegedly killed his two daughters by mowing them under the wheels of his truck and later killed himself by jumping before the same vehicle at a village in Pune district of Maharashtra early on Sunday, the police said.

The deceased, Bharate Barate, was angry over his 18-year-old elder daughter chatting with a boy on phone and her younger sister supporting her, they said.

The deceased girls were identified as Nandini Barate (18) and Vaishnavi (14), police said, adding that Barate had even written a suicide pact note that he along with his wife and two daughters are ending their lives.

The incident took place around 1.30 am on Sunday in Induri village of Maval tehsil in the district.

“Barate was a driver and owned a truck. On Saturday, he caught his elder daughter chatting with some boy on her phone. Losing his temper over it, Barate beat her up. He was upset over her behaviour,” senior police inspector Pradip Londhe of Talegaon MIDC police

station said.

As per the statement given by his wife, after beating the daughter, he was also seen writing on a piece of paper on which he also took a signature of his wife, which she did without reading its contents.

“At 1 am on Sunday, Barate got up and went outside.

After some time, he came back and took both the girls out of the house. After hearing the sound of the truck, his wife also woke up and came out. He had made his two daughters lie on the road and was driving the truck towards them. According to the woman, Barate even signalled her to join them,” the officer added.

But by the time she ran to seek help from her relatives who live nearby, Barate had mowed them under the truck. Later, he also jumped before that moving vehicle and died, he said.

“They found both the girls and Barate dead on the road,” he said.

Police said they are trying to find out why the girls did not try to run away from the spot after seeing the truck approaching as they were not tied.

— *PTI*

## In J&amp;K, Red flags on Army vehicles replaced with white-and-blue ones

**Srinagar:** The Army in J&K has replaced red flags on its vehicles with white-and-blue ones and road barriers in sensitive zones have been given a new look in a move to ease the feeling of alienation among people during security checks and drills.

“Nowadays, the Army vehicles in Kashmir are moving with white-and-blue flags. Earlier, the

Army vehicles used to have red flags and even the soldiers in Road Opening Parties carried red flags while clearing way for convoys, he said.

He said road barriers in sensitive zones have also been given a new look. These steps have been taken to address the feeling of alienation among citizens at the security checks and drills. — *PTI*





## IN BRIEF

### J&K: Soldier shoots himself dead

**Jammu:** An Army personnel allegedly shot himself dead with his service rifle inside a camp in Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir, police said on Sunday. Sepoy Hanuman Choudhary, who was on sentry duty, shot himself at his camp in Ukhral area around midnight, a police official said. The body has been sent to a local hospital for postmortem. Police have started inquest proceedings, the official said, adding the motive behind his taking such an extreme step was not known immediately.

### RAJ. BYPOLLS: 60.37% POLLING TO 3 ASSEMBLY SEATS

**Jaipur, April 18:** The by-elections to the three Assembly seats in Rajasthan have registered a turnout of 60.37 per cent, an official said on Sunday.

The three constituencies recorded a lower turnout of 13 per cent than the 2018 Assembly elections.

As many as 4,49,885 people out of 7.45 lakh voters exercised their franchise on Saturday to decide the fate of 27 candidates in the three seats, a state election commission spokesperson said.

A polling of 60.37 per cent was recorded in the three constituencies. The polling 56.60 per cent in Sahada (Bhilwara), 67.23 per cent in Rajsamand and 58.21 per cent in Sujangarh (Churu).

In the 2018 elections, a turnout of 73.56 per cent was recorded in Sahada, 70.68 per cent in Sujangarh and 76.59 per cent in Rajsamand.

The counting of votes will take place on May 2.

Bypolls were held after the death of sitting legislators Bhanwarlal Meghwal from Sujangarh, Kailash Trivedi from Sahada and Kiran Maheshwari from Rajsamand.

### MAHA MUST SET UP WELFARE OFFICE IN BELGAUM: RAUT

**Mumbai, April 18:** Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday said the Uddhav Thackeray government must set up an office in Belgaum, a district in Karnataka which Maharashtra claims is Marathi-speaking and therefore must be merged with the state.

In his weekly column 'Rokthok' in Sena mouthpiece *Saamana*, Raut said the office would be for the welfare of the Marathi-speaking population of the area, adding that Eknath Shinde, who is Maharashtra coordination minister for border areas, should make frequent visits there.

He said Chandrakant Patil, who was coordination minister in the previous Devendra Fadnavis regime, never visited the disputed border areas, and when he did caused confusion with some of his statements.

He said the Maharashtra government should strengthen its stand against Karnataka in the boundary dispute case pending in the Supreme Court, and the state advocate general should meet Marathi-speaking people in the border areas and update them about the case.

He said the Maharashtra government had decided to provide grants to educational and cultural institutions in Belgaum and other disputed border areas, and it was mandatory that the institutions be registered, but "the problem is the Karnataka government doesn't allow any organisation bearing Marathi or Maharashtra in its name to be registered"

## ■ CM urges Centre to ramp up supply of vaccines, medical oxygen to Bengal Didi writes to PM, flags jab shortage

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, APRIL 18**

Blaming the visit of the "outsiders" for the spurt in Covid-19 cases during the Assembly election in West Bengal, chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a letter, amid a fierce poll-battle between them, to increase the Centre's supply of Covid-19 vaccine, essential medicines and oxygen to the state.

The Trinamul Congress supremo's appeal to the Prime Minister came after her party MLA of Muraroi in Birbhum Abdur Rahman, who was earlier made candidate at the same seat this time but was replaced upon getting infected by Covid-19, died while another TMC MLA Ujjal Biswas, also candidate of Krishnanagar South in Nadia, and a Sanjukta Morcha candidate of Barasat in North 24 Parganas Sanjib Chatterjee have been infected by the deadly virus.

Referring to her previous letter to Mr Modi to allow state to purchase vaccination doses directly with state funds and launch a massive free vaccination campaign in the state, Ms Banerjee alleged, "The state has not received the requisite clearance yet. In the mean time, number of cases in the state has also begun to increase sharply, particularly in view of coming of large numbers of outsiders to the state for election campaign and other purposes at the behest of some political parties. As such, in the present situation, we have to significantly scale up our capacities to tackle the pandemic on war footing."

She pointed out, "Vaccination is of top importance. Particularly in our state, and more particularly in metropolitan Kolkata, where the density of population is extremely high, focussed and aggressive vaccination is extremely important. Unfortunately for us, the supply of vaccines from the GOI side has been scarce and erratic, which has been negatively affecting our vaccination programmes. While West Bengal is one of the best performers in vaccination, it is now suffering because of uncertainties of supply from GOI end. We have to vaccinate around 2.7 crore and we need 5.4 crore doses. We request for your urgent intervention to ensure that the state gets its requirement of vaccine doses fulfilled at the earliest."



Union home minister Amit Shah during a roadshow in support of BJP candidates, ahead of the 6th phase of West Bengal Assembly elections, at Bethuadahari in Nadia district on Sunday. — PTI

## People of Bengal want white beard, not white sari: Ghosh

**Bardhaman (West Bengal), April 18:** In an apparent jibe at chief minister Mamata Banerjee, state BJP chief Dilip Ghosh on Sunday said that people want the white beard and not white saree.

Mr Ghosh's reference to white beard is apparently to that of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The TMC supremo, on the other hand, is famous for her trademark white saree and Hawaiian slippers.

"White sari and Hawaiian slippers have fooled the people of West Bengal for long. That won't happen now. They don't want white saree anymore, what they need is the white beard, which will build Sonar Bangla (Golden Bengal)," he said, while addressing an election rally at Bhatar constituency in Purba Bardhaman district.

He said that elections in Bengal won't be needed to

### TMC, BJP indulge in blamegame after violence in Jalpaiguri dist

**Jalpaiguri, April 18:** Post-poll violence has allegedly taken place in Dabgram-Phulbari Assembly constituency in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district, with both the TMC and the BJP claiming that its members were attacked by activists of the rival party. The alleged incidents happened in Porajhar village in Phulbari I gram panchayat Saturday night after voting took place in the fifth phase.

As per an FIR lodged by BJP candidate Sikha Chatterjee with New

turning the force into the political agent of the ruling party," Mr Ghosh said. He also held roadshows in Ausgram, Purbasthali and Mangalkot seats in the district. — PTI

## BJP worker beaten to death in Bengal

**AGE CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, APRIL 18**

Post-poll violence claimed another life in West Bengal as a young BJP worker was allegedly beaten to death by Trinamul Congress supporters at Chakdah in Nadia, a day after the Assembly constituency went to the polls. The victim, Dilip Kirtonia (31), was the worker of the saffron party for the last eight years. He was killed by the TMC, said state BJP general secretary (Organisation) Amitabha Chakraborty.

The body of the deceased was found in front of his home at Mondalpara in Uttar Enayetpur village early on Sunday morning. On Saturday night Dilip was taken away by TMC area president Dulal Mondal's aides. When the youth did not return after long hours, his family members started a search

● **FURIOUS OVER** the local youth's murder, a violent mob vandalised the home of Dulal who however fled. The body of the victim was sent for post mortem later.

for him. At dawn the body of Dulal who however fled.

Preliminary investigation revealed that Dilip was manning the voters' queue at booth no 211. An altercation took place between him and Dulal then.

Furious over the local youth's murder, a violent mob vandalised the home of Dulal who however fled. The body of the victim was sent for post mortem later.

TMC candidate of Chakdah Shubhankar Singha however denied the hand of the ruling party in the murder. He passed the blame on to an internal feud of the BJP.

## TMC issues notice to 15 dissident leaders

**PRANMOY BRAHMACHARY BERHAMPORE APRIL 18**

Murshidabad district Trinamul Congress president Abu Taher Khan issued showcause notices to more than 15 party leaders for indulging in anti-party activities.

While addressing a press conference on Sunday, Khan said, "Despite repeated advice, several front-ranking leaders, including zila parishad members and members and municipality administrators and panchayat pradhans, were still indulging anti-party activities and campaigning against the party's official candidates in several Assembly constituencies. So we were compelled to issue showcause notices against them."

Khan also warned of strict action if these leaders fail to mend their ways and said these leaders could be soon expelled from the party if they continue to indulge in anti-party activities.

It may be noted that the factional feud has been

plaguing the Trinamul Congress before the Assembly election began in the state.

Some of Trinamul leaders are openly fighting as independent to defeat party candidates.

A party rebel, Syeda Rafika Sultana, is contesting as an independent candidate against TMC's Jalangi Assembly candidate Abdur Razzaq.

On the other hand, Nasir Seikh is also fighting against Raghunathgunj candidate Akhtaruzzaman and Anarul Hussein from Samsergunj.

TMC's Maidul Islam from Suti is openly campaigning against official party candidates.

Some other leaders like Sahakari Sabhadhipati, Murshidabad district zila parishad, Baidyanath Das and Beldanga municipality administrator and former chairman Bharat Jhahwar remained inactive despite repeated advice of party leadership.

Actually, they wanted to contest from the party but denied party ticket. All of them are still sitting on the fence.



Lalu Prasad Yadav

## LALU TO RETURN HOME FROM DELHI HOSPITAL AFTER RECOVERY

**Patna, April 18:** RJD president Lalu Prasad, who is likely to walk out of jail on Monday having secured his bail in the multi-crore-rupees fodder scam cases, will, however, take time to return home as treatment for his various ailments is still underway at AIIMS Delhi.

Supporters of the RJD, after getting to know about his bail, had been busy making preparations to greet him on his arrival, but Prasad's family clarified that he would return only after full recovery.

The Jharkhand High Court granted bail to Prasad in the Dumka treasury case on Saturday, noting that he has already served half the tenure of his sentence, and paved the way for his release from jail after 39 months and 25 days.

Prasad's younger son and political heir apparent Tejashwi Yadav wished the former chief minister a speedy recovery, and said that his treatment, as of now, will continue at AIIMS Delhi.

He is a diabetic and suffers from heart ailments, kidney infection and breathing problems, Yadav pointed out, adding that he and other family members are in touch with the doctors attending to him.

Sources close to Prasad said the RJD supremo, on hearing about the Jharkhand High Court bail order, maintained that he had always had faith in the country's judicial system.

His wife Rabri Devi, a two-time chief minister, and daughter Misa Bharti, who is a Rajya Sabha MP, met him in Delhi on Saturday. Prasad has seven daughters and two sons.

Bharti's younger sibling Ragini, who had earlier announced that she is observing Ramzan and 'chaiti' puja, said her prayers have been answered. — PTI

## Shah: Didi 'demoralised'

■ **Continued from Page 1** the first four phases. Going by Mr Shah's latest prediction, the BJP bagged 22 seats out of 45 which went to the polls in the fifth phase on Saturday.

Taking potshots at Ms Banerjee over her prolonged treatment for her leg injury, the Union home minister said: "There has been a plaster on her leg. I pray to God every day for her fast recovery from leg injuries before May 2. Won't it happen? It should so that she can walk on her legs when she would have to visit the governor to tender her resignation to him."

On the latest and viral audio clip of Ms Banerjee's conversation, he alleged: "Another audio has just come to light. All of you must have heard it. Didi, in the audio, is heard directing not to perform the last rites of the four persons who were killed in an unfortunate incident. She wanted to take out a rally with the bodies of the four deceased in a

truck. Didi, you should be ashamed of yourself! You sought to play politics on the bodies of those who are dead! I have never seen such low politics in my life. She also calls for 'fitting' the superintendent of police and inspector-general of the state police. Didi, how long will you play the politics of fitting? People of Bengal have fitted you already."

Attacking the TMC's misrule in the state, Mr Shah claimed: "Didi has created a new model of governance here. It is of Bomb, Banduk aur Barud (bombs, guns and gunpowder). We want to replace it with the model of Vishwas, Vikas and Vyapar (faith, development and business) which will build Sonar Bangla." He further complained that the state has three categories of citizens, while the country has only one. "One of them are the infiltrators, who are liked by Didi very much," Mr Shah quipped.

## Remdesivir supplier grilled

■ **Continued from Page 1** city. We acted in good faith for the larger interest of the public."

DCP Shinge also said the supplier was called for enquiry, that it wasn't an arrest and he was allowed to go after questioning.

However, the incident turned out to be a high-voltage drama due to the intervention of BJP leaders Devendra Fadnavis and Pravin Darekar, who rushed to the Vile Parle police station late Saturday night and objected to the police action.

Mr Fadnavis said: "We have been trying to get Remdesivir for Maharashtra by reaching out to pharma companies. Four days ago we requested Bruck Pharma to supply us Remdesivir but they couldn't until permission was given. I spoke to Union minister Mansukh Mandaviya and also got the FDA's permission."

However, the police claimed the communication from the FDA to the pharma company was not

shared with the police station.

Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole demanded action against Mr Fadnavis for intervening in the police action against the hoarders of Ramedesivir. "How did Fadnavis as an individual get permission for the storage of the drug? Has the Centre allowed him and the BJP to do the blackmarketing of Remdesivir?" he asked.

Bruck Pharma is one of 16 manufacturers of Remdesivir in India that has permission to export, but it does not have a marketing license. In order to sell Remdesivir, it has to approach one of seven pharma companies that have a marketing license for Remdesivir in India.

On the other hand, a state FDA official said they were planning to give emergency approval to a few manufacturers for direct sale. The officer said: "Right now it's in the talks stage. Bruck has not got any marketing approval yet."

## Manmohan offers Modi tips on Covid fight as cases touch 2.61L

■ **Continued from Page 1**

meanwhile, written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggesting five ways on how to tackle the present pandemic situation. Dr Singh said a big part of effort must be ramping up the vaccination drive, for which the states should be given flexibility to define categories of frontline workers who can be vaccinated even if they are below the age of 45.

Dr Singh added that since domestic supplies of vaccines are limited, any vaccine cleared for use by credible authorities like America's FDA or the European Medical Agency

should be allowed to be imported without insisting on domestic bridging trials.

The former Prime Minister further said that the government should publicise what are the firm orders for doses placed on different vaccine producers and accepted for delivery over the next six months. "If we want to vaccinate a target number in this period, we should place enough orders in advance so that producers can adhere to an agreed schedule of supply. The government must indicate how this expected supply will be distributed across states based on a transparent formula. The Central government

could retain 10 per cent of this for distribution based on emergency needs, but other than that, states must have a clear signal of the likely availability so that they can plan their rollout," he wrote.

Dr Singh added the Centre must proactively support vaccine producers to expand their manufacturing facilities quickly by providing funds and other concessions.

"In addition, I believe this is the time to invoke the compulsory licensing provisions in the law, so that a number of companies are able to produce the vaccines under a licence. This, I

recall, had happened earlier in the case of medicines to deal with the HIV/AIDS disease. As far as Covid-19 is concerned, I have read that Israel has already invoked the compulsory licensing provision and there is an overwhelming case for India to do so as well quickly," Dr Singh said.

Across India, several states have announced lockdowns, night curfews and other measures to tackle the pandemic.

In Patna, Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday imposed new restrictions, including a statewide night curfew from 9 pm to 5 am. Also, all edu-

cational institutions, religious places, malls, cinema halls and parks have been shut till May 15.

Offices and shops were also asked to follow strict Covid-19 guidelines and close after 5 pm.

The Tamil Nadu government imposed a statewide night curfew (10 pm to 4 am) beginning Tuesday and banned inter-state and intra-state travel by people during the night curfew. Besides, a full lockdown will also be imposed on Sundays across the state.

Maharashtra minister Aditya Thackeray said the state was preparing for a third wave, though it cannot

be determined now if it will be as strong or weak. "We have come to the genuine belief that underreporting is not going to help... Now we are preparing for the third wave. We have five lakh beds, 70 per cent of them oxygenated," said Mr Thackeray.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday held a review meeting to review the Covid containment measures in his constituency, Varanasi, while Congress leader Rahul Gandhi announced that he would suspend all his election campaign rallies in West Bengal due to the rising cases of the coronavirus.





# THE ASIAN AGE

19 APRIL 2021

## Vital shortages hit India amid Covid's 2nd wave

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to the people concerned to use the entire national capacity in the production of vaccines against Covid-19 comes at a time when poor anticipation and planning coupled with a lackadaisical approach of the government he heads have started having a telling impact on the pandemic situation in the country. For more than a year, the world has been under the grip of the fear the micro-organism has unleashed, but the nation which the government and the Prime Minister have been tom-tomming as the pharmaceutical hub of the world is now facing a shortage of everything that the healthcare workers need to fight the virus and save lives — hospital beds, antiviral life-saving drugs, vaccine, oxygen, intensive care units and ventilators. This, despite the fact that the government has set up a dedicated fund — PM-Cares — to promote initiatives to fight the virus.

The nation has no idea whether the government was, like most people in India, thinking if the pandemic had vanished, given the very little effort it was seen to be taking to face an exigency like the one we are facing now. There was little or no extra investment made to augment healthcare infrastructure in the country in the interregnum or to step up production capacities of the same materials, which we now face a shortage of. That the government has learnt little from the past is reflected from the fact that even the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, the national trade union belonging to the Sangh Parivar to which Mr Modi's BJP belongs, has cautioned about the reverse migration of guest workers from the towns and cities to the villages, in anticipation of another nationwide lockdown. It is stating the obvious that the government did not show as much alacrity as the guest workers did about planning for the future in the face of a pandemic attack.

It must not also go unsaid that the government had been busy plucking the low hanging fruits from the beginning of the corona fight. It started with the premature show of gratitude to the healthcare fraternity even before they started the real fight. Even the Indian Air force was dragged into the farce of showering flower petals on them from the skies when, on earth, they were fighting the virus with their back to the wall, with little availability of infrastructure and consumables. The government missed no chance to advertise the world's largest vaccination programme with little idea about the number of people it will have to vaccinate or the quantity of vaccine it would require or how to produce and distribute the same. Today, the vaccine manufacturers are running pillar to post seeking financial help to augment production capacity but the government does not seem to understand it at all; we heard no firm and immediate commitment from the government till now.

But it's not all lost as yet — the government must launch massive investment programmes in healthcare infrastructure, put its foot down firmly and ban all social, religious and political gatherings that can turn superspreaders, and work with every institution, state or otherwise, to enforce Covid-appropriate behaviour. Every rupee, every action and every moment count now.

## Don't recoil from scrutiny

The Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, in a majority vote, has expressed concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in India. It has pointed out that "human rights defenders and journalists in the country lack a safe working environment" and commented on "concerns about the difficult situation faced by Indian women and minority groups, caste-based discrimination". This could not have come as sweet music to the ears of the rulers who seem convinced that vaccine diplomacy and a presence in Quad as a counterbalance to China in the difficult time of the pandemic proves that India enjoys a pride of place in the international community.

The EU stance on India's recent human rights record only adds to concerns already expressed by US freedom watchdogs and the UN. While an ostrich-like posture is easy enough to adapt on foreign perceptions of what ails Indian democracy now, a moment's reflection might show what the reality is. Dispassionate observers have signalled that India has been guilty of demonising its minorities, subverting institutions, intimidating journalists and social media executives, criminalising dissent and whimsically controlling the Internet. The incarceration of so many who opposed the CAA and the harsh treatment meted out to those supporting the months-long farmers' protest by lending their voices to global social media criticism are symptomatic of contempt for a dissenting opinion, be it from celebrities, academics and media-persons.

It is paradoxical that while we seem to crave international attention and pat ourselves on the back when we come in for praise, we recoil from any kind of scrutiny. Beyond reflection, there is a need to accept criticism, understand the reasons why and act on it to move away from an undemocratic path. Corrective action can begin even in a small way by looking first at why a few elderly academics and activists are in prison for interminable periods without even getting a trial, which in the Indian system inflicts inordinate delays and is the equivalent of extended imprisonment. It is no democracy which shows no inclination to support the right to dissent and, on the contrary, throttles it.

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Anand K. Sahay  
Far & Near



## The idea behind capturing power in any kind of way: fair or foul

The BJP may or may not win the Assembly elections in Assam. In West Bengal, its chances may be considered to be less bright than in Assam on account of the structural makeup of the state, notwithstanding the pre-Partition communal politics rampant in undivided Bengal. But winning a poll fair and square is not the metric any longer. We have seen popular verdicts being overturned in state after state to the BJP's benefit.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his principal operative, Union home minister Amit Shah, the saffron party's new *sutra* is to form a government in a state through any means. The capture of power is evidently crucial for erecting a scaffolding — a formal platform — for the systematic spread of ideas in the public realm through unrestrained heavy-duty propaganda, the rapid dissemination of communal politics through enabling instruments of State power (the police and the bureaucracy), and the unleashing of policy with a communal slant.

The last indubitably means going out of the way to disadvantage and

"other" those who are not the majority, leading to the making of such patently unjust policies — which defy the idea of equality before the law — the new normal in a sharp deviation from the political tradition whose roots were laid over 70 years ago.

The Westminster system of party politics, which is enshrined in our Constitution, has been stood on its head in the post-Atal Behari Vajpayee BJP. When the BJP fails to bag the numbers in an election, it simply sets up a trade mart in which MLAs become the commodity. The *gomash-tas*, or middlemen, and auctioneers are out in strength.

When elected legislators on party tickets other than BJP fail to take the bait (offered in the form of incentives), the punitive element kicks in and various agencies of the Central government raid and begin so-called investigations against the BJP's opponents. The law courts simply watch helplessly. The Election Commission has little to say. The governors of various states frequently don the garb of apparatchiks. The Speaker is happy to receive instructions remotely.

The RSS is the ideological mentor of

the BJP and several dozen allied organisations that are the repository of the notion of the "Hindu Rashtra" (the idea that the land mass of India — in its present political geography as well as in its mythological connotation — is the natural home of the Hindus of the world, where all others must resign themselves to the fate of being less equal).

The RSS lays claims to being exalted. Its propagandists and adherents have prided themselves on being seekers of a higher morality and ethical conduct in the family, society, and the "nation", the last being an expression which in its most recent manifestation in India has been so thoroughly weaponised as to cause unease among "citizens" — namely, those Indians who are not swayed by their religious identity alone in the running of public affairs and policymaking.

It was expected that the self-appointed custodians of the "culture" of the Hindus would object to such weaponisation in the interest of political hygiene and harmony in society. They have not done so.

When after an election, newly elected MLAs of non-BJP parties are pur-

sued with serious intent to switch sides so that the BJP may unfairly get to form the government and make a mockery of the people who voted for them and against the BJP, a small hint from the top levels of the RSS leadership may have done wonders. It would have worked as a discouraging factor. But the RSS top brass have little to say. The inference is that they approve of dishonourable conduct in the interest of making an ideological conquest.

Whether it is an election to a panchayat, a district board, a trade union, a social club, a professional association — and not just the state or national legislature — the BJP uses every trick in the book to "capture" the body. Only then can it pass rules, regulations, laws, to influence civil society as well as the government.

More, only then does it gain the formal legitimacy and the authority to direct the making of budgets and play the lead hand in the disbursement of funds to its favourite schemes and outfits. The stamp of approval is thus gained to promote unworthy communal agendas. The general media toms this, rather than interrogate the phenomenon.

Awestruck by the energy brought to bear by the BJP to win all elections, big or small, some commentators have urged other parties to emulate the saffron party's methods. This is misconceived advice. It leaves out of account the fundamental proposition — that the BJP is unlike any other party that we know.

It sanctions the use of majoritarian force (which may be unseen), rather than the commonly understood constitutional methods. Ordinary civil society sometimes transforms into uncivil society under its gaze. This is a phenomenon that is anathema to a democratic order.

In both Assam and West Bengal, the political actors in the fray, as well as the general public, need to remain alert to the "capture" and "takeover" syndrome. A successful takeover bid may be expected to give rise to the unbridled spread of communal fires in (fragile) border states. The Congress and the Left parties have given little evidence of understanding the parallelogram of forces at work, especially in West Bengal. They may live to rue the day.

Subhani

INSIDE...



OUTSIDE...



## Ideology or competence: What do the voters want?



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

There are many versions of Murphy's Law. The most popular one states that if something can go wrong, it will. Among the many versions the oldest one is attributed to a British merchant, engineer and owner of ships, Alfred Holt, who told his fellow engineers in 1877: "It is found that anything that can go wrong at sea generally does go wrong sooner or later." That proposition became popular as Murphy's Law when an American aerospace engineer, Edward Murphy, declared: "Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong." From the sea to space, engineers devised systems that could be as fail-safe as possible, forewarned by Murphy's Law.

As an analyst of Indian political, economic, social and governance systems I have long held the view that in India Murphy's Law works with a vengeance. Anything that can go wrong, invariably goes wrong. The unfortunate downside to that reality is that most Indians have come to accept a certain degree of incompetence in most systems. Given the generally high level of citizens' tolerance for incompetence, it rarely becomes an election issue.

Politicians are voted in and voted out for a variety of reasons, ranging from their charisma, caste, community, money power and so on, but rarely have they been voted out for incompetence. The Indian voter has come to live with power outages, limited access to drinking water, uncollected garbage in the neighbourhood, inadequate law and order, difficulty in securing access to education and healthcare, and so on. Rarely have any of these become issues that determine the outcome of elections. I

cannot recall the last time a politician went to the polls campaigning on a platform of competence, rather than loyalty or grievance based on caste, community or some other identity.

So, why should it surprise anyone that the voter has come to terms with the incompetent management of the Covid-19 pandemic and that this is not a defining issue in the ongoing elections to state legislatures? Caste and communal identity, allegations of corruption and nepotism seem to ignite political passions more during elections than the competence or incompetence of contending candidates in handling a pandemic.

India is no exception. Consider the fact that in the United States, Donald Trump secured more votes in the 2020 election compared to the 2016 election even though every medical professional in the United States will vouch for the fact that his administration's response to the Covid-19 pandemic was "incompetent". Mr Trump's incompetence did not defeat him. The unity of non-white voters finally did.

For all his continued popularity, at least as shown in the opinion polls, the fact is that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been at the head of an incompetent administrative response to the pandemic. One can argue about the relative responsibility of the Centre and the state governments and which of the states have responded more competently, one can differ on how one would define competence, but what is very clear is that the question of competence or incompetence in governmental response to the pandemic has not yet become a political issue.

In part this could be because, as the old adage

goes, *iss hamaam mein sab nangey hain*. In short, all political parties in government across different states have been equally guilty of an incompetent response. Many public health experts believe Kerala is an exception, but it is interesting that the Left Front's competence in dealing with the pandemic has not been an overt political issue in the recent elections.

As more and more evidence mounts up of administrative and political incompetence in dealing with the pandemic, it remains to be seen if Indian voters will just shrug their shoulders, throw up their hands, point to the gods above and quote Murphy's Law. Or, will they hold their elected representatives and governments accountable? In the last two years more doctors and nurses have died fighting the pandemic than soldiers in fighting the nation's enemies. While politicians become all patriotic when it comes to the death of soldiers and demand votes in the name of nationalism, why don't the deaths caused by incompetence stir voters' emotions?

There have been many examples of competent crisis management in the past and they stand in contrast to the present incompetence in dealing with the pandemic. As chief minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi took great pride, and rightly so, in his government's handling of the Kutch earthquake in 2001. Why has the same Gujarat state been so incompetent in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic? Will Gujarat's voters now punish their government for its incompetence?

**Covid-19 mismanagement reveals either administrative incompetence or the fear of professionals to speak their mind to politicians in power. Either way, the citizen pays the price.**

The Indian administrative system was built on the assumption that a meritocratic and technocratic bureaucracy would compensate for the lack of experience in governance of an elected political leadership. This assumption worked as long as the civil service was willing to speak its mind and politicians in power were willing to listen to them. When civil servants and professionals in government are either scared to speak their mind or have little to contribute and politicians imagine they know everything on anything, one ends up with incompetent response to administrative challenges.

For all its lack of democracy, the Chinese Communist Party has created an internal merit-based bureaucracy that allows political leaders to rise to the top only after proving their administrative and governance credentials at every step of the power ladder. The Chinese people have sacrificed democracy at the altar of meritocracy and the Communist Party of China has for long functioned like the Indian Administrative Service, creating a "mandarinate", so to speak. This has made China's response to Covid-19 crisis more professionally competent.

In India, the gap between political power and administrative competence has widened with an increasing number of elected politicians taking charge of day-to-day functioning of the government and an increasing number of civil servants either abdicating their responsibilities or doing the bidding of politicians in office without consideration for the merits of a policy or a decision. All this gets revealed in times of a crisis. Covid-19 mismanagement reveals either administrative incompetence or the fear of professionals to speak their mind to politicians in power. Either way, the citizen pays the price.

The writer is an economist, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His latest book is India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution.

### LETTERS

#### GOOD JOB, RAHUL

Rahul Gandhi may have taken a suicidal step for his party by cancelling election rallies in West Bengal, but it is a commendable step in the interest of the country. On the other hand, the Prime Minister is thrilled by the crowds even while the daily coronavirus count is breaking all records. Today, as curfews kick in around the country, he is trying to make the right noises vis-a-vis the Kumbh Mela and so on. Yet where it matters, he has refused to join cause with Mamata Banerjee and ask the EC to crunch the remaining phases of the Assembly polls.

Jayprakash Naveen Patna

#### THANKS, DR SINGH!

AT LAST, the grand old man has pitched into the rescue. Yesterday being Sunday, former PM Manmohan Singh took the initiative to write to the incumbent, Narendra Modi, with his valuable advice on how to tackle the coronavirus pandemic. He has asked the PM to make public the orders for doses of coronavirus vaccine placed by the government and indicate how the vaccines will be distributed across states based on a transparent formula. He also wants flexibility to be given to states to define categories of frontline workers who can be vaccinated even if they are below 45 years of age. Thank you, Dr Singh.

Priyanka Mathur New Delhi

#### POLITICS OVER OXYGEN

THIS REFERS TO "Uddhav calls PM over oxygen, told Modi on W. Bengal tour" (April 18). It is disquieting that the PM of the largest democracy is involved in micro-management of oxygen, medicines and so forth. In the first place, why does the CM of a state have to reach out to the PM with a begging bowl for oxygen cylinders? Is the country being run on whims and fancies of a few? There ought to be a robust and transparent mechanism in place with minimal human intervention. Governments ought to rise above petty politics.

Deepak Singhal Noida

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to R. Narayanan (April 18). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.



## IN BRIEF

## Afghan mosque hit kills eight

**Jalalabad, Afghanistan, April 18:** Eight members of the same family were gunned down in an attack on a mosque in eastern Afghanistan, officials said Sunday. The shooting happened on Saturday night in the city of Jalalabad in Nangarhar province, and was believed to be over a land dispute, the province's governor Zaiulhaq Amarkhil said.

Five brothers and three of their male cousins were killed. "The incident is under investigation but initial information shows a land dispute has caused the incident," Amarkhil said. Fareed Khan, a spokesman for Nangarhar police, confirmed the attack.

## 4 cops sprayed, hospitalised

**Sacramento (US), April 18:** Four Sacramento police officers were hospitalised with injuries after they were sprayed with a liquid irritant during protests Saturday night, police told *KCRA TV*.

The demonstrators had gathered at the state Capitol downtown to protest the police shooting deaths of Daunte Wright in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, and Adam Toledo in Chicago. Protesters met at the Capitol Rose Garden after 8 p.m. and began marching around the downtown area later in the night, *KCRA* reported.

Demonstrators briefly sat in the streets in the Lavender Heights area before marching back toward the Capitol. The protest ended about 11 p.m.

## Syria prez poll on May 26

**Damascus, April 18:** (AP) Syria's parliament speaker announced Sunday that presidential elections in the war-ravaged country will be held on May 26.

Speaker Hammoud Sabbagh said the window for nominations will be open for 10 days starting Monday. Syrians abroad will vote May 20, he said. The election is widely expected to give President Bashar Assad a fourth seven-year term.

It is unclear whether any candidates will run against him but any such runs would be symbolic.

The United States last month warned Assad that the Biden administration will not recognise the result of its presidential election unless the voting is free, fair, supervised by the United Nations and represents all of Syrian society.

Syria has been in the throes of civil war since 2011.

## JIHADISTS KILL FIVE NIGERIAN SOLDIERS

**Kano, Nigeria, April 18:** Five Nigerian soldiers were killed, four injured and dozens missing when IS-aligned jihadists attacked a military base in northeast Nigeria's Borno state, two military officers told AFP Saturday.

Fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) on Friday dislodged troops from a base in Kamuya village, 35 kilometres (22 miles) from regional district Biu after a gunfight.

"The terrorists killed five soldiers and injured four others in the attack on the Kamuya base," a military officer told AFP. The insurgents sacked the base, forcing troops to withdraw in disarray, said a second military officer, who gave the same toll.

"So far 41 troops have returned while 58 are still missing and are presumed to have escaped the attack," said the second military officer.

Search and rescue operation was ongoing to "locate the missing soldiers", the officer added. Kamuya is the home village of Nigeria's former army chief Lieutenant-General Turuk Buratai which has been repeatedly targeted by jihadists, prompting the setting up of a base to end the attacks. ISWAP has focused on targeting military installations and troops since it split from mainstream Boko Haram in 2016 and rose to become a dominant group.

More than 20 people were killed following days of attacks on the town of Damasak this week where the militants burnt offices of international aid agencies and several homes. The attacks have forced 65,000 residents to flee into neighbouring Niger, according to the UN.

The 12-year jihadist conflict has killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million from their homes in Nigeria's northeast. The violence has spread to neighbouring Niger, Chad and Cameroon.

## Masks off as Israel vaunts virus win

Marks key milestone as the country vaccinates its way out of a coronavirus nightmare

**Jerusalem, April 18:** Israelis stepped into the streets without masks on Sunday for the first time in a year, a key milestone as the country vaccinates its way out of a Coronavirus nightmare.

"It's very strange but it's very nice," said Eliana Gamulka, 26, after getting off a bus near the busy Jerusalem shopping boulevard of Jaffa Street and removing her face covering. "You can't pretend that you don't know anyone any more," she smiled.

With over half the population fully vaccinated in one of the world's fastest anti-Covid 19 inoculation campaigns, the health ministry announced on Thursday that masks would no longer be required in public outdoor spaces.

For Gamulka, a project manager, the good news came at the perfect time: just two weeks before her wedding. It will be "very nice to celebrate with everyone, now without masks," she said. "The pictures will be great! I'm very relieved. We can start living again."

The vaccination of close to five million people has sent Israel's Coronavirus caseload tumbling from some 10,000 new infections per day as recently as mid-Jan., to around 200 cases a day. That has allowed the re-opening of schools, bars, restaurants and other indoor gatherings — although masks are still required in indoor public spaces.

And even before Health Minister Yuli Edelstein's announcement came into effect, punters in the popular bars of Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market were mask-free and smiling on Thursday evening.

Yet on Sunday, office worker Ester Malka said she wasn't quite ready to let down her guard. "We're allowed, but I'm still afraid. I got used to (wearing a mask)," she said.

"I feel like it's part of my life. We'll see what happens when everyone has taken them off. If it goes well for a couple of months, then I'll remove mine."

Israel just months ago had the world's highest infection rate, a Coronavirus outbreak that left 6,300 people dead among 836,000 cases.

But the Jewish state sent its coronavirus caseload tumbling after striking a deal for a vast stock of Pfizer/BioNTech jabs.

In exchange, it agreed to pay above market price and share data it gathers on the recipients, using one of the world's most



A woman walks along a closed vaccination centre in the city of Nice, France, on Sunday, amid the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The centre closed due to a lack of candidates for the proposed vaccination.

— AFP

sophisticated medical data systems.

Since Dec., some 53 per cent of Israel's 9.3 million people have received both doses of the jab, including around four-fifths of the population aged over 20.

As recently as Jan. it was registering 10,000 cases per day. But as the effects of mass vaccination kicked in, by March it was able to implement a gradual re-opening.

"There's no better advertisement for Pfizer," said Shalom Yatzkan, a computer programmer who had been in quarantine after catching the virus.

"I was sick for three days, I had neck pains and felt weak," he said as he walked through central Jerusalem. "I just hope the new variants don't catch up with us."

Another Sunday landmark in Israel's exit from Coronavirus restrictions was the full resumption of the country's educational system, without restrictions on the numbers of pupils in classrooms.

Speaking at a Jerusalem high school, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailed the "festivity" of the day for the schools, while warning of complacency. "We're not done with the Coronavirus yet, since it can return," he said, stressing the need to obtain "millions more vaccinations".

"Sooner or later, we'll need another vaccination (dose)," he said. The situation in Israel is in stark contrast to the occupied West Bank.

— AFP

## Canada records second case of rare blood clot

**Toronto, April 18:** Canadian health authorities said Saturday the country has recorded a second case of rare but serious blood clotting linked to AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine, but still recommend the shot for use.

The patient, who lives in the western province of Alberta and received a version of the AstraZeneca vaccine supplied by the Serum Institute of India, "has received treatment and is recovering," Canadian health authorities wrote on Twitter.

Canada reported its first case of blood clotting associated with low platelets on Tuesday in a Quebec

woman who received the same shot.

Blood clot formations linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine "remain very rare" and Canada still believes that the vaccine's benefits "outweigh the potential risks".

Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunisation (NACI) recommended suspending the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine in people under the age of 55 while it evaluated the risks. Health Canada said that limiting the use of the vaccine to certain populations was not necessary for the moment.

After a slow start, Canada's vaccine campaign is gaining momentum.

— AFP

## 80K Germans remembered

**Berlin, April 18:** Germany is paying tribute on Sunday to the nearly 80,000 people it has lost to the Coronavirus, even as the country struggles to get a grip on another rise in infections.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will lead a memorial event with other top officials at Berlin's Konzerthaus concert hall. His office says it is also dedicated to the

bereaved who could not accompany their relatives when they died and for whom important and comforting rituals of mourning were not possible.

Germany's confirmed death toll from Covid-19 stood at 79,914 on Sunday, an increase of 67 over the previous day. That is the fifth-highest total in Europe, after the UK, Italy, Russia and France.

Germany had a compar-

atively small number of deaths in the pandemic's first phase, but saw much higher infection levels in the fall and winter. In Jan., more than 1,000 deaths per day were reported at times in the country of 83 million people.

Infections have increased again over the past two months as a more contagious Coronavirus variant first detected in Britain took hold. Germany has

reported 3.14 million cases since the pandemic began.

Chancellor Angela Merkel is trying to get a bill through parliament that would mandate an emergency brake in areas where there are more than 100 weekly new cases per 100,000 inhabitants. The nationwide rate stood at 162 on Sunday. It would require the closure of stores, cultural and sports facilities.

— AP

## HIGHEST DAILY SPIKE OF 6,000 CASES IN PAK

**Islamabad, April 18:** Pakistan on Sunday reported its highest single-day Coronavirus spike this year with over 6,000 new cases and about 149 deaths, as the country struggled to speed up its vaccination programme.

The previous highest surge was recorded last year on June 20 when the country reported 6,825 infections and 153 deaths.

The country on Sunday reported 6,127 new cases, pushing the country's infection tally to 756,285. The death toll rose to 16,243 with 149 more fatalities. The government announced that it will start vaccinating people in the 50-59 age group from April 21.

— PTI

## POPE BACK TO IN-PERSON SUNDAY BLESSING

**Vatican City, April 18:** Pope Francis says he is happy to be back greeting the faithful in St Peter's Square for his traditional Sunday noon blessing after weeks of lockdown measures. Italy later this month will start gradually lifting some anti-pandemic restrictions, allowing, for example, outdoor dining at cafes and restaurants in areas of the country where the Covid-19 outbreak has been showing signs of improvement.

A couple of hundred people, including nuns and families, standing a safe distance apart in the vast square, turned out to see the pope speak from a window of the Apostolic Palace.

— AP

## Sikhs seek probe into shooting

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

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

While the Indianapolis and Sikh communities continue to mourn, and as the rest of our country mourns with them, investigators must also determine if this mass shooting was a hate-motivated attack.

— PTI

## Wisconsin shooting claims three lives

**Kenosha, April 18:** A shooting at a tavern in Wisconsin killed three people and seriously injured two others early Sunday, a sheriff's department official said.

The shooting happened at Somers House Tavern in the Village of Somers, Kenosha County Sgt. David Wright said. The suspected shooter was not immediately captured. Wright said the shooting appeared to be a "targeted and isolated incident," and authorities didn't believe the general public was in danger.

Officials were still working to determine the identities of the people who died. The two people who were wounded were taken to area hospitals, Wright said. The road leading up to the tavern remained closed early Sunday as officials investigated the latest in a string of recent shootings. Last month, four people were killed at an office shooting in California, eight people were fatally shot at massage businesses in the Atlanta area, and 10 died in gunfire at a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado.

— AP

## ONE KILLED IN OMAHA MALL SHOOTING

**Omaha (US), April 18:** A shooting at a Nebraska mall left one person dead and another wounded as terrified shoppers ran for cover. Authorities believe the shooting at Westroads Mall in Omaha was an isolated incident, and not a random attack. Police determined the suspects had fled the scene after searching the mall, according to Omaha police Lt. Neal Bonacci. Officers first gave the "all clear" around 1 p.m. — about an hour after multiple shots were fired.

— AP



Alexei Navalny

## ‘CONSEQUENCES’ IF NAVALNY DIES, WARNS U.S.

**Washington, April 18:** US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan warned Sunday that Russia will face "consequences" if hunger-striking Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny dies.

Jailed opposition leader Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent opponent, was arrested in Jan. upon returning to Russia after recovering from a near-fatal poisoning attack he says was orchestrated by Moscow.

"In terms of the specific measures we would undertake, we are looking at a variety of different costs that we would impose, and I'm not going to telegraph that publicly at this point," Sullivan told *CNN*.

"But we have communicated that there will be consequences if Mr. Navalny dies." The 44-year-old Russian began a hunger strike on March 31 to demand proper medical treatment for back pain and numbness in his legs and hands.

On Saturday, Navalny's doctors said his health had rapidly deteriorated and demanded prison officials grant them immediate access.

"Our patient can die any minute," cardiologist Yaroslav Ashikhmin said, pointing to Navalny's high potassium levels and saying he should be moved to intensive care. Both France and Germany on Sunday joined a growing international chorus of protest at Navalny's treatment.

Sullivan said the White House had told the Kremlin that Moscow would be "held accountable by the international community" for what happens to Navalny while in Russian custody. US President Joe Biden said that Navalny's situation was "totally unfair," but he is facing criticism for not bringing up the disident's treatment in a phone call to Putin last week or being more forthright in his public comments.

— AFP

## WEEK'S | DELAY

## Mission equal to Wright Brothers' 1903 flight

## Nasa Mars copter flight 'today'

**Washington, April 18:** Nasa's Ingenuity Mars Helicopter could make its first flight over the Red Planet as soon as Monday, the US space agency reported, following a delay of more than a week due to a possible technical issue.

The mini-helicopter's trip will mark the first-ever powered, controlled flight on another planet, and will help Nasa reap invaluable data about the conditions on Mars.

"Nasa is targeting no earlier than Monday, April

19, for the first flight of its Ingenuity Mars Helicopter," the space agency reported Saturday.

Data will return to Earth "a few hours following the autonomous flight," which would take off at approximately 3:30 am (0730 GMT), Nasa said. Ingenuity's first trip was

initially set for last Sunday, but was delayed after a potential issue emerged during a high-speed test of the four-pound (1.8 kilogram) helicopter's rotors.

Nasa calls the unprecedented helicopter operation highly risky: The flight is a challenge because the air on Mars is so thin — less than one percent of the pressure of Earth's atmosphere.

The helicopter arrived on Mars attached to the underside of the Perseverance rover, which

touched down on February 18. After the helicopter's flight, Ingenuity will send Perseverance technical data on what it has done, and that information will be transmitted back to Earth.

The helicopter mission is the equivalent on Mars of the first powered flight on Earth — by the Wright brothers in 1903 in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. A piece of fabric from that plane has been tucked inside Ingenuity in honour of that feat.

— AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,832.03	0.06
Nifty 50	14,617.90	0.25
S&P 500*	4,185.47	0.36
Dollar (₹)	74.35	0.76
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.46	0.85
Euro (₹)	89.06	0.77
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,431.99	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.82	0.18
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.088	-0.02
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.578	0.048

\* As of Friday/Saturday

Steel prices may take 2 yrs to cool down: JSPL MD

Steel prices might take at least two years to cool down as its demand is consistently increasing. In the current financial year, the demand for steel in India is also expected to exceed the production numbers, Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL) managing director V. R. Sharma told PTI. While the demand in FY22 will be in the range of 140-150 million tonnes, the country's production is expected to be somewhere around 125 mt, he said.

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Govt holds 93% stake in Pune-based bank, may sell 51% now BoM seen as first selloff pick

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

With the bank privatisation process gaining speed, state-owned lender Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) has emerged out to be the first strong candidate for the government's proposed disinvestment plan. Weighing in all options, both Niti Ayog and the finance ministry officials have already discussed the pros and cons of privatisation, a top finance ministry source said.

"The government is actively looking for ways to elicit strong interest from investors for state-run banks that are up for privatisation. Though we have shortlisted four public sector banks, initially we received huge response



from the prospective investors for Bank of Maharashtra," the source said.

There is a wide media speculation that the four PSBs shortlisted are Bank

of Maharashtra, Bank of India, Indian Overseas Bank and the Central Bank of India. It is also expected that the government is considering mid-sized or small banks for

the first round of privatisation, and may later go with large banks for divestment.

The Bank of Maharashtra stock moved up nearly 70 per cent from mid-February when an agency report named the lender among the privatisation candidates. Last Tuesday, the BoM stock moved up nearly 20 per cent with high volumes on renewed market buzz about its privatisation.

Attempts made by Financial Chronicle to reach out to the bank's MD & CEO A.S. Rajeev proved futile. He had earlier told the media that BoM would aim at growing at 10 per cent per annum and that only Rs 1,000 crore loan book now against Rs 15,000 crore in 2016 were required to be restruc-

tured. The government currently holds 93 per cent stake in the Pune-based BoM. Additionally, LIC holds 4 per cent. The remaining 3 per cent holding is with the public.

The government is likely to divest 51 per cent in the current round and reap the benefits of privatisation in the balance 42 per cent holding in later years.

As per a report by Denofwealth, Pune-based corporate giant Bajaj Group, which has a significant presence in the financial sector, could be a strong aspirant for the BoM buyout. Besides, two other corporates that are also reportedly throwing their hats into the ring are Tata Capital and Catholic Syrian Bank.

Future's board approves debt recast plan

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 18

Future Retail's board has approved a resolution plan to restructure the existing secured financial debt from the bankers. This has been permitted under a Resolution Framework for Covid-19 related stress announced by the Reserve Bank of India.

The resolution plan, already approved by the lenders, is subject to the approval of the expert committee under the chairmanship of K. V. Kamath.

The debt raised through the non-convertible debentures also will be restructured. The company has received the written consent of all the holders of the NCDs to amend the terms and conditions of the NCDs as per the resolution plan.

Debt from 28 banks and financial institutions, including working capital demand loans, term loans, cash credit, short term loans, NCDs, purchase bill discounting limits, other working capital loans and unpaid interest which became overdue will be restructured.

According to the company, the pandemic has deeply impacted the long-term business viability and led to significant financial stress across the industries. "The debt burden has become disproportionate relative to the cash flow generated by the company owing to the multiple lockdowns since the pandemic surfaced, posing sig-



nificant financial stability risks to the business. Hence, the restructuring of the debt is crucial and essential," it said in a stock exchange filing.

As per the plan, repayment of short term loans, term loans, NCDs, overdue working capital loans (converted into Working Capital Term Loans) will be extended up to a maximum of two years. Interest during the moratorium period between March 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021 shall be converted into Funded Interest Term Loan, which shall be payable by December 2021. Cash Credit will be continued at a reduced level based on bank assessment.

All securities created on the company's assets shall continue to operate in favour of the lenders in the ranks assigned originally, exception being extension of second charge on movable fixed assets being extended to working capital consortium lenders as a part of the restructuring. All penal interest and charges, default premiums, processing fees unpaid since March 2020 to implementation date will be waived off fully.

Global jewellery brands fear inventory delay

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 18

After a robust March quarter, international jewellery brands are now worried about "inventory delay" due to the surge in Covid-19 cases in India. They fear the delays could impact their full year sales.

US-based Signet Jewellers, in its quarterly update, said that it has evaluated the impact of inventory delays related to recent Covid-19 surges in India and other parts of the world.

"At this time, the company believes it has mitigat-

ed these short-term impacts; however, if the duration and magnitude of these inventory slow-downs intensify, there could be future negative impacts on the company's full year guidance," Signet cautioned.

Signet had posted stronger-than-expected conversion and average ticket values in the first quarter and also upped its full-year revenue guidance.

Similarly, French luxury goods Louis Vuitton's watches and jewellery division recorded revenue growth of 138 per cent in the March quarter com-



pared to the same quarter of 2020 and 80 per cent compared to that of 2019.

Russian diamond miner Alrosa too saw demand from end consumers for diamond jewellery showing robust growth across

key markets like the US and China owing to Valentine's Day and Chinese New Year and improved consumer sentiment.

This robust demand had reflected in the March exports of cut and polished diamonds, which grew 123.55 per cent compared to the same month in 2020.

However, chances of disruption in exports cannot be dismissed. Bharat Diamond Bourse was closed in the first week of April due to rising Covid cases in Mumbai. "BDB has been closed and if Mumbai port is also

closed, then it can affect the exports," said Prakash Pincha, chairman, eastern region, Gems and Jewellery Export Promotion Council. Lower frequency of flights too can hit exports.

According to an industry insider, the diamond certification process is causing the current delay in shipments and the backlog is swelling owing to fewer staff.

Part of the labour force in Surat's polishing units also have gone to their hometown to leave their family back there, fearing a lock-down, said Dinesh Navdiya of the GJEPC.

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Srihari creates national record

Tashkent: Ace Indian swimmer Srihari Nataraj created a national record in 50m backstroke while winning his second gold of the Uzbekistan Open Championship here. The 20-year-old clocked 25.11 seconds to bag the top prize in the FINA-accredited Olympic qualifying event on Saturday night.

Indian swimmers enjoyed a rich haul of 29 medals — 18 gold, seven silver and four bronze — in the meet.

It was Srihari's third national record in two days as the Bengaluru swimmer had rewritten the national marks twice in 100m backstroke, his pet event, earlier this week. — PTI

Krishna Poonia tests covid positive

New Delhi: Delhi Commonwealth Games gold medalist and sitting Rajasthan MLA Krishna Poonia on Sunday tested positive for Covid-19 and is undergoing treatment at a Jaipur hospital. The 43-year-old Krishna, who became the first Indian woman to bag an individual gold in the CWG by winning the discus throw event in 2010, is now admitted at the Rajasthan University of Health Sciences hospital. "She had cough and mild fever and she took a test on Saturday but the virus could not be detected. Today, we went to RHUS and doctors there took a CT scan from which it was diagnosed for Covid-19," her husband Virender Poonia said. — PTI

Federer confirms French Open entry

Paris: Roger Federer confirmed Sunday that he will play the French Open at Roland Garros this year having skipped the 2020 edition to recover from knee surgery. "Hi everyone! Happy to let you know that I will play Geneva and Paris. Until then I will use the time to train. Can't wait to play in Switzerland again," the 39-year-old said on Twitter. Federer, a 20-time Grand Slam winner, captured Roland Garros for the only time in 2009. In March, Federer competed at the Qatar Open in Doha, marking his first tournament since the 2020 Australian Open. — AFP

Nketiah saves Arsenal blushes

Eddie scores last-gasp equaliser to earn a 1-1 draw against lowly Fulham

London, April 18: Eddie Nketiah delivered a hammer blow to Fulham's bid for Premier League survival as the Arsenal striker's last-gasp goal rescued a 1-1 draw at the Emirates Stadium on Sunday.

Mikel Arteta's side were seconds away from a first ever home defeat against Fulham as they laboured to find a response to Josh Maja's second half penalty.

But Nketiah pushed Fulham closer to relegation deep into stoppage-time when he tapped in after the visitors failed to clear a corner.

It was a major setback for third bottom Fulham, who are six points behind fourth bottom Burnley and fifth bottom Brighton with just five games left.

After losing their previous four matches, Fulham were on course to mark Scott Parker's 100th match in charge with a memorable scalp.

Instead, they slipped closer to an immediate return to the Championship.

Next up for Fulham is a west London derby at Chelsea on Saturday before a decisive clash with Burnley on May 8.

Ninth placed Arsenal are nine points adrift of the top four and their best hope of reaching next season's Champions League is winning the Europa League.

Arteta's men face



Arsenal's Eddie Nketiah (right) scores against Fulham in an English Premier League match at the Emirates Stadium in London on Sunday.

Villarreal in the semi-finals after cruising to a 4-0 victory at Slavia Prague in the quarter-final second leg on Thursday.

HEARTBREAK FOR FULHAM

The Spaniard made five changes to the side that thrashed Slavia, with Gabriel Martinelli among those to come in as Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang remained absent with

malaria.

Martinelli should have given Arsenal the lead inside 40 seconds when he ran onto Alexandre Lacazette's pass and clipped his shot just wide.

Martinelli threatened again with a low shot on the turn from Emile Smith Rowe's cross, but Alphonse Areola sprawled to his left to make a good save.

Arsenal thought they had taken the lead when Dani

Ceballos looped his header past Areola from Hector Bellerin's cross.

But the Spaniard was denied his first Premier League goal after VAR ruled Bukayo Saka's toes were in an offside position in the build-up.

Saka hit the outside of the near post with a cross-shot before Fulham received another helping hand from VAR in the 59th minute. — AFP

BLUES END CITY'S QUEST TO REACH FA CUP FINAL

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

A damaging day for City also saw them lose Kevin De Bruyne to an ankle injury just over a week away from the League Cup final, where they face Tottenham, and the first leg of their Champions League semi-final against Paris Saint-Germain.

Chelsea were good value for another impressive win under Thomas Tuchel and will be favourites for the German's first silverware in English football when they face Leicester or Southampton May 15.

Tuchel could land an even bigger prize in the Champions League just months after replacing the sacked Frank Lampard in January.

His side showed they can get the better of City in what could be a dress rehearsal for the Champions League final should the English clubs see off PSG and Real Madrid in the last four. — AFP

Messi wins Copa crown for Barca

Madrid, April 18: Lionel Messi scored twice, including a stunning solo goal, as Barcelona blew away Athletic Bilbao to win the Copa del Rey on Saturday, consigning their opponents to a second final defeat in two weeks.

The cup was won and lost in a whirlwind 12 minutes in Seville, which saw Barca score four times to clinch an emphatic 4-0 victory, with Messi at his devastating best.

It remains to be seen if his seventh Copa del Rey triumph is the last trophy Messi lifts in Barcelona colours but if this was to be a final flourish, the 33-year-old crafted a fitting farewell. "It's very special to be captain of this team where I have spent my whole life and very special to be able to lift this cup," Messi said.

His first goal, and Barca's third, started with the Argentinian in his own half before a charging run down the right and a surge forward into the penalty area gave him the chance for a simple finish.

With the club's new president Joan Laporta in the crowd, Ronald Koeman's first title as Barcelona coach should also significantly boost his chances of remaining in charge

● It remains to be seen if his seventh Copa del Rey triumph is the last trophy Messi lifts in Barcelona colours but if this was to be a final flourish, the 33-year-old crafted a fitting farewell.

beyond the summer. "To win a title is important for me," Koeman admitted afterwards.

Yet Laporta was noticeably evasive when asked about Koeman's future. "He is doing well," he said.

Koeman took over a team at rock bottom, humiliated by an historic loss to Bayern Munich and wounded by the attempts of Messi to leave the club for free.

But this 31st Copa del Rey success for the club is a testament to progress made and Koeman will hope it not only helps convince Messi to stay but gives Barca momentum now in a neck-and-neck title race in La Liga.

"Despite the changes at the club and the young players, at Barca you have to always fight for trophies," Koeman said. — AFP

VERSTAPPEN EMERGES ON TOP IN CHAOTIC IMOLA RACE

Imola (Italy), April 18: Max Verstappen kept his cool to claim a chaotic rain-hit Emilia Romagna Grand Prix on Sunday as seven-time Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton recovered from a rare mistake to sneak in second. Red Bull driver Verstappen muscled past pole sitter Hamilton on the first corner at Imola to set up his impressive first win of the season.

"I surprised myself. We worked really hard to make that better. In these tricky conditions we did a great job," Verstappen said.

Lando Norris in a McLaren took third for the Briton's second successive podium ahead of Charles Leclerc for Ferrari.

The outcome of a compelling second leg of the Formula One season confirmed Verstappen's stature as a formidable obstacle to Hamilton's quest for an unprecedented eighth drivers' crown.

After winning the season-opener in Bahrain and putting in the fastest lap on Sunday Hamilton leads Verstappen by one point ahead of the Portuguese Grand Prix next time out. — AFP



other fast bowlers were bowling in the middle overs."