

SHORT TAKES

Summer vacation in Delhi schools to begin from Apr. 20

New Delhi: The Delhi government on Monday advanced summer vacation in all schools of the national capital in view of the spiralling Covid-19 cases. The vacation, which was to start from May 11 and continue till June 30, has now been rescheduled from April 20 to June 9. "In view of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic situation, the summer vacation has now been rescheduled and will be observed from April 20 to June 9," the Directorate of Education (DoE) said in an order. Earlier in the day, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced a six-day lockdown from 10 pm on Monday till 5 am on April 26, which, he said, was necessary to deal with the rising number of Covid-19 cases as the city's health system was stretched to its limit. Delhi has been reporting around 25,000 Covid-19 cases daily in the past few days. "All the heads of schools are hereby directed to disseminate this information among the teaching, non-teaching staff, students and parents through SMC members, mass SMS facility, phone calls and other means. "During the vacation period, heads of schools are authorized to call vacation staff according to requirement for any school-related work (academic, admission, examination) maintaining Covid-appropriate behaviour and following the standard operating procedure issued by competent authorities from time to time," it said. The Delhi government had earlier this month ordered closure of schools and suspension of physical exams for all classes in view of rise in Covid-19 cases. "All centrally conducted online and semi-online teaching and learning activities will remain suspended during the period for classes KG to nine," the Department of Education said in a separate order. — PTI

Delhi court denies Deep Sidhu's custody to police

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Monday rejected Delhi Police's plea for custodial interrogation of actor-activist Deep Sidhu in connection with a case filed by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) pertaining to the violence at Red Fort, during which parts of the heritage structure were reportedly damaged. Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Gajendra Singh Nagar turned down the police demand for Sidhu's 4-day remand and sent him to 14-day judicial custody, saying there was no sufficient ground to allow the custodial interrogation. Sidhu was arrested by Delhi Police on Saturday in relation to the Republic Day violence during the farmers' tractor march against the central government's new farm laws, moments after being released in another case related to violence, in which he got bail on Friday. He was earlier arrested on February 9 in connection with the Red Fort violence on the Republic Day. Sidhu's advocate Abhishek Gupta argued that both the FIRs rested on similar allegations, and since Sidhu had already been interrogated by the police in the matter, there was no need for fresh police remand now. Gupta said the investigating officers were "acting like emperors". — PTI

Delhi sees over 500% jump in containment zones since Apr. 1

New Delhi, April 19: The number of containment zones in the national capital has jumped to 13,259 from 2,183 on April 1, according to official data released by the Delhi government as the city grapples to rein in the drastic surge in Covid cases. It was a 507 per cent increase in such zones between April 1 and April 18. The number of containment zones has risen correspondingly to the increase in coronavirus cases. On April 1, the city had reported a total of 2,790 new cases with 10,498 total active cases. The number increased multiple-fold with 25,462 new COVID-19 cases and 74,941 total active cases on April 18. While the number of containment zones has consistently risen since April 12, the biggest jump was observed on April 18, when the national

capital recorded the highest daily rise of coronavirus cases. On April 17, Delhi had 11,235 containment zones, which increased to 13,250 on April 18, adding more than 2,000 zones across the city. The week from April 4 to April 11 saw a gradual increase in the number of containment zones. While on April 4, the city had 2,917 restricted areas, it added 173 more such zones on April 5 resulting in 3,090 containment zones. The following days, the Delhi government declared 3,291 containment zones on April 6; 3,708 on April 7; 4,226 on April 8; 4,768 on April 9; 5,236 on April 10 and 5,705 on April 11. It was after April 14 that the city started adding more than 1,000 containment zones to the list every day. — PTI

City has reported 823 fatalities due to the deadly virus in the last 5 days ■ Overall toll stands at 12,361
Record 240 Covid deaths in Delhi; 23,686 cases

New Delhi, April 19: Delhi on Monday recorded 240 deaths due to Covid-19, the highest since the pandemic began over a year ago, and 23,686 cases with a positivity rate of 26.12 per cent, according to data shared by the Health Department. As the coronavirus crisis deepened further, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced a six-day lockdown in the national capital from 10 pm on Monday till 5 am on April 26. He said it was necessary to deal with the rising number of Covid-19 cases as the city's health system was stretched to its limit.

The announcement, which came at the end of a weekend curfew, bought back the memories of last year's lockdown and triggered usual responses from people — migrant workers rushing to railway stations and bus terminals in a bid to return home, residents flocking to markets to stock up on essentials, and tippers joining in long, serpentine queues outside liquor stores. The city has reported 823 deaths due to the deadly virus in the last five days. On Sunday, the city had witnessed the biggest jump in its daily Covid-19 tally with 25,462 fresh cases, while the positivity



President of the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) Srinivas B.V. with his team members at IYC social media center in New Delhi on Monday. Srinivas is helping Covid patients receive essential medical help using social media. — PTI

rate had shot up to 29.74 per cent. Authorities had reported 161 deaths due to the disease a day ago.

On Saturday, 24,375 Covid-19 cases and 167 deaths were reported in the city. The city witnessed 141 deaths on Friday and 112 on

Thursday. With the fresh cases, the national capital's cumulative tally has risen to 8,77,146. The death toll stands at 12,361, according to the latest bulletin. A total of 90,696 tests, including 68,778 RT-PCR tests and 21,918 rapid anti-

gen tests, were conducted the previous day, the bulletin said.

So far, over 7.87 lakh patients have recovered in Delhi, it added. The number of active cases in the city increased to 76,887 from 74,941 the day before, the bulletin stated. — PTI

Disclose number of beds available in hospitals: HC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

The Delhi High Court Monday directed the Centre and AAP government to file affidavits by Tuesday disclosing hospital-wise availability of beds for Covid-19 patients here.

Taking stock of the current pandemic situation, the high court asked the Central government to look into the aspect of shortage of oxygen supply in Delhi hospitals on an urgent basis.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said the Centre and the Delhi government in their affidavits shall also give details as to how many hospital beds are with or without ventilators and oxygen support.

It also directed the firm, which used to supply oxygen to Delhi hospitals and has suddenly stopped, to restore the oxygen supply immediately.

Pharmacy shop owner arrested for Remdesivir blackmarketing

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

Delhi Police has arrested a 41-year-old pharmacy shop owner and his employee was arrested on Monday in connection with alleged blackmarketing of "Remdesivir" medicine in Delhi. The accused, Basant Goel, a resident of Delhi's Vivek Vihar and his 27-year-old employee Ramoutar Sharma, a resident of North Chhajupur in Delhi has been working with Goel for the last seven years at their pharmacy in Delhi's Durgapuri Extension Loni Road.

The police said an investigation was initiated by Delhi Police's Crime Branch after a case was registered by them on Monday in connection with black marketing of corona medicine "Remdesivir" in Delhi. "The owner of 'Goyal Medicos', Basant Goel has been arrested in the case along with his employee Ramoutar Sharma in connection with blackmarketing of Remdesivir" in Delhi," police said.

People flock markets to stock groceries, other essential items

New Delhi, April 19: People flocked the markets to stock groceries and other essentials, and ran other errands soon after Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced a week-long lockdown amid rising Covid-19 cases.

Long queues were seen outside stores at many places in Delhi soon after the announcement. While a few anticipated that the lockdown may be extended further; others did not want to step out during the restricted period and hence wanted to be better prepared. Shiv Takkar, a 30-year-old law student residing in Lajpat Nagar, said although he was anyway coming to buy some essentials and medicines, the moment he got a message from a friend about the lockdown, he thought of fetching whatever is needed immediately. "The situation has not improved a bit a year after. We did not have beds in hospitals then, we do not have beds now. So, it becomes difficult to trust the government, especially when it is an emergency," he said.

Rajbir Singh, a 58-year-old employee at a mineral water distribution company said, "Shopkeepers tend to increase the prices of items when such a situation arises. Last year, the prices of hand sanitiser and floor cleaners went through

the roof. Items like elaichi and liquorice, (which are used to prepare a concoction to boost immunity) weren't even available in many shops."

Another man, who did not wish to be named said, he remembered standing in a long queue at a pharmacy for two hours in April last year to buy a pair of gloves and some medicines. "Lockdown is harsh on everybody," he said.

Deepti Nainwal, a resident of Dwarka, said the moment she and her husband heard about the lockdown on Monday morning, they reached the grocery shop immediately where people were already standing in queue.

"There was panic among people. We just bought the minimal required grocery for us. The cases have been increasing due to which we do not want to go out of the house," she said.

Amit Sharma, a resident of Shahdara, said, "We have read that the new strain is more dangerous as compared to the previous one. Me and family have not been exposed to this virus yet. We are storing the necessary items for one week and will avoid to step out of the house. My mother is a senior citizen and we are more worried about her."

— PTI

Saket family court judge dies of Covid

New Delhi, April 19: A 47-year-old district court judge succumbed to Covid-19 at a government hospital here on Monday.

Kovai Venugopal, who was a judge at the Saket Family Court, died at 11 am at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Naryan Hospital.

According to the court sources, he was admitted to the hospital on Sunday and was being treated in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) ward.

Saket Bar Association secretary Dhir Singh Kasana alleged that the

incident was a result of "negligence on the part of the government".

"We have been continuously asking the government to make vaccination for all judges and lawyers mandatory as we have to work among thousands of people on a daily basis to keep the justice delivery system working," he said.

"Had the government agreed to our demand, this incident would not have happened," Kasana added.

Venugopal was battling the virus for over a week. — PTI

Thousands queue up outside liquor vendors after lockdown announcement



Long queue outside a wine shop in New Delhi on Monday. — G.N. JHA

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

Long, serpentine queues were seen outside liquor shops in Delhi soon after the announcement of a six-day lockdown on Monday, with tippers braving the sun for hours and occasionally breaking into heated arguments. Many lost patience as the mercury climbed and some even tried to jump queues, leading to minor disagreements and altercations at some places.

An association of liquor companies, meanwhile,

came out with a statement urging the Delhi government to start home delivery of alcoholic beverages

in the city, on the lines of Maharashtra, to ease the rush. Waiting for his turn in one such queue in south

SC panel to ascertain quality, quantity of water released by Haryana to Delhi

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

The Supreme Court on Monday formed a committee to ascertain the quality and quantity of water being released by Haryana at Wazirabad water treatment plant in the national capital. The six-member committee, headed by secretary Water Resources Ministry, will examine the quality and quantity of water coming to Delhi from Haryana. The committee has been asked to submit its report in three days.

The supply of water from Haryana at Wazirabad water treatment plan is essential for meeting the water

requirement in the national capital particularly during summer months.

The six-member committee has representatives of the Jal Shakti Ministry, Delhi Pollution Control Board, Delhi Jal Board, Haryana State Pollution Control Board and the Haryana Agricultural Board as its members.

A bench comprising Justice L. Naageswara Rao, Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian sought a report from the committee in the wake of Haryana and Delhi contested each others claim on the quality and the quantity of water being given by Haryana to Delhi.

The top court formed the six-member committee in the course of the hearing of a plea by Delhi Jal Board contending that Haryana was releasing less amount of water than expected and as a consequence there was an increase in ammonia level in Yamuna river water.

However, this was disputed by Haryana which contended that Delhi was diverting water before it actually reached Wazirabad water treatment plant. The court directed the further hearing of the matter after the submission of the report by committee.

Delhi Jal Board had approached the top court

in January 2021 seeking directions to the Haryana government not to discharge untreated wastewater in the river Yamuna passing through the State, resulting in a rise of ammonia levels in the river water.

The top court had issued notice to Haryana on January 19 seeking its response to the plea by Delhi Jal Board. However the top court enlarged the scope of the hearing asking the National Green Tribunal (NGT)-appointed committee for river monitoring to submit its recommendations to improve the quality of the river water and the extent to which they have been implemented.

Farmers' protest: SC to hear plea to clear roads for traffic

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

The Supreme Court on Monday posted for May 7 a plea filed by a Noida resident seeking direction to authorities to ensure that the road between Noida to Delhi is kept clear of the farmers agitating against three controversial farms laws so that the passage is not affected.

A Bench comprising Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul Kaul and Hemant Gupta told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta not to obstruct the life of other people. However, the court

adjourned the hearing by two week and posted the matter for further hearing on May 7 after the Solicitor General sought two weeks adjournment.

On the last date of hearing, the court had said that public roads should not be blocked during protests and there should be free flow of traffic on roads.

The court is hearing a PIL filed by Monica Agarwal, a marketing executive, that commuting has become a nightmare since the roads were blocked by the protesting farmers since last November.

SHORT TAKES

IAF chief leaves for 5-day France visit

New Delhi: Even as India is expecting next batch of Rafale aircraft later this month, Air Force Chief RKS Bhaduria on Monday left for France on a five day official visit. The visit of Indian Air Force Chief will be a significant step in further enhancing mutual cooperation. Air Chief will hold meetings and discussions with senior military leadership of France and visit operational facilities and airbases. The visit comes after Gen Philippe Lavigne, Chief of Staff, French Air and Space Force (FASF) visited India in February 2020. He will also take stock of delivery of the rest of the Rafale aircraft to the Indian Air Force. Dassault Aviation has till now delivered 14 jets to the Indian Air Force. India had signed an inter-governmental agreement with France in September 2016 for procurement of 36 Rafale fighter jets at a cost of around ₹58,000 crore.

Navy seizes drugs worth ₹3,000 crore

New Delhi: Indian Navy on Monday said that it has seized narcotics of ₹3,000 crore in Arabian Sea. Indian Naval Ship Suvarna, whilst on surveillance patrol in the Arabian Sea, encountered a fishing vessel with suspicious movements, said Indian Navy in a statement. To investigate the vessel, the ship's team conducted boarding and search operation, which led to the seizure of more than 300 kilograms of narcotics substances. The boat with its crew have been escorted to the nearest Indian Port of Kochi, Kerala for further investigation. "The approximate cost the catch in the international market is estimated to be ₹3,000 crore," said Indian Navy. This is a major catch not only in terms of the quantity and cost but also from the perspective of disruption of the illegal narcotics smuggling routes, which emanate from the Makran coast and flow towards the Indian, Maldivian and Sri Lankan destinations.

Parl should discuss Covid situation: Raut

Mumbai: Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut on Monday called for convening a special session of Parliament for at least two days to discuss the Covid situation. Terming the Covid as "unprecedented and almost war-like", Mr Raut said he held discussions with some key leaders from across the country on Sunday over the issue and all of them were of the view that the situation is "serious". "It's an unprecedented & almost a war like situation. Utmost confusion, tension everywhere! No beds, no oxygen & no vaccination as well! It's nothing but TOTAL CHAOS! A Spl session of the Parliament for at least 2 days should be called to discuss the situation!" he tweeted. — PTI

'OXYGEN SUPPLIES FOR MP BLOCKED IN CERTAIN STATES'

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, APRIL 19

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Monday said oxygen consignments for MP have been blocked in certain states, leading to disruption in supply of oxygen to hospitals here. Mr Chouhan took up the issue with the chief ministers of the concerned states urging them to sort out the matter as soon as possible to ensure that no Covid-19 patients died due to want of oxygen in hospitals in MP. "Oxygen consignments headed for MP were blocked in states of Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh by district and lower level officers there under some pretexts. We have taken up the matter with the chief ministers of these states to sort out the matter urgently", a government spokesman told this newspaper here. Mr Chouhan held discussions with his Maharashtra counterpart Uddhav Thakre in the afternoon on the matter, he said. Mr Thakre assured him of prompt action to sort out the issue, he added. Madhya Pradesh on Monday received 390 metric tons of oxygen. Ten Covid-19 patients died in government medical college hospital in Shahdol in MP on the intervening night of Saturday-Sunday due to lack of oxygen.

HC orders lockdown in 5 UP cities, govt objects

'All establishments, be it government or private, shall remain closed till April 26'

Allahabad, April 19: Amid a surge in coronavirus cases, the Allahabad High Court on Monday directed the Uttar Pradesh government to impose a week-long lockdown in Lucknow, Allahabad, Kanpur Nagar, Varanasi and Gorakhpur.

Reacting to the order, the Uttar Pradesh government, however, said there will be no "complete lockdown" in the cities for now.

A two-judge bench comprising justices Siddhartha Varma and Ajiit Kumar passed the lockdown order on a Public Interest Litigation on the condition of quarantine centres in the state and treatment of coronavirus patients.

"We are of the considered view that in given scenario of present time if people are restrained from going outside their homes for a week in the first instance, the current chain of spread of coronavirus infection can be broken and this will also give some respite to the frontline medical and health workers," the bench observed.

Accordingly, we are passing the directions in respect of cities of Prayagraj (Allahabad),



An ambulance carrying Covid patient wait to be attended by medical workers as coronavirus cases surge in Ahmedabad on Monday.

Lucknow, Varanasi, Kanpur Nagar and Gorakhpur and we direct the government to strictly enforce them forthwith," it said.

"All establishments be it government or private, except financial institutions and financial departments, medical and health services, industrial and scientific establishments, essential services including municipal functions, and

public transport, shall remain closed till 26th April, 2021. The judiciary will, however, function on its own discretion," the bench said.

The state has witnessed a spurt in coronavirus cases over the past few weeks.

Responding to the order, Uttar Pradesh additional chief secretary, information, Navneet Sehgal said strict curbs are necessary to control the spread of

If people die of pandemic in a large number due to paucity of sufficient medical aid it would be the governments to blame which failed to counter the pandemic even after one long year of experience and learning. One would only laugh at us that we have enough to spend on elections and very little to spend on public health.

— Allahabad high court

the coronavirus and that the government has taken several steps in that direction.

However, he said, alongside saving lives, protecting livelihoods is also important.

"Therefore, there will be no complete lockdown in the cities for now. People are automatically closing many places," he said.

He did not say whether the government intends to move the Supreme Court against the high court order.

■ Opens its hospitals in state for civilian corona patients

Army steps in to fight Covid in MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, APRIL 19

Army on Monday stepped in to tackle the coronavirus pandemic by opening its hospitals in Madhya Pradesh for the civilian Covid-19 patients.

In another development, Madhya Pradesh high court on Monday pulled up the Shivraj government for its failure to solve the crisis of oxygen and life-saving drug Remdesivir in the state. Earlier in the day, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan talked to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the defence minister Rajnath Singh seeking their intervention to help the state overcome the crisis facing the state in treatment of Covid-19 patients.



A medic collects swab samples for Covid test from police personnel, who were deployed in Damoh Legislative by-election, as coronavirus cases rise across the country, at government Hospital in Bhopal on Monday.

While the PM assured to ensure a steady supply of oxygen and Remdesivir drugs to the state, Mr Singh accepted the chief minister's proposal to open the Army hospitals in the state for treatment

of Covid-19 patients, a government spokesman here said.

Two senior Army officers met the chief minister here in the afternoon to discuss allocation of beds in different Army hospi-

IN A separate meeting with leaders of the pharmaceutical industry, PM commended the sector for its efforts to increase production of several necessary drugs and also for reducing the price of injections like remdesivir, according to an official statement

medicines and essential medical equipment going smoothly, the prime minister asked the industry to ensure seamless supply chains and extended the government's support for facilities like logistics and transportation.

He urged the industry to conduct more and more researches on threats that can occur in the future along with Covid as, he said, it would help the country take a lead in combating a virus.

Urging doctors to educate people against "rumours" on Covid treatment and prevention, Modi said it is very important in these difficult times to not become a victim of panic, according to the statement.

For this, along with prop-

er treatment, emphasis must also be on counselling of patients admitted in hospitals, Modi said and encouraged doctors to use telemedicine for the treatment of other diseases, in case there is no emergency.

The Centre has recently taken many important decisions related to the supply of essential medicines, injections and sufficient availability of oxygen. The states have been given necessary guidelines about these, he said.

Amid a massive surge in coronavirus cases across the country, some chief ministers have complained of a shortage of essentials like oxygen supply and medicines like remdesivir, and sought the Centre's intervention. The Prime Minister said, "It is due to the doctors' hard work and the nation's strategy that India was able to control the infectious disease. It is now facing a second wave. All the doctors and our frontline workers are confronting the pandemic with full force and are saving the lives of millions of people."

Meghalaya to be out of bound for tourists

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, APRIL 19

In view of the growing number of Covid-19 cases across the country, the north-eastern states have started taking steps restricting the movement of people from outside the region as Meghalaya on Monday imposed a ban on entry of tourists into the state while Manipur has imposed a night curfew in the state.

Assam, which is also the gateway of the north-east, has already announced that Covid-negative certificates from other states will not be valid to enter the state and people will have to undergo tests upon arrival at airports and railway stations.

Informing that there will be no restriction on local tourism, Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma said that restrictions on the entry of tourists from outside Meghalaya will come into force from April 23. The state has also decided to shut down tourist spots, which witnesses high tourists footfall. "We have decided to close down tourist destinations which usually have very high tourist turn out," CM said.

Meanwhile, Assam's Covid tally mounted to 2,24,455 as 639 more people tested positive for the infection, while six fresh fatalities pushed the death toll to 1,135.

The six deaths were reported from Barpeta, Cachar, Dhemaji, Kamrup Metropolitan, Morigaon and Tinsukia districts. Assam currently has 5,268 active cases.

Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told reporters that the cases reported in Assam during the second wave were mostly among those who were from outside the state.

Audio clip row: BJP demands 'strict action' against Mamata

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

Citing statements made by West Bengal chief minister and Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee prior to the Sitalkuchi violence and the purported audio of the conversation between her and her party's Sitalkuchi candidate, the BJP on Monday demanded "strict action" against her for promoting enmity among groups and also violation of the oath as prescribed by the Constitution.

In a memorandum submitted to the Election Commission, the BJP has also cited some of the statements made by Ms Banerjee during public rallies, including against opposition leaders to demand registration of an FIR to "set the right precedent as a deterrent for others who make divisive, communal statements to create divisions and enmity between

UNION MINISTER Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, who led the BJP delegation, which submitted the memorandum virtually, said TMC leaders have become "habitual violators" of the Model Code of Conduct and Representation of People Act.

groups and communities based on unverified allegations with intent to vitiate the environment of free and fair polls."

Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, who led the BJP delegation, which submitted the memorandum virtually, said TMC leaders have become "habitual violators" of the Model Code of Conduct and Representation of People Act.

Referring to Ms Banerjee's statements prior to the Sitalkuchi violence, including the one to "gherao" Central forces and the purported

audio between her and TMC's Sitalkuchi candidate, the BJP said, "The audio seeks to incite and aggravate the differences between two communities on religious lines. The audio has been intensively released to polarize votes in the remaining polls." The BJP also noted that the EC's earlier "reprimand, warning, condemnation and ban of 24 hours did not deter her" and the Sitalkuchi violence took place.

The BJP demanded that the views expressed by the EC "needs to be pursued to its logical end" and the commission may consider filing an FIR to "investigate the entire chain of events; their intent, purpose, actors and perpetrators and book all those found guilty for perpetrating the crimes of promoting hate and polarization amongst the communities and inciting people against the public servants."

Signs of community in C'garh: Minister

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, APRIL 19

Chhattisgarh health minister T.S. Singhdeo on Monday indicated that the state may have entered the phase of community spread of the virus.

Mr Singhdeo told reporters here that in many coronavirus positive cases, sources of infections could not be found; indicating that community spread of the virus may have begun in the state.

The Source of infection is tapped through contact tracing. He said the threat of community spread of the virus usually increased when the rate of infection grew by five per cent.

"But, in some districts, the rate of infection has been found to be more than 30 per cent, while in some other districts it was even more than 50 per cent. Hence, the chances of community spreading appeared real in these districts", he added.

Mr Singhdeo predicted

CHHATTISGARH HEALTH minister said that in many Covid +ve cases, sources of infections could not be found; indicating that community spread of the virus may have begun in the state.

that the active cases in the state may increase to 1.5 lakh to two lakhs from the current 1,28,019 by the end of this month.

"We need to be more careful", he added.

Chhattisgarh has reported 12,345 fresh cases of coronavirus positive and 170 deaths in the last 24 hours. Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel meanwhile has ordered strengthening scrutiny of people entering the state.

He said thorough scrutiny of people entering the state at railway stations, bus stands and airports must be done and people suspected to be infected by the virus be quarantined in the nearby hospitals.

'70% of patients above 40 yrs in both waves'

New Delhi, April 19:

Asserting that the older population continues to remain more vulnerable to coronavirus infection, top medical experts in the government on Monday said over 70 per cent of Covid patients in both the waves are above 40 years.

Addressing media, ICMR Director General Balram Bhargava said there is no difference in deaths between first and second wave among hospitalised patients, while the oxygen requirement is higher in second wave and ventilator requirement is not higher in the

second wave.

Prevalence of shortness of breath is slightly higher in the second wave of Covid but sore throat and dry cough and other symptoms were higher in the first wave, the Centre said on Monday.

"No difference in deaths between first and second wave among hospitalised patients. About 54.5 per cent patients require oxygen in second wave against 41.5 per cent in the first wave," he said.

"More than 70 per cent patients in both waves are more than 40 years

PREVALENCE OF shortness of breath is slightly higher in the second wave of Covid but sore throat and dry cough and other symptoms were higher in the first wave, the Centre said on Monday.

old, only marginally higher proportion of younger patients. Higher proportion of asymptomatic patients in the second wave," he said, based on the study of 1,885 patients in second wave and 7,600 patients in the first wave.

NITI Aayog Member (Health) V.K. Paul said in the first wave 31 per cent patients were aged less than 30 years, this time it is up to 32 per cent.

"Essentially there is no difference," Mr Paul said.

Bhargava appealed that wastage of oxygen must not happen and it should be rationalised.

Mr Paul added that remdesivir must be used on hospitalised patients in moderate stages of illness on oxygen and it is not to be used in home settings.

— PTI

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED GIRL



Simran

General public is hereby informed that this girl namely Simran D/o Wazir R/o F-15, Room No. 53, DDA Flats, Narela, Delhi Age : 17 years

Height : 5', **Face :** Round, **Complexion :** Sallow, **Build :** Medium, wearing light green colour suit-salwar and white colour hawai slipper in feet, has been missing/kidnapped since 30.03.2021 from her house. In this regard FIR No. 151/21 dated 30.03.2021 u/s 363 IPC has been registered at P.S. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi.

Any person having any information or clue about this missing/kidnapped girl may kindly inform to the following.

E-mail: cbc@cbl.gov.in **SHO:** **Website:** http://cbl.nic.in **P.S. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi**

Fax: 24368639, **Ph. :** 011-27787592, **27787593**

Tel.: 24368638/24368641 **DP#47/ON21**

SHORT TAKES

Kerala imposes night curfew

Thiruvananthapuram: In the backdrop of rising Covid-19 cases, Kerala government on Monday decided to bring in various restrictions, including imposing night curfew from 9 pm to 5 am from April 20 and malls and cinemas can function only till 7.30 pm. "Restriction on non-essential activities and movement at night between 9 PM and 5 AM shall come into force from 9 PM of April 20, 2021", the government order said. Tuition centres can function only online and should not hold any physical classes. All meetings, training events and other programmes under all government departments would be held online as far as possible, it was stated. The decisions to impose the restrictions, which would be in place for two weeks, were taken at a high-level meeting of the core group for Covid-19 management chaired by chief secretary Dr V.P. Joy. — *PTI*

Gujarat govt cuts RT-PCR test price

Ahmedabad: The Gujarat government slashed the charges of RT-PCR tests being conducted by private laboratories to ₹900 from ₹1,100, deputy chief minister Nitin Patel said on Monday. If a laboratory assistant is called at home or at the hospital to collect samples through RT-PCR test, the charges will be ₹900 with effect from Tuesday, he said. Mr Patel, who handles the Health portfolio, said a if a person visits a laboratory to give his swab sample, he will now be charged ₹700 instead of ₹800. "Till now, the state government alone conducted 40.99 lakh RT-PCR tests and over 1.19 crore antigen tests free of cost," Mr Patel said. He said 11 state-run hospitals across Gujarat will get the PSA oxygen generator plants soon to cope up with the rising demand for medical oxygen for Covid-19 patients. — *PTI*

Maha: Covid -ve must from Delhi, 5 states

■ **Continued from Page 1** (SOPs) for passengers from these six states. For passengers travelling in long-distance trains from these states, the Railways will share data of the trains that are scheduled to be running between these places and Maharashtra with the local disaster management authorities. Data of passengers travelling will also be shared with the local disaster management authority each day, four hours before the departure of the trains. No unreserved tickets will be issued from these places to Maharashtra, the SOPs said. The Railways should ensure trains from the places of sensitive origin come to the outer platforms where it would be easier to conduct thermal screening of the passengers, the order said. However, Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant has appealed to his Maharashtra counterpart Uddhav Thackeray to withdraw the order.

"#COVID19 is a global pandemic. Let us put up a combined fight against this pandemic under the leadership of PM @narendramodi ji. I urge @CMOMaharashtra not to single out states as 'Places of Sensitive Origin' and withdraw the said order in the public interest," Mr Sawant tweeted.

Maharashtra is the worst coronavirus-affected state in the country, recording 58,924 cases and 351 deaths on Monday. The total number of Covid cases and deaths in the state has reached 38,98,262 and 60,824 respectively so far.

Didi stops short rallies, Kolkata campaign

■ **Continued from Page 1** campaign in Kolkata. Besides, I have also curtailed my rallies. On the last day of the poll campaign, i.e. April 26, I will hold a small rally only."

Asked about lockdown or night curfew, like it's being clamped in other states to break the chain of infection, she explained, "Nothing will happen out of the night curfew. It is not a solution. We are not imposing lockdown now also. If it is done suddenly, won't the people suffer? Will a lockdown solve the problem? Bus, train and flights are operating. Lakhs of people have come here from outside. I feel that the people should not be forced into anything. What cannot

Need concerted action to combat terror: India

'Vision of Indo-Pacific premised upon Asean centrality'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

Indian on Monday said that contemporary security challenges are not limited to territorial or political disputes and there is need for coordinated and concerted action across borders to combat challenges of terrorism, radicalisation, drug trafficking and organised crime.

"The world order that we built following the Second World War is under serious stress. The nature of threats faced by member states when the United Nations was founded 75 years ago has also changed," external affairs minister S. Jaishankar said.

Addressing the UN Security Council open debate on "Enhancing cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organisations in enhancing confidence-building and dialogue in conflict prevention and resolution", Mr Jaishankar said contemporary security challenges are not limited to territorial or political disputes, but

Jaishankar speaks to US envoy Blinken

New Delhi: External affairs minister S. Jaishankar spoke to US secretary of state Antony J. Blinken, covering recent developments in India's immediate and extended neighbourhood, UNSC agenda and their bilateral health cooperation in view of the Covid pandemic. The Indo-Pacific and Afghan peace process were expected to have been discussed.

transcend physical or political boundaries.

Highlighting that India has traditionally maintained close and friendly cooperation with regional organisations, Jaishankar said India's relationship with the Asean is a key pillar of its foreign policy and the foundation of its Act East Policy.

Mr Jaishankar also said that "India's relationship with the (southeast Asian grouping) Asean is a key pillar of its foreign policy and the foundation of its Act East Policy".

He also told the UN Security Council that "India's vision of the Indo-Pacific as a free, open and inclusive region, underpinned by international law and a rules based order, is premised on Asean centrality and the common pursuit of progress and prosperity".

India said it "remains committed to further building on the momentum of regional cooperation under the (regional grouping) BIMSTEC framework and make that organisation stronger, vibrant, and more effective and result oriented" but made no mention of south Asian grouping Saarc.

With South Asian grouping Saarc in cold storage due to the previous years' Indo-Pak tensions, India has invested its hopes for regional cooperation in BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) — which does not have Pakistan as a member. BIMSTEC comprises

India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

To save Great Indian Bustard, SC for underground powerlines

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

The Supreme Court ordered conversion of overhead high-tension power lines into underground cables, wherever feasible, within a year in Rajasthan and Gujarat to protect Great Indian Bustard from extinction.

It also ordered installation of diverters to protect the birds — the Great Indian Bustards and

Lesser Falcons — from colliding with the high voltage power lines. These two rare birds on the verge of extinction.

It identified 40 such overhead lines endangering the rare birds.

A bench of Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian said, "The state and the Central government have a duty cast to preserve the endangered species and as

such the expenses incurred will have to be provided by them either under the schemes available or by earmarking the same in such manner."

The order came on a PIL by a Delhi-based wildlife enthusiast

M.K. Ranjitsinh and others who had sought direction to Rajasthan and Gujarat governments to ensure predator proof fencing, controlled grazing in the enclosure development.

■ Electoral bonds worth ₹3,429.56 crore were redeemed by parties in 2019-20 JMM 1st political party to reveal details of electoral bonds

New Delhi, April 19: The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) is the first party that has declared the name of the entity which made donations to it through electoral bonds, poll rights group Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said.

The declaration of ₹1 crore donation was made in the party's 2019-20 contribution report, it said.

According to the contribution report of the ruling party in Jharkhand, the donation was made by aluminium and copper manufacturing company Hindalco.

In a new report, the ADR

said the most common and popular source of income for national and regional political parties in 2019-20 were donations through electoral bonds. "Given the anonymity provided to donors by the scheme, electoral bonds have emerged as the most popular channel of donations to parties in the last two years," the ADR report said.

"It is to be noted that the JMM party has declared the name of the donor who donated ₹1 crore through electoral bonds in its contribution report for FY (financial year) 2019-20, however, this income through electoral bonds

has not been declared by the party in its audit report for FY 2019-20," it said.

This raises the question as to whether political parties are aware of the donor's identity who made contributions through electoral bonds, as can be seen in this case, the ADR said.

Electoral bonds have been pitched as an alternative to cash donations made to political parties as part of efforts to bring transparency in political funding.

The report said more than 50 per cent of the total income — ₹312.37



BJP president J.P. Nadda during a roadshow in favour of party candidate Priya Saha from Sainthia constituency at Birbhum district's Sainthia on Monday. — *PTI*

BJP seeks action against Didi for 'spreading hatred, enmity'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

Citing statements made by West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee prior to the Sitalkuchi violence and a purported conversation with her party's Sitalkuchi candidate, the BJP on Monday demanded "strict action" against the TMC president for promoting enmity among groups and also violation of the oath as prescribed by the Constitution.

In a memorandum to the Election Commission, the BJP has also cited some of the statements made by Ms Banerjee during public rallies, including against Opposition leaders to demand registration of an FIR to "set the right precedent as a deterrent for others who make divisive, communal statements to create divisions and enmity between



Mamata Banerjee

groups and communities based on unverified allegations with intent to vitiate the environment of free and fair polls."

Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, who led the BJP delegation which submitted the memorandum virtually, said TMC leaders have become "habitual violators" of the model of conduct and Representation of People Act.

Referring to Ms Banerjee's statements prior to the Sitalkuchi violence, including the one to "gherao" Central

forces and the purported audio between her and TMC's Sitalkuchi candidate, the BJP said "the audio seeks to incite and aggravate the differences between two communities on religious lines. The audio has been intentionally released to polarise votes in the remaining polls." The BJP also noted that the EC's earlier "reprisand, warning, condemnation and ban of 24 hours did not deter her" and the Sitalkuchi violence took place.

Citing some of the "divisive statements" of Ms Banerjee, including "outsiders" allegation against her Opponents, the BJP said her statements were in stark contravention of the MCC and demanded that Ms Banerjee should be made to apologise and be banned from campaigning. It also demanded an FIR to be filed against her.

■ **ELECTORAL BONDS** worth ₹3,429.56 crore were redeemed by parties in 2019-20, indicating that the remaining ₹3,117.19 crore or approximately 91 per cent worth of electoral bonds were encashed by parties whose audit reports are yet to be available

crore — of 19 political parties, analysed for the 2019-20 fiscal, was received from donations through electoral bonds, which are anonymous, meaning the identity of donors are not disclosed to the public. Electoral bonds worth ₹3,429.56 crore were

redeemed by parties in 2019-20, indicating that the remaining ₹3,117.19 crore or approximately 91 per cent worth of electoral bonds were encashed by parties whose audit reports are yet to be available on the Election Commission's website, it said. The total income declared by the two national and 17 regional parties for 2019-20 was ₹619.28 crore.

The All-India Trinamul Congress reported having the highest income of ₹143.676 crore which forms 23.20 per cent of the total income of all the parties analysed, followed by

the TDP with an income of ₹91.53 crore or 14.78 per cent and the BJD whose income was ₹90.35 crore or 14.59 per cent, the ADR said.

The total income of the top three parties was ₹325.556 crore, which comprised 52.57 per cent of the total income of political parties analysed collectively in this report, it said.

Out of the 19 political parties analysed, nine parties have shown an increase in their income, from the 2018-19 fiscal to 2019-20, while 10 parties have shown a decline in their income during this period, the report said. — *PTI*

Lockdown begins

■ **Continued from Page 1** time to boost our infrastructure. We will use this week-long lockdown to improve our healthcare... I appeal to people to completely follow the lockdown. We will together overcome this fourth phase of Covid-19 as we did in the earlier three waves," he added. Addressing migrant workers, Mr Kejriwal said, "I appeal to you with folded hands. It's a small lockdown, only for six days. Don't leave Delhi and go. I'm very hopeful that we won't need to further extend the lockdown... Govt will take care of you."

Delhi is the worst-hit city in India with 25,500 fresh cases on Sunday. In the last 24 hours, the number of cases remained high despite a dip — 23,500.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority said that movement of people will be allowed for marriage related gatherings and up to 50 people will be permitted to attend a wedding, but they will have to show a soft or hard copy of the wedding card. Twenty people will be allowed to attend funerals.

Public transport such as Metros and buses with their 50 per cent capacity will be allowed.

Vaccine for all above 18 yrs

■ **Continued from Page 1** continue to supply them.

Vaccine manufacturers can scale up their production as well as attract new national and international players. Private hospitals would have to procure their supplies of Covid-19 vaccine from the 50 per cent supply earmarked for states or from the open market. Private vaccination providers will have to declare their self-set vaccination price.

Government will allow the imported ready-to-use vaccines to be utilised in the private sector and state facilities. Centre, from its share, will allocate vaccines to states/UTs based on the criteria of extent of infection (number of active Covid cases) and performance (speed of administration).

Incidentally, this move comes a day after former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh wrote a letter to PM Modi urging him to ramp up vaccination efforts and let states decide priorities for age groups. Dr Singh was himself admitted in AIIMS, New Delhi, on Monday after testing positive for Covid-19. However, the letter written by Dr Singh was not received by the government in the same spirit of "constructive cooperation".

In a rather terse reply, health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan replied to the for-

mer Prime Minister and gave a political spin to his suggestions, saying the Congress leader should first advise his junior party leaders who have been critical of Centre's vaccine programme.

"History shall be kinder to you Dr Manmohan Singh ji if your offer of 'constructive cooperation' and valuable advice was followed by your @INCIndia leaders as well in such extraordinary times!" Dr Harsh Vardhan said while attaching his reply to the mild-mannered Dr Singh on Twitter only to face criticism on social media with netizens accusing him of playing politics at this time of pandemic instead of taking suggestions.

The government has been scrambling for a response as the second wave has exposed the country's weak and uncaring health care system more than the first wave. With Covid-19 cases shooting, and the situation getting worse each day, harrowing stories have been emerging of hospitals overflowing with patients, patients suffering and dying due to shortage of medicines, oxygen and hospital beds.

Facing severe criticism for its poor handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, and for preferring elections and Kumbh Mela to public health, the Union govern-

NIA team pays visit to family of Mansukh

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, APRIL 19

A team of the NIA on Monday visited the Thane-based residence of businessman Mansukh Hiran, who was allegedly murdered days after an explosives-laden SUV was found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence in Mumbai. They met Hiran's family members in connection with the investigation into his death.

The NIA is conducting a probe into the case of the SUV laden with explosives found near Ambani's house and the alleged murder of Hiran.

This is the second time that senior NIA officials have visited Hiran's residence at Vikas Palms society in Thane city. The team reached his house at around 2.15 pm.

According to an NIA officer, a team of investigators went to Hiran's house on March 11 and spoke to his wife and sons.

An explosives-laden Scorpio car was found near Mr Ambani's residence in south Mumbai on February 25.

Hiran, who was in possession of the vehicle, had complained to police that his vehicle was stolen before it was found laden with explosives, however he was found dead in a creek in Thane on March 5.

His wife in her complaint had raised suspicion over suspended police officer Sachin Waze's role in Hiran's death.

ment on Monday went into a huddle to find ways to wriggle out of this politically volatile situation.

Miffed with the handling of the situation on ground, Allahabad high court stepped in and ordered lockdown in five prominent cities of Uttar Pradesh — Lucknow, Prayagraj, Varanasi, Kanpur and Gorakhpur — till April 26 to contain the virus spread. "If popular government has its own political compulsions in not checking public movements during a pandemic, we cannot remain mere passive spectators," it said.

"In any civilised society if the public health system is unable to meet the challenges and people die for want of proper medication, it means there has been no proper development. Health and education go side-by-side. Those in the helm of affairs of governance are to be blamed for the present chaotic health problems and more so when there is democracy which means a government of the people, by the people and for the people," the Allahabad HC observed while adding: "If people die of pandemic in a large number due to paucity of sufficient medical aid it would be the governments to blame which failed to counter the pandemic even after one long year of experience and learning."

THE ASIAN AGE

20 APRIL 2021

China giving India the runaround

The Chinese were giving the Indians the runaround in the matter of negotiations for disengagement from friction points in eastern Ladakh until the Indian Army, in an audacious late night action in late August last year that caught the Chinese troops unawares, captured key peaks in the Kailash Range south of the Pangong Lake. From the position of advantage thus gained, the Indian forces commanded a strategically panoramic view of the Chinese deployments stretching far, and could deal with them as they wished. However, a military advantage of such significance was surrendered by New Delhi in February this year in negotiations.

The expectation was that a show of reasonableness in this area would persuade the Chinese to be accommodating in the Depsang Plains to the north, and in Gogra and Hot Springs in the broad Galwan area. Currently, Chinese armour has rapidly raced forward more than 15 kilometres inside the Indian demarcation of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and can threaten our military airfield at Daulat Beg Oldi, which is practically within hailing distance from the Karakoram Pass that links China and Pakistan overland. Depsang has critical value for India and the Chinese are not budging from there.

The upshot of this is quite clear — the Chinese are not going back to status quo ante which existed in March, 2020 any time soon, as demanded by India.

8, but under the settlement Indian patrols are not permitted beyond Finger 4. This was not the case a year ago.

The upshot of this is quite clear — the Chinese are not going back to status quo ante which existed in March, 2020 any time soon, as demanded by India. If this demand is not met, the restoration of bilateral relations to earlier levels cannot be visualised. This was evident in a plaintive statement of the external affairs ministry earlier this month. “In this context it was highlighted also that completion of disengagement in other areas would pave the way for (the) two sides to consider de-escalation of forces and ensure full restoration of peace and tranquility and enable progress in bilateral relations,” the statement read. This was after the eleventh round of military-level talks in which, according to the statement, it was decided to resolve the outstanding issues in an “expeditious manner”.

Instead of staring facts in the face, defence minister Rajnath Singh and General Bipin Rawat, the Chief of Defence Staff, appear to be launched on a propaganda spree to distract public opinion. The minister has more than once echoed the Prime Minister in saying that India has not lost one inch of territory to China in eastern Ladakh. The establishment seeks to garner praise from the public for standing up to the might of the Chinese military. But the world knows better. So do our own security professionals. If there won't be “disengagement” by China in Depsang and Gogra-Hot Springs, there can be no “de-escalation” by India in Ladakh. This has the makings of the 38th parallel, the militarised border between north and South Korea.

Castro, a beacon of strength

To a question during his visit to the United States if he would want a Muammar Gaddafi or Yasser Arafat or a Fidel Castro to be the future president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela replied: “One of the mistakes which some political analysts make is to think that their enemies should be our enemies.” In one stroke, the anti-Apartheid warrior, newly released from prison after 27 years, decimated the white arrogance that believed it has the power to decide the politics of the world, and also marketed a brand of politics that challenged the US hegemony in the northern hemisphere for decades.

That tiny island nation and its iconic leaders, brothers Fidel and Raul, were a beacon of strength to revolutionaries who fought impossible imperialists around the world.

People have their reasons to find fault with Cuba and the Castros, but that tiny island nation and its iconic leaders, brothers Fidel and Raul, were a beacon of strength to revolutionaries who fought impossible imperialists around the world. Mandela was just reflecting that allegiance. So, the stepping down of Raul as the first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba marks an end of an era that began with the Cuban revolution in 1959.

Raul succeeded his elder brother as President of Cuba in 2008 and as party chief in 2011; quit as President in 2018 and handed over the charge to Miguel Diaz-Canel, who is expected to succeed him as the party chief as well. In the last six decades of the Communist rule, Cuba has achieved tremendous progress in two key human development indices: health and education. Cuba's ratio of physicians to 10,000 people is the highest in the world; at 99.9 per cent, the literacy rate of Cuba is one of the highest. But the Cuban dispensation faces the same challenge every Communist country does: the need to change with the times, democratise the systems and institutions and meet the aspirations of their free-minded people. The revolutionaries will have to reinvent themselves if they were to remain a beacon of strength for their comrades outside as well as their own people.

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Subhani



US Afghan exit a pyrrhic victory for Pak generals?

Indranil Banerjee



Conventional wisdom has it that America's decision to end its military presence in Afghanistan signals total victory for Pakistan's artful generals and disaster for the Afghan government and its allies, particularly India. However, this might not necessarily be the actual long-term denouement.

To begin with, the US withdrawal decision was inevitable and sensible. For, there was no favourable end state in sight for the United States. US President Joe Biden did well to announce the formal end to the 20-year-old “Afghan War”. All US combatants are to leave Afghanistan by September 9, 2021, the twentieth anniversary of the attacks on America in 2001.

The generals in Rawalpindi are gloating over what is generally being viewed as America's worst military defeat. The US invaded Afghanistan 20 years ago with the aim of annihilating the terrorist organisation Al Qaeda and driving out its Pakistan-backed ally, the Taliban.

Al Qaeda was pretty much decimated, and the Taliban fled to safe havens inside their mentor's backyard while remnants of the Pakistan Army were allowed an honourable exit. For a while, in the initial years, it had appeared that the US military campaign had done wildly well.

Smug officials and legislators in Washington drew up ambitious plans to install a Western-style democracy in Afghanistan. A former CIA contact, Hamid Karzai, was pulled out from hiding and installed as President in Kabul. Thereafter things started going downhill.

What the powers in Washington had not reckoned with was the tenacity of the generals in Pakistan's military headquarters at Rawalpindi. The generals were cowed down by their “friends” and men-

tors in Washington but would not abandon their dream of making Afghanistan a part of their strategic backyard.

The generals publicly cringed and whined before their American masters but secretly worked against them, reviving the Taliban, arming and training them and fielding even more vicious groups like the notorious Haqqani network to target Americans.

Rawalpindi rightly calculated that Washington could not win a war of attrition spread over decades. The Americans bled in the Afghan badlands, their convoys came under regular attack within Pakistan, assassins trained by Rawalpindi's dirty tricks department regularly eliminated troublesome Afghans, especially the military types, and remorseless Pathans raised in Pakistan's madrasas routinely blew themselves up in the roads and bazaars of Afghan towns and cities, taking down innumerable civilians with them.

Gradually the Taliban and their murderous allies gained the upper hand while the Americans and their Nato allies retreated.

That there could be no satisfactory endgame for the United States had dawned upon American Presidents a long time ago. Former US President Donald Trump vowed to bring back all US troops from Afghanistan but had prevaricated and ultimately thrown up his hands. For all military experts agreed that any US military withdrawal would enable the Taliban backed by the Pakistan Army to quickly bring the present Afghan regime to its knees and undo the sacrifices of thousands of US servicemen.

President Biden though is determined not to go down that route and the September 9 deadline seems to be hard and final. The Stars and Stripes will be lowered over the dusty Afghan landscape for the last time on that day.

Strategic experts in India are worried. And for good reason too. The last time the Taliban had taken over Afghanistan, some 26 years ago, India's historical presence in Afghanistan was forced to abruptly end. Almost overnight, Indian diplomats and others had to flee in specially chartered flights, leaving behind a grand embassy building that was later to be converted to an ammunition dump by the victorious Taliban forces.

This time too there is no guarantee that India's presence and influence in Afghanistan will not end with the anticipated victory of the Taliban. Pakistan's generals, who own and control the Taliban, want more than anything else to forcefully and completely eject all Indian presence from Afghanistan. If the Indians are allowed to remain, it will at best be a token presence.

This is a stated objective and Rawalpindi's generals have even complained about the humanitarian and development work carried out in that country by the Indian government. With Afghanistan out of bounds for Indians, the generals hope they will convert that country into their backyard for military and terrorist activities much of which would be directed against India.

However, such a favourable outcome could well elude the generals this time. For global strategic equations are changing, and the primary focus of the Western powers has moved away from the Middle East which has been their principal obsession since the end of the Second World War.

The importance of oil in global geopolitics and economics compelled the Western powers to evolve a strategy to maintain dominance over the Middle East

and deny its enemies influence or unfettered access to this region. With the diminishing importance of oil and the concomitant rise of an assertive China, the focus of the Western powers has shifted.

Pakistan, which was a lynchpin in Western strategic calculation, has lost its previous importance. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan will free Washington from the last of its dependencies on Islamabad. This will presage profound changes.

Coupled with this is the gradual and inevitable shrinking of Saudi Arabian influence and cash reserves. Riyadh too can no longer afford to write blank cheques for Islamabad as it did in the past.

As a result, Pakistan is bound to face increased economic difficulties as it consumes more and more of its limited resources to keep the fighting going in Afghanistan and on the borders with India. This is one reason why Islamabad today seeks a temporary truce at the Line of Control in Kashmir. Constant fighting is a costly business and Pakistan is gradually but inevitably sliding into bankruptcy.

These developments will very shortly completely push Islamabad into the deep pockets of its “all-weather friend” Beijing, which already views Pakistan as a vassal state. Pakistan's generals might continue to dream of turning Afghanistan into a vassal state but they might not have realised that as a vassal themselves, the real power in Afghanistan will be China. Beijing will decide what kind of regime it wants in Afghanistan and from all indications it is clear they have no desire to witness the free run of the highly radicalised Islamists in that country.

Pakistan internally too is not exactly a picture of serenity or economic health. There is a heavy price to pay for sponsoring egregious violence. Pakistan's generals may raise their glasses to celebrate their victory in Afghanistan, but those glasses might well turn out to be empty.

The writer is an independent commentator on political and security issues

LETTERS

A TOTALLY BAD IDEA

The reported proposal to appoint Sunil Arora as governor of Goa just days after his retirement as India's chief election commissioner is in utter bad taste and absolutely inappropriate. Yet another extremely bad precedent indeed. Is this the BJP's way of rewarding the former CEC for favours done by way of compromising the much-needed independence of the Election Commission? The way in which the government kept Goa without a full-time governor for eight months indicates foul play. Remember how P. Sathasivam became governor of Kerala four months after his retirement as CJI?

Jayprakash Naveen Patna

LEGAL ‘DREAM’

WATCHING THE IPL, the abiding images of Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Ranveer Singh are somewhat irritating. The current India captain lags way behind these two. Suddenly, there seems to be a lot more products and services and a consumer can't wait to splurge. Good for commerce and the economy, but not for developing the standard of the game. One had the impression gambling was banned in the country. So what are Dream11, Howzzat and countless other Dream11 clones doing? Is just a rushed disclosure of financial risk enough to caution viewers? It helps that Dream11 valuations are in excess of one billion dollars.

C.K. Ramani Mumbai

VOTE WISELY

IT WAS quite heartening to see West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee sit in silent protest by herself against the 24-hour campaigning ban imposed on her by the Election Commission. While her comments that prompted the ban may have been out of line, it must also be noted that she has been targeted in the vilest of language. Her resolve to prevent the saffronisation of West Bengal in the face of misogynistic bullying by the ruling party at the Centre is commendable. The next couple of weeks will be crucial for preserving West Bengal's free and inclusive fabric. One can only hope that the state will vote wisely.

Bhagwan Thadani Mumbai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Aakar Patel



How the world sees India is changing... not for the better

What sort of India is the present generation growing up in and what will they live through? I am over 50 and with good health and good luck might see another couple of decades or so but in productivity terms my best years are behind me. The future belongs to those who are today children and young adults. What do they have in store for them? Having looked at the data and the facts of the last seven years in detail for my next book, I can see a little bit into the future and what it has in store.

Economically, the future is slightly different from what it was when I was coming into the job market. India had liberalised its economy in the year that I turned 21 and in the few years after that the market for jobs vastly improved in the cities. Even people with a generic college degree with no specialisation could get a white-collar job in an airconditioned office if they had just basic knowledge of English.

This greatly benefited the middle class which had always had access to quality schools but not that many op-

tions in terms of work (which is why parents kept insisting on specialisation in education and asking children to become doctors and engineers). Now it was possible even for a BA, BSc or BCom woman or man to access an upper class lifestyle. I was one who benefited from this, as did lakhs of others.

The majority of Indians did not benefit from this, of course, because they had access neither to the big cities or to a decent education. But they had hope, and this explains the thousands of private educational institutions that sprang up in India's towns and semi-urban spaces that attempted to replicate what was happening in the cities.

This period is now over. India's urban unemployment is at a historic high and, more important, the participation rate of India's labour force — meaning those who are employed or looking for work — is at a historic low. This means crores of Indians of working age (15 and above) have given up hope of finding a job. This was the case even before the Covid-19 pandemic and the position has been steady for over

three years, meaning that it is not cyclical and will not change on its own. The lack of work will in time result in a lack of hope and this will have consequences. One of them will be an increase in crime and lawlessness.

Long term trends globally are also negative in terms of both trade and employment and so, unlike in the past when some of us benefited, the future does not hold out hope for those who are today young.

Socially also, the India that I grew up in and knew has changed. India has always had a problem of reconciling its theoretical secular status with the reality that communal tensions existed. The 1980s and 1990s give us enough evidence to prove this was the case. This communal impulse was dampened by efforts from the government. However poor these efforts may have been, the government did not actively inflame the impulse as has happened since 2014. This has consequences both internally and, less important, externally. Within India our politics has become dark and election campaigns are run by the dominant political party

actively targeting Indian Muslims. Because this is electorally rewarding as we have seen, we will see more of it. The consequence is that it has damaged Indian society and produced violence in neighbourhoods. To give one clear example, there were zero beef lynchings before 2015. We have introduced a new category of violence.

This will have downstream consequences also, such as economic, which will affect the wider population, but there is no point talking about that today. Externally, our love for hate has brought the world's attention on us. Just to give an example from this week, this is what the European Parliament said on April 14: “Members have expressed concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in India, echoing comments by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and several UN Special Rapporteurs. This includes reports that human rights defenders and journalists in the country lack a safe working environment. The report also voices alarm regarding India's Citizenship Amendment Act, which according to the

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is fundamentally discriminatory in nature against Muslims and dangerously divisive.”

This text was approved by 61 votes in favour and six votes against. India's attempts to stop it or soften the criticism failed. The Indian government will brush it off as it has several other reports this year, but again, this comes with consequences. You cannot expect to be given a position on the UN Security Council, as India does, when the world sees what you are doing with distaste.

India was viewed from the outside as a place which was chaotic and noisy but likeable. This was so when I first went abroad at the age of 16. This has now changed in the view of those who study and observe India. It will change soon for the rest of the world also. The optimism has gone. It is disappointing as an Indian to record this, but one cannot look away from what one has found.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

IN BRIEF

NZ distances from 'Five Eyes'

Wellington, April 19: New Zealand said Monday it would not let the 'Five Eyes' intelligence alliance dictate its dealings with its largest trading partner China, in the latest distancing from the US-led group's approach to tensions with Beijing.

Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta told the New Zealand China Council that the Five Eyes — the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand — should not stray from its scope of intelligence-sharing between member nations.

"We are uncomfortable with expanding the remit of the Five Eyes relationship," she said.

Baerbock may succeed Merkel

Berlin, April 19: Germany's Green party on Monday named its co-chair Annalena Baerbock as their candidate to succeed Angela Merkel, throwing down the gauntlet to the chancellor's conservatives who were locked in infighting for her crown. "Both of us want the job, but in the end, only one can do it. So today is the moment to say that the Greens' first chancellor candidate will be Annalena Baerbock," said the party's joint co-chairman Robert Habeck. Yet with the party polling in second place behind Merkel's divided conservatives, the Greens now have a genuine chance of becoming the biggest party.

PIO brothers buy UK food chain

London, April 19: Indian-origin billionaire brothers Mohsin and Zuber Issa have acquired a popular British fast food chain, Leon, as part of what they described as their goal to grow their foodservice operations in Britain.

The Issa brothers, whose parents moved to the UK from Gujarat in the 1970s, own the Euro Garages chain of petrol stations as part of their EG Group business. Last year, they acquired leading UK supermarket chain Asda from US owners Walmart as part of the strategy to expand their non-fuel business. The acquisition is said to be worth an estimated £100 million.

Dulux dog breed faces extinction

London, April 19: The Old English Sheepdog, one of Britain's most recognisable dog breeds, has been listed for the first time as vulnerable to extinction after a drop in popularity. The Kennel Club said Monday.

The move by the club, Britain's biggest organisation devoted to dog health, welfare and training, follows declining numbers since the breed's heyday in the late 1970s.

The Kennel Club recorded just 227 puppy registrations in 2020 for the dog — instantly recognisable for its shaggy coat and long used in adverts for paint manufacturer Dulux.

It is the lowest number in 60 years, it said, marking a "steep decline" in the breed's popularity, the club said.

The dog has since 2009 been on the club's "At Watch" list, which monitors breeds.

FLOYD SOUGHT HELP WITH 'VERY LAST BREATH'

Minneapolis, April 19: George Floyd pleaded for help with his "very last breath" but was not shown any compassion by Derek Chauvin, prosecutor Steve Schleicher said Monday in closing arguments at the murder trial of the former police officer.

"George Floyd begged until he could speak no more," Schleicher told the jury in a Minneapolis courtroom. "All that was required was a little compassion and none was shown on that day." "He asked for help with his very last breath but the officer did not help," Schleicher said.

"He didn't follow training, he did not follow the department's use of force rules, he did not perform CPR," he said.

"George Floyd was not a threat to anyone, he was not trying to hurt anyone," Schleicher said.

Chauvin, who is white, was seen on video kneeling on the neck of Floyd as the 46-year-old Black man lay facedown handcuffed on the ground for more than nine minutes.

Chauvin, 45, is charged with murder and manslaughter for Floyd's May 25, 2020 death, which sparked protests across the United States and around the world against racial injustice and police brutality.

Oz-NZ travel bubble opens, high emotion as kin reunite

Passengers can fly across Tasman Sea without undergoing quarantine

Sydney, April 19: Emotions ran high Monday as excited passengers set off on the first flights to take advantage of a quarantine-free travel bubble between Australia and New Zealand, allowing families split by the pandemic to finally reunite.

"(I'll) yell, scream cry, hug, kiss, (feel) happy — all of these emotions at once," Denise O'Donoghue, 63, told AFP at Sydney airport as she prepared to board her flight.

The arrangement means that for the first time in almost 400 days passengers can fly across the Tasman Sea without undergoing mandatory Covid-19 quarantine when they arrive.

"It's a very big day and exciting for families and friends," said New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who hailed the success of both countries in containing the virus as a key factor in allowing the travel corridor.

Australia was New Zealand's largest source of international tourists before the pandemic, accounting for about 1.5 million arrivals or 40 percent of total visitors in 2019.

The bubble's opening received saturation coverage from media in both countries, with live television reporting from airports providing regular updates on the progress of flights.

On a grass embankment at the foot of Wellington Airport's runway, the words "WELCOME WHANAU" (family) were spelled out in giant letters.

Lorraine Wratt, a New Zealander stranded by the pandemic while visiting family in Australia, told AFP it was "wonderful" to be able to travel again.

"We're very excited to be heading back home but we're gonna miss our family (in Australia) big time," she said.

"We came to Australia on December 11 to spend Christmas with our children...



A woman arriving from New Zealand, right, is hugged by her stepmother at Sydney Airport in Sydney, Australia, on Monday as the much-anticipated travel bubble between Australia and New Zealand opens.

— AP

Canada to send support to virus-hit province

Ottawa, April 19: Canada is expected to channel funds into childcare, wage subsidies and other pandemic recovery measures as the government presents its new budget Monday ahead of possible snap elections.

The 2021 budget is the first full fiscal plan from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's administration

since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and is expected to outline Canada's recovery as virus infections surge.

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland has promised Ottawa "will continue to do whatever it takes" to fight the spread of the coronavirus and support the economy as it emerges from a recession.

"We have a plan for jobs and robust growth," she told parliament last month. Canada entered the pandemic in a strong fiscal position relative to other G7 nations after decades of belt-tightening, she said, allowing it to dole out hundreds of billions of dollars in Covid-19 emergency aid.

— AFP

istmas with our children... planning to go back in February, it's been a bit of a nightmare." Australia is

home to hundreds of thousands of expatriate New Zealanders and before coronavirus many regularly

shuttled back and forth across the Tasman on three-hour flights.

— AFP

INFECTED BODY WASHES ASHORE, ALARMS VANUATU

Port Vila, April 19: Vanuatu slapped travel restrictions Monday after tests confirmed a body that washed ashore on the largely coronavirus-free Pacific nation was infected with Covid-19.

Government sources said the deceased was a Filipino sailor whose vessel had left Port Vila a day before his body was found washed up near a village.

The man's crewmates and police officers who retrieved the body had all tested negative for the virus, said the sources.

— AFP

UK's 'no systematic racism' report slammed by UN

London, April 19: A body of experts that advises the United Nations on human rights concerns has slammed a widely criticised British government-backed report that concluded there was no systemic racism in the country.

The UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent said Monday that it found it "stunning" that the report "repackages racist tropes and stereotypes into fact" and urged the British government to reject its findings.

"The report cites dubious evidence to make claims that rationalise white supremacy by using the familiar arguments that have always justified racial hierarchy," the Geneva-based working group said.

"This attempt to normalise white supremacy despite considerable research and evidence of institutional racism is an unfortunate sidestepping of the opportunity to acknowledge the atrocities of the past and the contributions of all in order to move forward," it added.

The Commission on

Race and Ethnic Disparities, which was set up by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson after last year's Black Lives Matter protests, published its report into racism last month. Its conclusions that Britain is not "institutionally racist" or "rigged" against minorities have been widely vilified, with some critics even arguing that the report downplayed the country's historic role in slavery.

Citing strides to close gaps between ethnic groups in educational and economic achievement, the report said race was becoming "less important" as a factor in creating disparities that are also fuelled by class and family backgrounds.

Many academics, law-makers unions and anti-racism activists were skeptical of the findings in the 258-page report, with some claiming the commission ignored barriers to equality, while others said it downplayed the ongoing legacy of Britain's colonial past as

well as its role in slavery. Johnson's spokesman, Max Blain, said the UN working group's statement "misrepresents the findings" of the UK racism report.

"This report in no way condones racist behaviour, and in fact it highlights that racism and inequality are still problems for our country," he said. The commission, which was made up of 11 members from a broad cross section of ethnic backgrounds, has also previously defended itself against the charges, arguing that some of the criticism has "tipped into misrepresentation" and that it never argued that racism does not exist in society or in institutions.

The UN working group also poured scorn on what it described as the report's "mythical representation of enslavement," saying it was "an attempt to sanitize the history of the trade in enslaved Africans."

This, it went on, is "a reprehensible, although not unfamiliar tactic, employed by many whose wealth came directly from the enslavement of others, ever since slavery was outlawed."

One of the main clarion calls in last year's Black Lives Matter protests across the UK was for the government and institutions to face up to the legacy of the British Empire and the country's extensive profits from the slave trade.

The toppling of a statue of 17th-century slave trader Edward Colston in the city of Bristol in June prompted a pointed debate about how to deal with Britain's past. Many felt such statues extol racism and are an affront to PoC Britons. Others, including the PM, argued that removing them was erasing a piece of history.

— AP

Banned party releases 11 Pak police hostages

Lahore, April 19: The banned radical Islamist party Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan on Monday released 11 police hostages after the first round of talks with the Imran Khan government, which buckled under the pressure of the terror outfit over its demand to expel the French ambassador over a blasphemous caricature published in France last year.

After declaring TLP a proscribed outfit under terrorism laws and freezing its leadership's bank accounts last week, the Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government had announced that there would be no talks with the terror outfit as the state would not allow it to challenge its writ. However, after Sunday's clash between the law enforcement agencies and the TLP workers in Lahore in which 11 policemen and Rangers were taken hostage by the radicals, the government held talks with the outfit leadership on Monday.

Pakistan Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed in a video message said: Talks have started with the TLP. The TLP has released 11 policemen who were taken hostage by it and kept at its headquarters in Lahore. The first round of talks with the TLP went well and the second will take place in the evening. The minister hoped that

the rest of the matters would be resolved with the TLP in the second round of talks.

Meanwhile, business centres, markets and public transport in Lahore, Karachi and some other parts of the country remained closed on Monday on the call of senior cleric Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman to condemn the "brutal" police action at the TLP headquarters in Lahore on Sunday that left three Islamists dead and dozens injured.

The TLP has announced a protest march to Islamabad on Tuesday if the government does not expel the French envoy.

In Monday's talks with the government, the TLP leaders presented four demands — expel the French ambassador; release its party chief Saad Rizvi; revoke the ban on TLP; and release all its activists (over 3,000) and withdraw FIRs against them. The party warned that if their demands are not met, they will go ahead with their march to Islamabad. "On the assurance that Prime Minister Khan will review TLP demands and there will be no further police action against those camping in Lahore, the Islamists freed the hostages," a senior police officer told PTI.

Thousands of Islamists are camping on the Multan Road outside the TLP headquarters. — PTI

Release journo, Myanmar told

Tokyo, April 19: Japan's government said Monday it is asking Myanmar to release a Japanese journalist who was arrested by security forces in its largest city of Yangon the previous day.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato told reporters that his government is asking Myanmar authorities to explain the arrest and release him as soon as possible.

He did not identify the detainee, but Japanese media said he is Yuki Kitazumi, a former Nikkei business newspaper reporter currently based in Yangon as a freelance journalist. "We will continue asking the Myanmar side for his early release, while doing our utmost for the protection of Japanese citizens in that country," Kato said.

Japan's Foreign Ministry later said the journalist was arrested at his home on Sunday night and is being detained at Yangon's Insein Prison, where political prisoners are frequently held. It said Japanese Embassy officials have not been given access to him.

Kyodo News agency reported that he was arrested on suspicion of spreading "fake" news.

Kitazumi has posted reports and views about developments in Myanmar on Facebook. Hours before his arrest, he posted a video showing Myanmar citizens gathering at a Tokyo temple to pay tribute to people killed in the Myanmar military junta's crackdown on protests against its Feb. 1 seizure of power from an elected government.

Kitazumi was detained

EU SANCTIONS 10 MYANMAR JUNTA OFFICIALS

Brussels, April 19: The EU on Monday imposed sanctions on 10 Myanmar junta officials and two conglomerates linked to the military over the coup and bloody crackdown on protesters, European officials said.

The military has ramped up its attempts to crush dissent following mass demonstrations against its ousting of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, with at least 737 civilians killed and the press increasingly under attack.

International pressure has been steadily building on the junta, with western powers seeking to target their key money-makers. — AFP

briefly by police in late February while covering pro-democracy protests in Myanmar.

Japan has stepped up its criticism of the military government's deadly crackdown on opposition but has taken a milder approach than the United States and some other countries that imposed sanctions against members of the junta.

On Saturday, the junta released more than 23,000 prisoners to mark the traditional new year's holiday. At least three had been political prisoners, but it wasn't immediately clear if any activists detained during the crackdown were freed. — AFP

HISTORY | CREATED

Nasa's experimental helicopter become first object to take flight outside Earth

Tech takes a massive stride with a 19-inch chopper

Cape Canaveral, Florida, April 19: Nasa's experimental helicopter Ingenuity rose into the thin air above the red surface of Mars on Monday, achieving the first powered flight by an aircraft on another planet.

The triumph was hailed as a Wright Brothers moment. The mini 1.8-kilogram copter even carried a bit of wing fabric from the Wright Flyer that made similar history at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, in 1903.

"Altimeter data confirms that Ingenuity has

performed its first flight, the first flight of a powered aircraft on another planet," said the helicopter's chief pilot back on Earth, Harvard Grip, his voice breaking as his teammates erupted in applause. It was a brief hop — just 39 seconds — but accomplished all the major milestones.

Project manager MiMi Aung was jubilant as she ripped up the papers holding the plan in case the flight had failed.

"We've been talking so long about our Wright Brothers moment, and

here it is," she said.

Flight controllers at Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California declared a success after receiving the data and images via the Perseverance rover. Ingenuity hitched a ride to Mars on Perseverance, clinging to the rover's belly upon their arrival in an ancient river delta in February.

The \$85 million helicopter demo was considered a high risk, yet high reward. "Each world gets only one first flight," Aung observed earlier this month.

Scientists cheered the news from around the world and even from space.

"A whole new way to explore the alien terrain in our solar system is now at our disposal," Nottingham Trent University astronomer Daniel Brown said from England.

This first test flight — with more to come by Ingenuity — holds great promise, Brown noted. Future helicopters could serve as otherworldly scouts for rovers, and eventually astronauts, in difficult, dangerous locales.

Ground controllers had to wait more than three excruciating hours before learning whether the pre-programmed flight had succeeded more than 170 million miles (287 million kilometres) away.

When the news finally came, the operations centre filled with applause, cheers and laughter. More followed when the first black and white photo from Ingenuity appeared, showing the helicopter's shadow as it hovered above the surface of Mars. "The shadow of greatness, #MarsHelicopter first

flight on another world complete!" Nasa astronaut Victor Glover tweeted from the International Space Station.

Next came a stunning colour video of the copter's clean landing, taken by Perseverance, "the best host little Ingenuity could ever hope for," Aung said in thanking everyone.

The helicopter hovered for 30 seconds at its planned altitude of 10 feet (3 meters), and spent 39 seconds airborne, more than three times longer than the first successful flight of the Wright Flyer, which

lasted a mere 12 seconds on December 17, 1903.

To accomplish all this, the helicopter's twin, counter-rotating rotor blades needed to spin at 2,500 revolutions per minute — five times faster than on Earth. With an atmosphere just 1 per cent the thickness of Earth's, engineers had to build a helicopter light enough — with blades spinning fast enough — to generate this otherworldly lift. More than six years in the making, Ingenuity is just 19 inches (49 centimetres) tall, a spindly four-legged chopper. — AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,746.21	0.17
Nifty 50	14,873.80	0.37
S&P 500*	4,161.45	-0.57
Dollar (₹)	74.59	-0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.51	0.50
Euro (₹)	88.52	0.07
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,975▲182	0.39
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.73	-0.06
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.081	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.605	0.032

* As of 8:30 PM IST

ACC net jumps 74% to ₹563 cr in March quarter

Cement maker ACC Ltd reported a 74.17 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 562.59 crore for the first quarter ended March 2021, helped by an increase in sales and cost efficiency. The company, which follows the January-December financial year, had posted a profit of Rs 323.02 crore in the year-ago period. Total revenue from operations was at Rs 4,291.97 crore, up 22.57 per cent from Rs 3,501.71 crore earlier.

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Market turns volatile; FPIs net sellers Sentiments sour as C19 cases rise

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 19

It was panic selling over rising Covid infections in the country as the market opened on Monday. In just half an hour, the Sensex was down 1469.32 points, or 3 per cent, as the benchmark index touched the day's low of 47,362.71. The Nifty-50 touched a low of 14,191.40, down 426 points.

But a partial recovery later helped the Sensex to close with a loss of 882.61 points, or 1.81 per cent, at 47,949.42 while Nifty-50 closed at 14,359.45, down 1.77 per cent.

Vaccine and oxygen shortages in several states were making the fight against the second Covid wave difficult for the Centre and states. "It seems like our markets have decoupled from global counterparts due to rising Covid cases in India. Going forward, the Covid-19 situation and the pace of vaccination would be a key monitorable for the markets," said Ajit Mishra, VP-research, Religare Broking. "Market participants reacted negatively to increasing restriction announcements from state governments while ignoring the positive global cues," Mishra said.

Foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth Rs 1,633.70 crore but domestic institutional investors stepped in with Rs 2,355.56 crore net buying.

₹ SHEDS 53 PAISE ON LOCKDOWN FEARS

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 19

Fear of harsher restrictions and more economic pain amid a record surge in Covid-19 cases spooked the rupee that fell 53 paise to close at 74.88 on Monday. The rupee is under pressure despite a weak US dollar globally and has weakened by 3 per cent this month.

India reported its tenth record daily increase in Covid cases in 11 days, with the capital city of New Delhi announcing a

complete curfew till next Monday. Maharashtra had imposed stringent curbs, effective April 15.

On Friday, the rupee had settled at 74.35 a dollar. The Dollar Index, which gauges the dollar's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.49 per cent to 91.11. Anindya Banerjee, deputy vice-president-currency derivatives at Kotak Securities, said, "RBI...may intervene aggressively to curb volatility. Over the near term, we expect a range of 74.00 and 75.50."

MACROTECH TANKS ON MKT DEBUT

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 19

Mumbai-based Macrotech Developers, earlier Lodha Developers, made a tepid stock market debut at 10.28 per cent discount to the public issue price, of Rs 486 a share, at Rs 436 on the NSE. As the market faced huge selling pressure, Macrotech further dipped to a low of Rs 422.60. However, the shares gained upward momentum as the mar-

ket stabilised and recovered some losses, which helped Macrotech to close at Rs 457.95 on the NSE and at Rs 463.15 on the BSE, lower by 5.77 per cent and 4.70 per cent, respectively. The firm had raised Rs 2,500 crore from the IPO.

Macrotech Developers is now the third largest listed realty firm in terms of m-cap at Rs 20,717.55 crore, after DLF (Rs 58,615.38 crore) and Godrej Properties (Rs 36,167.34 crore.)

The fall was bigger in the broader market with Nifty Mid-cap 50 and Nifty Mid-cap 100 indices down by 2.

60 per cent and 2.12 per cent respectively and the BSE Mid-cap down by 1.93 per cent.

Oxford study to reinfect recovered C19 patients

TODD GILLESPIE APRIL 19

People who have fought off the Covid-19 virus will be deliberately reinfecting in a first-of-its-kind trial at the University of Oxford that may shed light on how to develop more effective vaccines against the pathogen.

Researchers are looking for 64 healthy, previously Covid-infected volunteers from 18 to 30 years old to be studied under controlled, quarantined conditions for at least 17 days, the UK university said on Monday. Participants will be infected with the original strain from Wuhan and followed for a year.

Initial data from the Oxford study should be available within several months, helping vaccine developers look at levels and types of immunity needed to prevent reinfection, and how long protection persists. Challenge trials, involving deliberate, supervised infections, are seen as helpful for answering questions like these, because they allow scientists to scrutinise the details of how the body confronts the virus and vice versa.

While vaccines and previous infections provide some immune protection against the coronavirus, concerns and doubts remain about how long it lasts.

—Bloomberg

SC stays HC proceedings in Future-Amazon case

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 19

The Supreme Court has stayed the proceedings in the Amazon-Future Group case before the single and division benches of the Delhi High Court.

"...Further proceedings before the single judge as well as the Division bench of the High Court shall remain stayed," the bench headed by Rohinton Fali Nariman said.

The court was hearing the appeal by Amazon that challenged the division bench's decision in the case involving the Future group. On March 22, the division bench of Chief



Justice D. N. Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh had stayed a March 18 order of single judge Justice J. R. Midha ordering attachment of the assets of Future Coupons, Future Retail, Kishore Biyani and 10 others promoters.

The court has permitted filing of counter affidavit within two weeks from Monday. A rejoinder affidavit can be filed within

one week thereafter. The matter will come up for final disposal on May 4 along with other matters, the top court said.

Amazon has been seeking enforcement of an order of the emergency arbitrator (EA) at the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) restraining Future Retail from taking any steps to transfer its retail assets to Reliance Group under a proposed Rs 25,000-crore deal.

Amazon's contention is that it had invested Rs 1,431 crore in Future Coupons on the clear understanding that Future Retail would be the sole vehicle for its retail business.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

GLENMARK LIFE PLANS IPO

Mumbai, April 19: Glenmark Life Sciences, a wholly owned subsidiary of Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, has filed draft red herring prospectus with the Sebi for an initial public offering. The public offer comprises a fresh issue of shares worth up to Rs 1,160 crore and an offer for sale of over 73.05 lakh equity shares each of Rs 2 face value.

Glenmark Life Sciences is a developer and manufacturer of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs).The company works with 16 of the 20 largest generic companies globally. With 120 APIs in its portfolio, the firm supplies APIs to more than 540 pharma companies worldwide.

— FC Bureau

WHATSAPP IN PINK IS A VIRUS

New Delhi, April 19: Cyber experts have warned users from falling into the prey of a virus link, which claims to turn Whatsapp in pink colour and comes

with new features. Clicking on the link claiming to be an official update from Whatsapp will hack users phone and they may lose access to their Whatsapp. "Beware of WhatsApp Pink!! A Virus is being spread in whatsapp groups with an APK download link. Don't click any link with the name of #WhatsappPink. Complete access to your phone will be lost," cyber security expert Rajshankar Rajaharia posted on social media platforms. Several Whatsapp users were seen sharing the malicious link. — PTI

M&M SELLS 1,000 E-CARGO AUTO



Pune, April 19: Mahindra & Mahindra on Monday said its Mahindra Treo Zor electric three-wheeler (cargo) has crossed the sales milestone of 1,000 units within six

months of its launch, indicating growing demand for electric three-wheelers in Asia's third largest economy. With this milestone, the Treo Zor has become India's top selling electric cargo and has acquired a market share of 59 per cent in its category. — Michel Gonsalves

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Covid cases surge delays India Open

New Delhi: The India Open Super 500 tournament, one of the last three qualifying events for the Tokyo Olympics, was on Monday postponed due to raging Covid-19 pandemic in the country. The \$400,000 India Open was scheduled to be held behind closed doors in the national capital from May 11 to 16.

"Considering the current challenges, BAI is left with no option but to announce the postponement of the tournament for the time being," Badminton Association of India (BAI) general secretary Ajay Singhania said. Delhi has emerged as the worst hit city with 25,462 cases reported on Sunday. — PTI

Vaccinate athletes at earliest: NRAI

New Delhi: The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) has requested the government to vaccinate its Olympic-bound shooters at the earliest, taking into account the unprecedented spike in Covid-19 cases. As per the data updated by the union health ministry, India reported 2,73,810 new positive cases in the last 24 hours, the highest single-day surge taking the country's caseload past the 1.5 crore mark. As many as 1,619 people succumbed to the disease in the last 24 hours. Considering the grim situation, the NRAI is keen that its athletes are vaccinated soon. — PTI

Foxes pip Saints to reach FA Cup final

London: The goal scored by Kelechi Iheanacho didn't just send Leicester into a first FA Cup final since 1969. It was the first to be cheered by spectators at Wembley in more than a year. Not since March 2020 had fans been allowed into English football's national stadium through three national lockdowns. Now as coronavirus restrictions are eased, Wembley was allowed a 4,000-strong, socially distanced crowd on Sunday to witness Leicester's 1-0 victory over Southampton to test the return of spectators. While those permitted were only local residents over the age of 18 who tested negative for Covid-19. — AP

‘Super clubs’ in different league European heavyweights face criticism over ‘cynical’ Super League

Paris, April 19: Twelve of football's most powerful clubs faced accusations of greed and cynicism on Monday as they announced a breakaway European Super League that could have far-reaching implications for the game.

Six Premier League teams — Liverpool, Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea, Manchester City and Tottenham — are involved, alongside Real Madrid, Barcelona, Atletico Madrid, Juventus, Inter Milan and AC Milan.

The clubs, most of them saddled with debt and large wage bills, and hit hard by the pandemic, stand to benefit financial-

ly, with predictions that they will share billions of euros.

But the initial reaction from football authorities, fans and pundits was furious, with threats to ban participating clubs from domestic, European and world competitions.

"Our members and football supporters across the world have experienced the ultimate betrayal," the Chelsea Supporters' Trust said.

"This is unforgivable. Enough is enough," it added.

The ESL said the founding clubs had agreed to create a "new midweek competition" to start "as soon as practicable" but that they would continue

● The clubs, most of them saddled with debt and large wage bills, and hit hard by the pandemic, stand to benefit financially, with predictions that they will share billions of euros.

to play in their domestic leagues.

Three more clubs would be announced, the statement said, with the 15 founder members guaranteed to play each year. Another five places will be available "based on achievements in the prior season".

The founding clubs will share 3.5 billion euros for infrastructure investment and to offset pandemic costs, and are expected to receive a further 10 billion euros in "solidarity payments" over the life of the initial commitment — much more than is available in the Champions League.

"I think there are two things in play here: one is greed and the other is desperation," former England Football Association and Manchester City chairman David Bernstein told the BBC.

UEFA THREAT

Under the plan, two groups of 10 will play each other home and away, with the

top three qualifying for the quarter-finals. The fourth and fifth-based teams would play off for the two remaining spots.

Then the competition would adopt the same two-leg knockout format used in the Champions League before a single-leg final in May. A women's version is also planned.

But European governing body UEFA and the English, Spanish and Italian football authorities warned the clubs face being barred from their national competitions and the Champions League.

"We... Will remain united in our efforts to stop this cynical project," read a joint statement.

— AFP

Lokuhettige gets eight-year ban

Dubai, April 19: Former Sri Lanka cricketer Dilhara Lokuhettige was on Monday banned from all cricket for eight years after being found guilty of breaching the ICC Anti-Corruption Code.

The ban for Lokuhettige, a right-arm fast-medium bowler and lower-order batsman, is backdated to April 3, 2019 when he was provisionally suspended.

"Having represented Sri Lanka in international cricket, Dilhara had attended a number of anti-corruption education sessions and would have known his actions were a breach of the Code," Alex Marshall, ICC General Manager Integrity Unit, said in a release.

"The severity of the sanction reflects the seriousness of his offences and his continued refusal to cooperate and should serve as a deterrent for anyone considering getting involved in corruption of any kind."

The 40-year-old, who had retired in September 2016 after playing nine ODIs and two T20 Internationals for his country, was found guilty of three offences under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code in January this year, following a hearing by an

● Former Sri Lanka cricketer was found guilty of three offences under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code in January this year, following a hearing by an independent tribunal.

independent tribunal. He was charged under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code in November 2019 for his involvement in match-fixing during a T20 tournament in UAE in 2017, where a Sri Lankan team participated.

The Tribunal found Lokuhettige guilty of:

Article 2.1.1 for being party to an agreement or effort to fix or contrive or otherwise influence improperly the result, progress, conduct or other aspect(s) of a match.

Article 2.1.4 — Directly or indirectly soliciting, inducing, enticing, instructing, persuading, encouraging or intentionally facilitating any Participant to breach Code Article 2.1.

Article 2.4.4 — Failing to disclose to the ACU full details of any approaches or invitations received to engage in corrupt conduct under the Code. — PTI

INDIA BOXERS ASSURED OF FOUR MEDALS AT WORLDS

New Delhi, April 19: Asian champion Vinka and Alfiya Pathan were among the four Indian boxers who progressed to the semifinals of the youth world championships for men and women in Kielce, Poland. Gitika and Poonam are the other two boxers to enter the last-four stage and have secured at least a bronze medal for the country. All the four boxers put up scintillating performances in their respective quarterfinals bouts.

Panipat boxer Vinka blanked her Colombian opponent Camilo Camela 5-0 in the 60kg category, while the 2019 Asian junior champion Alfiya (+81) also won by the same margin against Hungarian boxer Reka Hoffmann. Playing in the 57kg category, Poonam notched up an easy 5-0 win against Nazerke Serik of Kazakhstan to progress to the semifinals. Gitika (48kg) produced another strong show as she dominated her opponent, Romania's Elisabeth Ostan, from the word go with precise punches and swift movement that saw the referee stopping the contest after the first round and declaring the Haryana boxer as the winner. — PTI



