

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI FRIDAY 9 APRIL 2021



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IPL 2021: Champions Mumbai take on Kohli's men in opener today



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Prez Biden seems ready to extend US troop presence in Afghanistan

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Nushrat tests Covid -ve, had gone into self-isolation after co-star Akshay tested +ve



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PSG's forward Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring a goal during the UEFA Champions League match with FC Bayern Munich in Munich on Thursday. — AFP

Reigning Mrs World held for fracas at Mrs Sri Lanka event

Colombo: The reigning Mrs World, Caroline Jurie, and one of her associates were arrested on Thursday for allegedly causing damage to property and injuring a contestant at a beauty contest held last week. Jurie had announced that winner Pushpika de Silva is a divorcee and only married women are qualified to become Mrs Sri Lanka. She then forcibly took off the winner's crown from de Silva and placed it on the head of the first runner up, and by that act causing injuries to the winner. — PTI
Full report on Page 6

Younger sister held over Dwarka mishap

New Delhi: A 28-year-old woman, Nupur Choudhary, was arrested on Thursday for being behind the wheels of a car that allegedly mowed down an elderly couple in Dwarka four days ago, the police said. The police had earlier arrested her elder sister Deepakshi after the incident. — PTI

37 vaccinated docs at Ganga Ram test +ve

New Delhi: As many as 37 vaccinated doctors at the Sir Ganga Ram Hospital have tested Covid positive, hospital sources said on Thursday. Majority of these doctors have mild symptoms while a few have been hospitalised as they complained of uneasiness.

COUNTERPOINT



Reply to all these EC notices? No hurry! Let them issue some more!

WEATHER

Max: 37°C
Min: 20°C
RH: 14%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Bahula
Trayodasi till 4.28 am
Star: Poorvabhadra full day
Variyam: 11.50 am to 1.33 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.36 am to 9.25 am; 12.42 pm to 1.31 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to noon
SUNSET TODAY 6.43 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.02 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 4.45 AM
MOONSET TODAY 4.21 PM

Maoists release commando in 'jan adalat' after 5-day custody

Was handed over to emissary team constituted by C'garh govt to negotiate release

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, APRIL 8

The CRPF's CoBRA commando Rakeshwar Singh Manhas walked free on Thursday evening after spending five days in Maoists' custody.

The jawan of 210 CoBRA battalion who was abducted by Maoists after the April 3 Naxal ambush on security forces in Terram on Sukma-Bijapur border in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar region was handed over to a four-member emissary team, constituted by the Chhattisgarh government to negotiate his release, at an undisclosed location.

The jawan, with his hands tied, was produced before a "jan adalat" or kangaroo court of Maoists in the presence of scores of armed rebels, local vil-



Abducted CoBRA commando Rakeshwar Singh Manhas being released in a Maoists' kangaroo court on Thursday.

lagers and mediapersons before being set free at 4 pm.

"The jawan has been released by Maoists. He has reached Basaguda camp (of CRPF)," Bijapur

district superintendent of police Kamal Lochan Kashyap said. He was scheduled to be flown to Raipur after his medical checkup, the police said.

"As soon as we learnt that the jawan was held hostage by Maoists, we contacted eminent people in the region, social activists and media persons to secure his release from Maoist custody," Mr Kashyap said.

Earlier in the morning, the four-member interlocutor team headed by Padma Shri Dharam Pal Jain left for an undisclosed location in the forest on Sukma-Bijapur border to negotiate the release of the jawan with the Maoists.

"I was contacted by the government to become an interlocutor to negotiate release of the jawan. I left for the appointed place in the morning along with other members of the team and some media persons to secure release of the jawan. I am happy

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SC collegium led by Bobde holds scheduled meet

New Delhi, April 8: The Supreme Court collegium headed by CJI S.A. Bobde Thursday held its scheduled meeting to discuss possible candidates for appointment of judges in higher judiciary, but it remained inconclusive, sources said. The brief collegium meeting was attended by all the five senior-most judges, including Justice N.V. Ramana who has been appointed as the next CJI by President Ram Nath Kovind, they said. No decision could be taken, they said and rubbished certain news reports of purported differences among some collegium members. — PTI
More on Page 4

SC approves deportation of 150 Rohingya refugees to Myanmar

PARMOD KUMAR with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

The Supreme court on Thursday permitted the deportation of Rohingya refugees detained at Jammu. Passing the order on the PIL moved by Mohammad Salimullah for the protection of Rohingyas, the court refused to order the release of nearly 150 Rohingyas detained in holding centres in Jammu and allowed their deportation to their parent country as per procedure of law.

"It is not possible to grant interim relief. However, it is made clear that the Rohingyas in Jammu on whose behalf the application has been moved shall not be deport-

► **DURING THE** hearing on March 23, lawyer Prashant Bhushan had pleaded that sending the Rohingyas to Myanmar when it is under a military junta will endanger their life

ed unless the procedure prescribed for such deportation is followed," ruled a bench headed by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, also comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian.

During the hearing on March 23, lawyer Prashant Bhushan had pleaded that sending the Rohingyas to Myanmar when it is under a military junta will endanger their life, noting that the principle of non-refoule-

ment forbids expulsion of a refugee if there is a clear and certain danger to life in the original country.

He also referred to the order passed by the International Court of Justice to highlight that Rohingyas faced genocidal threat there.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta appearing for the Centre had opposed the application on behalf of Rohingyas seeking to stall their deportation. He had cited a similar application concerning the Rohingyas in Assam that was dismissed in 2018.

Mr Mehta had submitted that the deportation is done in accordance with the procedure established by law, and hence it

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■ Maha says Centre has promised to rush more doses ■ Noida, other UP areas start lockdowns States spar with Centre on vaccine 'shortage'

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

Amid the raging controversy and war of words over a shortage of Covid-19 vaccines, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday took the second dose of Covaxin. "Got my second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at AIIMS today. Vaccination is among the few ways we have to defeat the virus. If you are eligible for the vaccine, get your shot soon," the PM said in a tweet. However, several states have complained to the Centre that they don't have enough vaccines to inoculate their population and will have to shut some centres soon.

Reports from Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Haryana and Chhattisgarh say they are facing an

Temporary travel ban to NZ from India

Melbourne/Wellington: New Zealand has for the first time imposed a temporary ban on travellers coming from India, including its citizens, from April 11 to 28 due to a surge in Covid-19 cases among visitors to this country, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Thursday. — PTI

acute vaccine shortage. Some states also face a shortage of oxygen and Remdesivir injections. However, Union health minister Harsh Vardhan dismissed these allegations, saying enough vaccines had been given to the states.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday

PM takes 2nd dose of vaccine at AIIMS

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday took his second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at the AIIMS in New Delhi, and asked those eligible for the shot to take it soon to defeat the virus. Mr Modi had taken his first jab on March 1 at the hospital. — PTI

Kerala CM Pinarayi tests +ve for corona

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday tested positive for Covid-19. The chief minister, who had taken the first dose of the Covid vaccine in March, confirmed his infection in a tweet. "I have been confirmed Covid +ve," he tweeted. — PTI

However, several states have complained to the Centre over the shortage of oxygen, Remdesivir and vaccine supply and said the vaccine drive will be severely impacted due to the short supply of jabs. Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik said his state has vaccine supply only till

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Myanmar envoy locked out in 'embassy coup'

London, April 8: Myanmar's ambassador to the United Kingdom, who has criticised the military coup in the country, says he has been locked out of his London office by colleagues.

Kyaw Zwar Minn said he was barred from entering the embassy on Wednesday evening by diplomats loyal to the military regime and had to spend the night in his car.

Last month, the ambassador called for the release of Myanmar's democratic leader, Aung San Suu



Ambassador to the UK Kyaw Zwar Minn stands locked outside the Myanmar embassy in London. — AFP

Kyi, who was detained when the military seized power on February 1.

"They are refusing to let me inside. They said they received instruction from

the capital, so they are not going to let me in," he told the *Daily Telegraph*, calling the move a coup.

British foreign secretary Dominic Raab on Thursday condemned the bullying actions of the Myanmar military regime, and praised the ambassador's courage. But it was unclear what, if anything, the UK could do about the move. The UK continues to call for an end to the coup and the appalling violence, and a swift restoration of democracy, he said. — AP

From Day 1, efforts are being made to destabilise the Maha govt. Few people are making efforts day in and out for it, but the govt is stable. Those involved in destabilising the govt are being exposed.

— Shiv Sena

■ Sena: 'Dirty politics' by BJP to destabilise Uddhav SC rejects plea by Maha govt, Deshmukh to halt CBI probe

PARMOD KUMAR with bureau inputs
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, APRIL 8

In a setback to former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh, the Supreme Court on Thursday refused to interfere with the Bombay high court order allowing the CBI to conduct a preliminary inquiry into the allegations of corruption levelled against Mr Deshmukh by former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh.

Dismissing the appeal filed by both the Maharashtra government and Mr Deshmukh against the high court order, a bench comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hemant Gupta said the nature of the allegations and the persons involved made an independent probe necessary.

"The nature of allega-

The nature of allegations and personas involved needs an inquiry by an independent agency. It is a matter of public confidence. We are not inclined to entertain this.

— SC Bench

tions and personas involved needs an inquiry by an independent agency. It is a matter of public confidence. We are not inclined to entertain this. Dismissed", the court said, dismissing the two appeals.

The court order came as senior lawyer Kapil Sibal and Abhishek "Manu" Singhvi, representing Mr Deshmukh and the Maharashtra government respectively, told the bench the high court passed the order without hearing Mr Deshmukh, against whom the allegations of corruption had been levelled by the for-

mer Mumbai police commissioner.

When Mr Singhvi noted that the high court didn't address the question of maintainability of the petitions before it, Justice Kaul said: "The allegations are extremely serious and it becomes curious and curious. In this scenario, is it not a CBI probe case?"

As Mr Singhvi noted that the Maharashtra government has withdrawn the "general consent" for CBI probes in the state long back, saying the agency can investigate cases in Maharashtra

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'EC can serve 10 notices, I'll continue to oppose dividing voters on religious lines'

Domjur (WB), April 8: Asserting that she would continue to raise her voice against any attempt to divide voters on communal lines, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said that the Election Commission may serve 10 showcase notices on her but she won't change her stance.

The poll panel had on Wednesday issued a notice to Ms Banerjee for violating the model code of conduct, after she allegedly urged the Muslim community to vote en bloc for the TMC. The TMC supremo, during her campaign in

You (EC) can issue 10 showcase notices to me but my reply will be the same. I will always speak against any division in Hindu, Muslim votes. I will always stand against division of voters along religious lines.

— Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal CM

Domjur Assembly seat, also sought to know why no complaint has been registered against BJP

star campaigner and PM Narendra Modi, alleging that he often makes references to Hindu and Muslim votebanks while delivering speeches.

"You (EC) can issue 10 showcase notices to me but my reply will be the same. I will always speak against any division in Hindu, Muslim votes. I will always stand against division of voters along religious lines," the TMC supremo said.

"Why is that no complaint has been filed against Narendra Modi, who every day talks about Hindu and Muslim (votebanks)?" the CM said. — PTI

ED links Didi's kin Abhishek to mining scam

New Delhi, April 8: The ED has alleged West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew and TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee's family benefited from illicit funds obtained from certain illegal coal mining in the state under a "deep system" of political patronage driven by a "well-oiled" machinery.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) made these claims on Wednesday in a remand note presented before a special court seeking enhanced custody of police officer Ashok Kumar Mishra, also the inspector in-charge of Bankura police station. — PTI
More on Page 3

Yogi: Anti-Romeo squads in Bengal if voted to power

Kolkata, April 8: Senior BJP leader Yogi Adityanath Thursday said that anti-Romeo squads will be formed in Bengal if the party is voted to power in the state.

Bengal is not a safe place for women under the present Trinamul Congress government, Mr Adityanath, also Uttar Pradesh CM, said addressing three poll rallies in Hooghly and Howrah districts of West Bengal. — PTI
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IN BRIEF

'CM wrote to govt urging jab for all'

New Delhi: Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain on Thursday said the national capital's Covid-19 vaccine stock will last for the next four to five days. "The vaccination drive is going well in Delhi. We received some vaccines yesterday. We have stock for four to five days. We have demanded more and we will get it," he said. When asked about the ministry of health and family Welfare letter to Punjab, Delhi and Maharashtra, asking them to undertake necessary corrective actions immediately for improving the Covid 19 vaccination drives in their state/UT, Jain said the Centre is doing politics over vaccination. "Centre is doing politics over vaccination. We should fight the Covid pandemic together. The Centre was alleging that there was less vaccination of healthcare workers in Delhi. We can also say that there was less vaccination at Centre's hospitals. This isn't an issue, the issue is that we have to vaccinate more and more people soon," he said. Mr Jain further said that out of the total vaccination done in Delhi, "only 30 per cent to 40 per cent was done in the central government's hospitals".

Traffic cops to accept cash for pending fines

New Delhi: The Delhi traffic police will collect dues for pending challans in cash also as many individuals are not able to pay fines through the online payments system, officials said Thursday. According to a circular issued Thursday, cash counters may be made operational in each circle every Saturday and Sunday between 10 am to 6 pm from April 10. "It has been observed that many individuals with pending challans are not able to pay their fines through the online payment system for various reasons. Special CP (Traffic) has desired that the cash counter may be established in each circle on every Saturday and Sunday from 10 am to 6 pm to collect the fine amount for pending challans," it stated. — PTI

Woman held at IGI for smuggling heroin

New Delhi: A Malawian woman has been arrested by customs officials at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport here for allegedly trying to smuggle in heroin worth ₹28 crore, an official statement said Thursday. The accused was intercepted by the customs officials after her arrival Tuesday from Johannesburg via Doha. "Subsequently on examination of her checked-in baggage and another hand bag kept in the said baggage, four packets of white colour powder/granules totally weighing 4 kgs, suspected to be narcotics, were recovered," it said. — PTI

POLICE OPPOSES BAIL PLEAS IN HC OF JNU STUDENTS

New Delhi: Delhi Police contended before the Delhi High Court on Tuesday that JNU students Natasha Narwal and Devangana Kalita, arrested in connection with the communal riots in north-east Delhi last year, were part of a larger conspiracy to threaten the unity, integrity and harmony of the country. The police made the submissions in response to the appeals filed by Narwal and Kalita challenging a trial court's order dismissing their bail pleas in a Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) case related to the riots. A bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and Anup Jairam Bhambhani listed the matter for Friday for conclusion of arguments on behalf of the police. Special public prosecutor Amit Mahajan, representing Delhi Police, opposed the pleas and claimed that Narwal and Kalita were well aware of the acts being carried out during the riots and that it would lead to consequences which could be disastrous. He said the case against them is not only based on statements of witnesses and these conspiracies cannot be recorded on camera and that it is proved through circumstantial evidences.

Delhi sees this year's biggest Covid jump

City records 7,437 new cases

37 doctors of Ganga Ram test positive

**AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8**

New Delhi, April 8: Delhi recorded 7,437 fresh Covid cases Thursday, the highest single-day surge this year, while 24 more people died due to the coronavirus infection, taking the death toll to 11,157, according to the city's health department.

The positivity rate also mounted to 8.1 per cent from 6.1 per cent the previous day, as the massive spike in cases witnessed over the past few weeks continues. This is also the first time that over 7,000 cases have been reported in a day this year. The daily case count for the past two days was also above 5,000.

The highest single-day spike in Delhi till date — 8,593 cases — was reported on November 11, while on November 19, the city recorded 131 Covid-19 deaths, the highest single-day fatality since the pandemic began. On November 27, the city had recorded 5,482 cases and 6,224 cases on November 24 and 7,486 on November 18, as per official data. A total of 91,770 tests, including 52,696 RT-PCR tests and 39,074 rapid antigen tests, were conducted a day ago, the bulletin said. The number of cumulative cases on Thursday stood at 6,98,005. Over 6.63 lakh patients have recovered from the virus.

As per the latest bulletin, 24 more people died due to the disease, taking the toll to 11,157. The number of active cases rose to 23,181 from 19,455 a day before. The number of people under home isolation increased to 11,367 from 10,048 on Wednesday

As many as 37 vaccinated doctors at the Sir Ganga Ram Hospital have tested Covid positive, hospital sources said on Thursday.

Majority of these doctors have mild symptoms while a few have been hospitalised as they complained of uneasiness. Of the 37 doctors, 32 are in home isolation and five are admitted in the hospital. All the doctors were infected while serving Covid patients at the hospital despite many having already received both doses of the vaccine during first phase of inoculation that was started on January 16 covering health care workers.

while the number of containment zones mounted to 4,226 from 3,708 a day before. In a separate order, the health department said, in view of the increased cases of Covid here, medical superintendents, medical directors, directors of Covid hospitals are directed to depute sufficient manpower, infrastructure in the holding or triage area with enough oxygen facility to avoid unnecessary wait for completing the admission procedure which may lead to increase in chance of spread of infection further. — PTI

Juvenile, 4 others held for killing man over wife's illicit relationship

**AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8**

A juvenile was apprehended while four people, including a woman, were arrested for allegedly killing her 35-year-old husband for objecting to her "illicit relationship" with another man, police said on Thursday.

The accused woman along with her male friend named Mukesh Walia, a native of Haryana's Bhiwani, planned around six months ago to kill her husband Wasi Ahmad to get rid of him and claim an insurance amount so that the duo could live together along with her three children

The victim worked with Mukesh, Sachin and Vikas as masseur in Mahipalpur area, they said.

Detailing how they executed their alleged plan, police said that on April 3

THE ACCUSED along with her male friend named Mukesh Walia, a native of Haryana's Bhiwani, planned around six months ago to kill her husband Wasi Ahmad to get rid of him and claim an insurance amount so that the duo could live together along with her three children

area to kill Ahmad. Their first two attempts on Ahmad's life failed, but they allegedly managed to kill him on the night of April 3 in Samaypur Badli area, police said.

The victim worked with Mukesh, Sachin and Vikas as masseur in Mahipalpur area, they said.

Detailing how they executed their alleged plan, police said that on April 3



Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives the second dose of Covid vaccine at AIIMS in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

Noida, Ghaziabad impose night curfew till April 17

**AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8**

Amid a surge in Covid-19 cases, night curfew has been imposed in Noida and Ghaziabad, the two district authorities' orders said on Thursday.

The restrictions will be in force from 10.00 pm to 5.00 am till April 17 from Thursday night, the orders said. The movement of essential goods or commodities and medical and other essential services, however, will be exempted from the night curfew restrictions, the orders issued by the Ghaziabad and

Gautam Buddh Nagar district magistrates said. All government and private educational institutes (except medical, paramedical, and nursing colleges), including coaching centres, shall be barred from holding physical classes till April 17 in the two districts. All exams, including practicals, however, shall be held according to the schedule and are exempted from this order.

Noida DM Suhas L. Y. said, "There shall be an intensive enforcement of masks and other anti-Covid protocols in pub-

lic places including workplaces by the police and incident commanders and by departments concerned."

Ghaziabad DM Ajay Shankar Pandey said, "The night curfew from 10.00 pm to 5.00 am will be imposed from Thursday till April 17 to efficiently check the spread of Covid-19 in Ghaziabad."

The Central and state government officials and medical staff will remain exempted from the night restrictions. Pregnant women and those in need of medical help too are exempted, the orders said.

Woman held for driving car that ran over elderly couple

**AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8**

A 28-year-old woman was arrested on Thursday for being behind the wheels of a car that allegedly mowed down an elderly couple in Dwarka four days ago, police said.

The accused has been identified as Nupur Choudhary, they said. Shanti Swaroop Arora (79) and his wife Anjana Arora (62) were run over by the car on Sunday evening following which police arrested Deepakshi Choudhary (30), the elder sister of Nupur. She was apprehended on charges of rash driving and causing death by negligence.

Shanti was a retired government official, while Anjana was a homemaker. However, police on

Wednesday said the victims' family had raised suspicion over who was actually driving the car.

Police had said, "Deepakshi Choudhary accompanied the injured to Manipal hospital. She stated that she was driving the vehicle and committed the accident. She also produced her documents to the investigating officer. However, victim's family raised doubts that her sister was driving the vehicle."

During investigation, it was found that Nupur, who works as a probationary officer in a bank in Uttam Nagar, was driving the car at the time of the incident, a senior police officer said.

Further investigation in the case is in progress, police said.

HC, district courts to hold virtual hearings till April 23

New Delhi, April 8: In view of the "alarming" rise in Covid cases in the national capital, the Delhi High Court on Thursday decided that from April 9 to April 23 it will take up matters "through virtual mode only".

An office order issued by registrar general of the Delhi High Court, Manoj Jain, said that even all the courts of the Joint Registrars (judicial) shall also hold proceedings via virtual mode during this period.

The order said that the decision was taken by the Full Court of the High Court.

It also said that no adverse order would be passed by the courts of Joint Registrars (judicial) in case of non-appearance of parties and/or their counsel and the matter which are fixed for recording of evidence before the said courts shall be adjourned.

Similar directions were also issued by the Full Court in respect of the functioning of the subordinate courts.

The office order said that the District Courts have been directed to hold proceedings via virtual mode

only from April 9 to April 24 and the video conferencing links be made available on the website/causelist.

"It has been further directed that the principal district and sessions judges in consultation with the DG (prisons) shall make necessary arrangements for extension of remand of Undertrial prisoners (UTPs).

"Wherever required, during the trial, UTPs may be produced through video-conferencing. No adverse orders shall be passed by the district courts in Delhi in case of non-appearance of parties and/or their counsel and the matters which are fixed for recording of evidence, shall be adjourned," the office order of the high court said. The high court had commenced complete physical functioning from March 15 onwards.

Subsequently, it had said that virtual or hybrid proceedings would be held on the request of lawyers.

Following the outbreak of Covid in March last year, the court was holding proceedings through video conferencing. Its functioning was restricted to urgent matters from March 16 last year. — PTI

**New Okhla Industrial Development Authority**Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida-201301 (U.P.)
Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.com**E-TENDER NOTICE**

E-Tenders are invited from eligible contractors/firm for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com & <https://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

Fresh-Tender Work

A) The above tenders can be uploaded by dated **22.04.2021** upto **5.00 PM**. shall be opened/downloaded on dated **23.04.2021** at **11.00 AM**.

S. No.	Job No.	Name of Work	Tender Amount (Rs. Lacs)
1.	66/CGM/Sr. M. (E&M)-I / E.T. / 2020-21	Hiring of Innova Crysta for Lucknow Guest House, Noida.	8.76

Re-Tender Work

B) The above tenders can be uploaded by dated **15.04.2021** upto **5.00 PM**. shall be opened/downloaded on dated **16.04.2021** at **11.00 AM**.

S. No.	Job No.	Name of Work	Tender Amount (Rs. Lacs)
2.	167/CGM/Sr. M./E&M-II/ 2020-21	Annual Maintenance of Street Light at NMRC Bus Stand/Parking Near Botanical Garden, Sector-38, Noida	4.73
3.	168/CGM/Sr. M./E&M-II/ 2020-21	Maintenance of Street Light on Road in Sector 107, Noida	6.27
4.	184/CGM/Sr. M./E&M-II/ 2020-21	Construction of New Fountain in Central Park, Sector-50, Noida	24.51
5.	128/CGM/Sr. M./E&M-II/ 2020-21/ET	Renovation of Fountain at Jhundpura Road, Sector-11 for 2 years Operation & Maintenance, Noida	10.39
6.	132/CGM/Sr. M./E&M-II/ 2020-21/ET	Renovation of Fountain at Q Block Park in Sector-12 for 2 years Operation & Maintenance, Noida	16.25

Chief General Manager
Noida**CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA****DIVERSION AND REGULATION OF TRAINS DUE TO TRAFFIC BLOCKS**

In order to further strengthen the existing infrastructure and to enhance rail and road users' safety, Railways will undertake the construction work of 6 Lane Road over Bridge between Ghaziabad and Marpat stations over Delhi Division. To execute this work various Traffic Blocks will be taken upto 24.04.2021. Consequently the following trains will temporarily be affected as under :-

DIVERSION OF SPECIAL TRAINS			
Train No. & Train Name	Diverted Route Via	Date (from originating station)	
02452 New Delhi - Kanpur Central Sharm Shakti Express Special	New Delhi-Agra Cantt-Bhandal-Etawah-Kanpur Central	08, 09, 10, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 & 23.04.2021	
04217 Prayagraj Sangam - Chandigarh Unchahar Express Spl.	Tundia Jn.-Khurja Jn.-Hapur-Ghaziabad-Delhi Jn.-Panipat-Ambala Cantt. Jn.	08 & 09.04.2021	
02569 Darbhanga Jn. - New Delhi Clone Special	Khurja Jn.-Meerut City-Saharanpur Jn.-Ambala Cantt. Jn.	10, 12, 13, 14, 18 & 19.04.2021	
	Tundia Jn.-Khurja Jn.-Hapur-Ghaziabad-New Delhi	08, 09, 10, 12, 13, 14, 18 & 19.04.2021	

REGULATION OF SPECIAL TRAINS	
Train No. & Train Name	Time/Period of Regulation
02801 Puri - New Delhi Purushottam Special	Train will be regulated on 09 & 10.04.2021 for 80 minutes and on 11, 13, 14, 15, 19 & 20.04.2021 for 50 minutes between Tundia Jn.- Marpat station.
02397 Gaya - New Delhi Special	Train will be regulated on 09 & 10.04.2021 for 75 minutes and on 11, 13, 14, 15, 19 & 20.04.2021 for 45 minutes between Tundia Jn.- Marpat station.
05955 Kamakhya - Delhi Mail Special	Train will be regulated on 09 & 10.04.2021 for 65 minutes and on 11, 13, 14, 15, 19 & 20.04.2021 for 35 minutes between Tundia Jn.- Marpat station.
04005 Sitamarhi-Anand Vihar T. Lichhivi Express Special	Train will be regulated on 09 & 10.04.2021 for 60 minutes and on 11, 13, 14, 15, 19 & 20.04.2021 for 30 minutes between Tundia Jn.- Marpat station.
02563 Saharsa Jn.- New Delhi Clone Special	Train will be regulated on 09 & 10.04.2021 for 50 minutes between Tundia Jn.- Marpat station.
03413/03483 Malda Town - Delhi Special	Train will be regulated on 09 & 10.04.2021 for 40 minutes between Tundia Jn.- Marpat station.
05025 Mau Jn.-Anand Vihar T. Express Special	Train will be regulated on 14 & 19.04.2021 for 120 minutes and on 21.04.2021 for 60 minutes between Tundia Jn.- Marpat station.

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table of stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., must be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

RailMadad Helpline No. 139

Visit RailMadad Website :- www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in

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SHORT TAKES

HP civic polls: Cong wins in two cities

Shimla: The BJP and the Congress emerged as the single largest party in two each out of the four municipal corporations in Himachal Pradesh that went to polls on Wednesday, an election official said. The ruling BJP emerged as the single largest party in Mandi and Dharamshala, while the Congress succeeded in getting majority in Palampur and Solan, state electoral officer Sanjeev Chauhan said. In what may be considered as a relief for chief minister Jairam Thakur, the BJP got a clear majority in his home district Mandi by securing its victory in 11 out of total 15 wards. The Congress got just four seats in Mandi. In Dharamshala, the BJP is short of one seat in clear majority, winning 8 out of total 17 wards, while Congress got five and independents four seats. — PTI

ED files chargesheet against ex-UP mantri

New Delhi/Lucknow: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) filed its first chargesheet against former Uttar Pradesh minister Gayatri Prajapati on Thursday even as it attached 60 assets and over 50 bank accounts of his and his family members worth over ₹55 crore, officials said. The central agency is probing the former legislator, who held the mining portfolio in the Samajwadi Party government led by Akhilesh Yadav, on money-laundering charges in a case linked to alleged possession of disproportionate assets. "A total of 57 bank accounts with a total balance of ₹3.5 crore and 60 immovable properties worth ₹33.45 crore have been provisionally attached. The total market value of such properties as on date is over ₹55 crore," the Lucknow zonal office of the ED said. — PTI

PM HANDS OVER PATROL VESSEL TO SEYCHELLES

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday handed over a fast patrol vessel to Seychelles and inaugurated a solar power plant, a court building and 10 community development projects in the western Indian Ocean nation at a virtual event. The patrol vessel as well as the three other projects were part of India's development assistance to the strategically located island nation. The projects were jointly inaugurated by Modi and President Seychelles Wavel Ramkalawan. The new magistrates' court building in the capital city Victoria is India's first major civil infrastructure project in Seychelles built with grant assistance. It is a state-of-the-art building which is expected to substantially enhance the capacity of the Seychelles judicial system and aid in better delivery of judicial services to the people of the country. The 50-meter-long fast patrol vessel is a modern and fully equipped naval ship that has been made in India by GRSE, Kolkata, and is being gifted to Seychelles under Indian grant assistance. The one megawatt ground-mounted solar power plant at the Romainville Island of Seychelles too has been set up under India's grant assistance. — PTI

'Family made money': ED links Didi's kin to coal mining scam

New Delhi, April 8: (PTI) The ED has alleged West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew and TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee's family benefited from illicit funds obtained from certain illegal coal mining in the state under a "deep system" of political patronage driven by a "well-oiled" machinery. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) made these claims Wednesday in a remand note presented before a special court seeking enhanced custody of West Bengal police officer Ashok Kumar Mishra, also the inspector in-charge of Bankura police station. The police officer, apart from TMC youth wing leader Vinay

Mishra's brother Vikas Mishra, was arrested by the ED in a case which has local trader Anup Majhi alias Lala as the prime suspect. The inspector was arrested by the ED here on April 3 and the court had sent him to custody till Wednesday. The court extended his ED remand till April 12. The ED case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) was filed after studying a November, 2020 FIR of the CBI alleging a multi-crore coal pilferage scam related to the Eastern Coalfields Ltd mines in the state's Kunustoria and Kajora areas in and around Asansol. The ED, in the remand note,

alleged that certain illegal mining instances were flourishing in the state under the "patronage" of the political party in power. The agency connected the policeman to Majhi, Vinay and Vikas Mishra, going up all the way to the Abhishek Banerjee's family. The Diamond Harbour MP has denied these allegations. All coal assets fall directly under Centre and are guarded by the Central agencies. If BJP thinks TMC leaders got money from those illegally operating the coal assets, then what's stopping Centre from investigating all culprits who failed to manage these national assets? he had tweeted earlier this week. — PTI

Yogi promises anti-Romeo squads in Bengal

Education and transport will be made free for girls, says Adityanath

Kolkata, April 8: Senior BJP leader Yogi Adityanath Thursday said that anti-Romeo squads will be formed in Bengal if the party is voted to power in the state.

Bengal is not a safe place for women under the present TMC government, Adityanath, also Uttar Pradesh chief minister, said addressing three poll rallies in Hooghly and Howrah districts of West Bengal.

He said if BJP is voted to power it will stress on women and education. "Why is Bengal not a safe place for women? ...

Education and transport will be made free for girls in Bengal.

Anti-Romeo squads will be formed in Bengal to deal with those who loiter around girls schools," he said.

Anti-Romeo squads were launched in Uttar Pradesh to ensure safety of women soon after Adityanath assumed power in 2017.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and her party, the TMC have often referred to the Hathras gangrape case to mock at Mr Adityanath government's policing for women and the law and order situation in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh.

The top BJP leader criticised the Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal and derided it for failing to bring in any positive change in the ten years that it has been in power.

"Where is the paribartan (change) that Mamata Banerjee had promised ten years ago? he asked.

When Trinamul Congress came to power in the state a decade ago it had promised to serve 'maa-maati-manush'



Yogi Adityanath

(mother, motherland and people), which became its slogan.

"What happened to that slogan? I have come to ask Mamata Banerjee about it. Why is Bengal not a safe place for women? This soil had produced so many social reformers. What happened to the youth of the state who have become frustrated?" he asked.

Mr Adityanath claimed that Banerjee has no compassion for the youth, farmers and development. "But she has compassion for the TMC goons".

Referring to the Citizenship Amendment Act, he said it had been passed by Parliament and TMC had fanned violence against it in West Bengal.

The violence that occurred in West Bengal due to the legislation of CAA in Parliament had been fanned by the TMC.

In UP the government had recovered money from those who indulged in violence and damaged public property, he said.

"Here in Bengal, TMC is all for appeasement for the sake of vote bank. Mamata Banerjee supports cow slaughter. In UP cow slaughter is not allowed. If anybody is found to be involved in it, the person goes to jail," Mr Adityanath said. — PTI

■ Mamata govt seems scared of losing power: Chakraborty

Mithun rally not allowed in Behala

Kolkata, April 8: The BJP was denied permission to hold a roadshow of Bollywood superstar Mithun Chakraborty, who had recently joined the saffron camp, in Behala area of the city on Thursday, following which a group of party activists held a demonstration in front of a police station.

The agitation was led by actor-turned-politician Srabanti Chatterjee, who is contesting from the Behala Paschim Assembly constituency on a BJP ticket, party sources said.

"The Kolkata Police did not allow our leader Mithun Chakraborty to campaign for me in the constituency without citing any reason.

"The Trinamul Congress cannot avert its imminent



Actor and BJP leader Mithun Chakraborty along with Union minister and party candidate from Tollygunge Babul Supriyo takes part in a roadshow at Tollygunge in Kolkata on Thursday.

— ASIAN AGE

loss by such an undemocratic act of preventing us from campaigning.

"Is the state government scared of losing power?," the popular Bengali actor

party sought permission to hold a door-to-door campaign by the Bollywood superstar in the Behala area after the city police had cancelled its roadshow plea on Wednesday night.

"The door-to-door campaign by him was also not granted at the last minute," they claimed.

The Kolkata Police declined to make any comment on the issue.

The BJP candidate later took out a roadshow in the constituency where the National Award-winning actor was not present.

The actor-turned-BJP candidate is pitted against TMC heavyweight and West Bengal minister Partha Chatterjee who is seeking re-election from the Behala Paschim constituency. — PTI

Army Chief Naravane on 5-day tour of Bangladesh

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

Indian Army chief General MM Naravane on Thursday reached Bangladesh on a five days visit to continue with the tradition of strong bilateral and defence ties between the two countries.

General Naravane's visit comes in the midst of Swarnim Vijay Varsh celebrations which mark 50 years of the liberation of Bangladesh, in which Mukti Bahini fought shoulder to shoulder with Indian Armed Forces.

General Naravane paid tributes to the martyrs of the Liberation War of 1971 by laying a wreath at the Shikha Anirban. He also received a Guard of Honour at Senakunji.

Gen. Naravane called on General Aziz Ahmed, chief of Bangladesh Army. Both discussed strengthening of bilateral defence cooperation and strategic ties between two countries were discussed.

Gen. Naravane gifted a replica of T-55 Tank and a picture of 75/24 mm Howitzer. The original equipment are being gifted for museums of Bangladesh. Both T-55 Tank and 75/24 mm Howitzer played a stellar



Army Chief General M.M. Naravane signs visitors book after paying tributes to the valiant soldiers, who laid down their lives during the Liberation War of 1971, at Shikha Anirban in Dhaka on Thursday.

— PTI

role in the 1971 War of Liberation. Gen. Naravane called on Admiral M. Shaheen Iqbal Chief of Naval Staff, Bangladesh Navy and discussed issues of mutual interest. He also met Air Vice Marshal M Abul Bashar, Acting Chief of Air Staff of Bangladesh Air Force.

Army Chief will also visit the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

High-decibel campaign ends for 4th phase of WB polling

Kolkata, April 8: Campaigning for the high-decibel fourth phase of polling, for 44 assembly seats scheduled in five districts of West Bengal on April 10, ended at 5pm on Thursday.

A total 1,15,81,022 voters including 58,82,514 men, 56,98,218 women and 290 members of the third gender, will decide the fate of 373 candidates in Friday's polling in constituencies spread over Howrah (Part II), South 24 Parganas (Part III), Hooghly (Part II) in south Bengal and in north Bengal's Alipurduar and Coochbehar.

The polling will be held between 7 am to 6.30 pm in 15,940 polling stations. At stake are nine assembly

constituencies in Howrah, eleven in South 24 Parganas, five in Alipurduar, nine in Coochbehar and ten in Hooghly.

Among those whose fate will be decided at the hustings are former Bengal Ranji captain Manoj Tiwary, TMC's candidate from Shibpur, state education minister and sitting MLA from Behala Paschim Partha Chatterjee and central minister Babul Supriyo of the BJP who has locked horns with state sports minister Arup Biswas for the Tollygunge seat.

Ratna Chatterjee, wife of former city mayor and fire minister Sovan Chatterjee, who left

Mamata Banerjee's TMC to join the BJP for a short period, is facing BJP's actress-turned politician Payel Sarkar for the Behala Purbo seat

Former state forest minister, Rajib Banerjee, who moved to the BJP recently is contesting from Domjur while BJP MP and actress Locket Chatterjee is contesting the polls from Chinsurah in Hooghly district.

The Sanyukta Morcha comprising Left front, Congress and ISF has fielded mostly young faces for the fourth phase of polling. CPI(M) leader Sujan Chakraborty is one of the few seniors fielded by the Left for this phase of the elections. — PTI

TAKE MONEY OFFERED BY BJP, BUT VOTE FOR TMC: ABHISHEK TO VOTERS

Kumargram/Tufanganj, (WB) April 8: Alleging that the BJP was distributing cash to purchase votes, TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee on Thursday asked people to exercise their franchise in favour of his party, after having taken the money being offered by the saffron camp. Insisting that people should bargain for more, he urged voters to ask for ₹5,000 if offered ₹500.

"Take money from lotus (BJP symbol) and vote for the twin flowers (TMC symbol). If they can do cheat you, why won't you do the same?" Banerjee stated at a public meeting at Kumargram in Alipurduar district



Abhishek Banerjee

Speaking at another rally at Cooch Behar's Tufanganj, he said that people decide whether they want leaders from outside or their "daughter Mamata Banerjee".

Taking a jibe at the BJP's "acche din" promise, the TMC MP said that the saffron party has failed to live up to the expectations of people. He pointed out that the price of essential items, petrol and cooking gas have skyrocketed under the BJP rule at the Centre, causing hardships to many people. — PTI

Adhikari gets EC notice for using 'communal tone'

New Delhi: The Election Commission on Thursday issued a notice to Suwendu Adhikari, the BJP candidate from Nandigram in West Bengal, for alleged communal overtones in his speech made last month. He has been asked to respond to the notice within 24 hours.

The notice said the poll panel received a complaint from Kavita Krishnan of CPI-ML Central Committee in which it was alleged that on March 29 Adhikari delivered a "hate speech" in Nandigram while addressing a public meeting.

The notice said the EC has been found to be in violation of certain clauses of the model code. — PTI

BJP will repair old temples of Bengal: Malviya

Kolkata: The BJP, if voted to power, will renovate old temples, pay ₹3,000 to "purohits" (priests) and elderly kirtan singers per month and make Kolkata the financial hub of Eastern India, senior party leader Amit Malviya said on Thursday.

He also said that a ₹2,500 crore fund will be set up for promotion of the annual Ganga Sagar Mela.

Speaking to reporters on certain points of the party's poll manifesto in Kolkata, the national in-charge of the BJP's Information & Technology department said that the party has several plans to develop West Bengal and preserve its culture and heritage. — PTI

Violence in Kerala after death of League worker

GILVESTER ASSARY
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 8

A day after Muslim League youth wing member died in post poll violence, parts of Kannur district particularly Koothuparamba and Panur areas witnessed widespread violence.

After the death of 22-year-old-Mansoor, the area became tense. Widespread violence took place during the funeral procession of the youth league worker on Wednesday night. Half a dozen offices of the CPM local and branch committees were set on fire and

vandalised allegedly by youth league workers.

The police had to resort to lathicharge and hurl stun grenades to disperse the violent mobs. The houses of some of the accused in the case were also attacked.

The remand report prepared by the police stated that the Manzoor's death was a planned murder. It said a 25-member gang was behind the brutal incident.

Soon after the voting ended in the state on Tuesday night, clashes broke out between CPM and IUML workers which resulted in the death of Mansoor.

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that an unidentified dead body of a male namely **Unknown, S/o: Unknown, R/o: Unknown, was found on 23.03.2021 at 5:00 PM on Hiranki Pusta Road near 20 Kila, Alipur, Delhi.** In this regard DD No. 83A dated **23.03.2021** has been lodged at Police Station, Alipur, Delhi. Identification of unidentified dead body of male is as under:

Name: Unknown, Age: 30-35 Years, Height: 5'5", Complexion: Shallow, Wearing: White Shirt and Light Brown Pant.

If anyone have any information or clue about this male deceased may kindly be inform undersigned.

SHO
Police Station, Alipur, Delhi
Ph.: 011-27202265, 9560227120

DP/932/ON/2021

SHORT TAKES

3 MILITANTS DIE,
3 SOLDIERS HURT
IN J&K GUNFIGHTAGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, APRIL 8

Three suspected militants have been killed and an equal number of security personnel were injured in a fierce gunfight raging in a congested locality of Jammu and Kashmir's southern Shopian town since Thursday morning. Police and Army sources said that fighting broke out after a joint team of J&K police's counterinsurgency Special Operations Group (SOG), the Army's 44 Rashtriya Rifles and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) laid siege to Jan Mohalla of the Shopian town, about 50km from here, overnight on learning about the presence of militants in a private house. The officials said that the militants were offered to lay down their weapons and surrender before the security forces but they preferred to fight and their opening fire at the search party triggered the encounter. They said that the identities of the slain militants are being ascertained. Injured Army jawans Ram Dev, Drug Singh and Raj Kumar have been hospitalised. Sources said condition of one of them is stated to be critical. According to the officials, the firefight continued till reports last came in. They said that the intelligence input suggests that a "top" militant commander has been trapped in the besieged area.

ULFA-I ASKS TEA
FIRM TO SHIFT ITS
OFFICES TO ASSAMMANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, APRIL 8

After releasing two abducted employees of an oil company, the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) on Thursday served a warning to a leading tea company demanding immediate relocation of all its administrative offices to Assam and recruitment of indigenous people of the state, failing which the outfit will prevent them from doing business in Assam. The Ulfa(I) has served this notice to Amalgamated Plantations Pvt Ltd (APPL). The APPL was carved out of the erstwhile Tata Tea Ltd (now Tata Global Beverages Ltd, or TGBL) 10 years ago to run tea estates in West Bengal and Assam. The notice signed by Ulfa(I) publicity department member self-style Capt. Rumel Asom stated, "The United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) has taken note of... management of the tea estates in Assam under your ownership. We appreciate that you are in the business of making a profit and to that end, you must devise your corporate planning. However, you have heavy responsibilities to the land and her people. You have your head office outside Assam where no indigenous personnel from Assam is in employment. The liaison office is also not in Assam."

■ Test, track, treat effective strategy to check Covid: Modi
We defeated Covid without
vaccines, PM Modi tells CMsAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi on Thursday told chief ministers of the states to focus on creating "micro-containment" plans, higher testing and increased vaccination coverage to beat the second wave of novel coronavirus in the country which is once again infecting a large population in good speed.

During a meeting with the states and UTs on the current pandemic situation, the PM said state governments should have at least 70 per cent testing through RT-PCR and contact tracing of all infected persons should be intensified. He asserted that sample collection has to be proper so that no infected person escapes during scrutiny.

He also said that India has in the past successfully brought down the peak of Covid-19 cases and it can be done again.

Mr Modi reminded the chief ministers that India was able to successfully bring the Covid-19 wave down last year without any vaccine.

"Proactive testing is very important... Now more cases are asymptomatic. People feel that they have some mild pulmonary disease and then they infect the whole family. Testing and tracing are the most important thing right now and we have to bring the positivity rate below 5 per cent," Mr Modi said. He suggested that between April 11-14 special drive — Teeka Utsav — should be launched by states to immunise the maximum number of people eligible for the jab.

"There is a need to work on war footing again to fight Covid-19. Despite all



People queue up to give samples for Covid-19 RT-PCR test at Turbhe railway station in Navi Mumbai on Thursday.

the challenges, we have a better experience, resources and vaccines," he said.

The Prime Minister also backed the night restrictions imposed by several states to check the spread of the infection.

The PM said the lockdowns should be renamed as "Corona Curfew" to increase awareness among people about the reason for the restrictions. "We are facing a challenging situation. Some states are showing sharp rise in cases. There is laxity in containment measures in some states but we need to respond to the pandemic on a war footing level... People have become too careless, hence, we have to see that all efforts are not wasted due to corona fatigue among people. To contain virus we must contain human host. We beat the first wave, we will beat this too," the PM said.

He said strict vigilance in needed for next two-three weeks and all

asymptomatic people have to be tested and monitored properly. The state were also told to make efforts to keep mortality rate low. "We should do analysis of deaths, age group, time of detection, time of admission to hospital, reason for death etc. Ambulances, oxygen, ventilators should be made available," PM said.

With leaders of the ruling BJP and Opposition parties accusing each other of politicking over the Covid-19 pandemic, Mr Modi said those who want to do politics are already doing it, but he believes in serving the people of India at such a difficult time.

"As far as doing or not doing politics is concerned, I am seeing from day one and I have been putting up with all kinds of statements without joining the issue myself because I believe that serving the people of India is our responsibility," Mr Modi said.

Kerala CM
Vijayan, Chandy
test Covid +ve

Thiruvananthapuram, April 8: Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday tested positive for Covid-19. Mr Vijayan, who had taken the first dose of the Covid vaccine last month, confirmed his infection in a tweet.

"I have been confirmed Covid+ve. Will get treated at the government medical college, Kozhikode," he tweeted.

Governor Arif Mohammad Khan said in a tweet he spoke to the chief minister "who is hospitalised after testing Covid positive. Relieved that his health is stable. I wish hon'ble chief minister and family members speedy recovery."

Meanwhile, Congress leader and former CM Oommen Chandy also tested positive Thursday, party sources said. The 77-year-old Chandy had not been keeping well since the past two days and tested positive for the virus, the sources said. — PTI

Assam rules
out lockdown
or night curfewAGE CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI, APRIL 8

Assam health minister and BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma here on Thursday ruled out the possibility of night curfew or a lockdown in the state but requested everyone to get tested if they have symptoms.

Asking the people not to panic, Mr Sarma told reporters, "The Covid-19 positive cases are certainly on rise so people should remain alert and take necessary precautionary steps." He added that the government is going to intensify vigil on airports and railway stations.

CBI to look into Antilia case
for probe against Deshmukh

Agency says case papers will aid it in questioning Waze

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, APRIL 8

The CBI on Thursday approached the special NIA court seeking access to papers of Antilia bomb scare case for its preliminary enquiry against Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh.

The Central Bureau of Investigation approached special NIA judge Prashant R. Sitre a day after this court allowed the CBI to question Sachin Waze who is in NIA custody.

The CBI claimed that the papers of the explosive case will aid it in questioning Mr Waze. The court has kept the matter for hearing on Friday.

A CBI team has reached Mumbai from Delhi after the Bombay High Court directed the central probe agency to conduct preliminary enquiry (PE) into the corruption allegations levelled by former Mumbai police chief Param Bir Singh against Deshmukh.

Mr Singh was shifted from the post of Mumbai police commissioner to the home guards department on March 17.

Another 'encounter specialist'
quizzed in bomb scare caseAGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, APRIL 8

Former police officer and encounter specialist Pradeep Sharma on Thursday appeared before the NIA for the second day in connection with the parking of explosives-laden vehicle near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence and murder of businessman Mukesh Hiran's death. Meanwhile, the NIA took API Sachin Waze, who has been arrested in the same case, to the state-run J.J. Hospital for

medical check-up. He was sent back after examination and his medical report was given to concerned authorities.

A source in the J.J. Hospital said that Waze was brought to the hospital at around 1.30pm after he complained of chest pain. At the hospital, he underwent an ECG test report which seemed normal and he was sent back.

This was the second time that the agency took Waze for the medical check-up to the hospital since his arrest.

He later filed a petition in the HC seeking a CBI probe against Deshmukh, alleging that the NCP leader had asked Mr Waze and other police officers to extort ₹100 crore from restaurants and bars.

The NIA arrested Waze on March 13, in the case of an explosives-laden SUV found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence "Antilia" in south Mumbai on February 25

and the subsequent murder of Thane-based businessman Mansukh Hiren.

The CBI also questioned former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh and Waze on Thursday. The agency also questioned assistant commissioner of police (ACP) Sanjay Patil and asked deputy commissioner of police (DCP) Raju Bhujbal to get his statement recorded in the evening.

After Mufti,
ED to quiz
her motherYUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, APRIL 8

Days after former J&K chief minister and PDP president, Mehbooba Mufti, was grilled by Enforcement Directorate (ED) in an alleged money laundering case, her mother Gulshan Nazir has been asked to appear before its officials here next week for a similar cross-examine.

Sources close to the Muftis said that ED officials on Thursday visited their residence to serve a notice on Ms Gulshan, asking her to appear before the agency at its office in City's Raj Bagh area on April 15.

The ED officials had on March 25 questioned Ms Mufti for about five hours in connection with the alleged money laundering case.

On emerging from ED's regional office here, she had told reporters, "Whoever speaks up, ED, CBI and NIA are used against him/her. The nation is running not according to the Constitution of India but the agenda of a particular party."

Likening her questioning by ED with "criminalising of dissent by the government," Ms Mufti had alleged that the BJP government at the Centre was working against the Opposition and everyone else who does not agree with it through ED, CBI or NIA.

Collegium led by
CJI Bobde holds
scheduled meet

All 5 top SC judges attend meeting

New Delhi, April 8: The Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) S.A. Bobde Thursday held its scheduled meeting to discuss possible candidates for appointment of judges in higher judiciary, but it remained inconclusive, sources said.

The brief collegium meeting was attended by all the five senior-most judges, including Justice N.V. Ramana who has been appointed as the next CJI by President Ram Nath Kovind on April 6, they said.

No decision could be taken, they said and rubbished certain news reports of purported differences among some collegium members.

As per the apex court's website, Justice Ramana did not hold the court on Thursday. The top court has a sanctioned strength of 34 judges and after the retirement of Justice Indu Malhotra recently, the vacancies have gone up to five.

The matter of elevation of Chief Justice Tripura high court Akil Kureshi and also Karnataka senior woman judge Justice B.V. Nagarathna to the Supreme Court have been discussed in meeting in past as well, sources said.



S.A. Bobde

CJI Bobde would superannuate on April 23 and Thursday's pre-scheduled meeting assumes significance in the wake of the fact that justice Ramana has been formally appointed as the next CJI.

As per the convention, since the President has issued warrants of appointment for the next CJI, the outgoing predecessor does not make any recommendations to the Centre for appointment of judges in high courts and the apex court.

The collegium meeting was scheduled before the issuance of the notification appointing Justice Ramana as the CJI.

The last collegium meeting had taken place in the third week of March, the sources said.

Besides the CJI, the four others members of the collegium are Justices N.V. Ramana, R.F. Nariman, U.U. Lalit and A.M. Khanwilkar. — PTI

Naxals free commando

■ Continued from Page 1

that Naxals kept their promise to release the jawan if approached by government-appointed emissaries," Mr Jain said.

The other members of the emissary team were local tribal community leader Telam Boraiya, retired teacher Rudra Kere and sarpanch of Surkunda panchayat in Bijapur district, Rukmini Ekka.

With relief writ large on his face, the jawan after his release told reporters, "They (Naxals) treated me well when I was in their custody"

As soon as he was handed over to the emissaries Mr Manhas contacted his family members in Jammu through the cell phone of a journalist present and

informed them that he had been set free and was coming home very soon, a journalist who accompanied the delegation told this newspaper from the spot.

Sources told newspaper that the jawan was spotted by local villagers after the April 3 encounter who handed him to the Maoists.

"Maoists had grilled him to extract information on the strength of the security forces deployed in the region and the kinds of weapons they use," sources said.

Maoist led by commander of PLGA's battalion number one Madvi Hidma ambushed a search party of security personnel in Terram area on April 3 killing 22 jawans and injuring 31 others.

Rohingyas

■ Continued from Page 1

cannot be held to be violative of right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The Centre also disputed that Rohingya detainees were refugees and called them "illegal migrants".

"India cannot be a capital for all illegal migrants of the world", the SG said.

During the hearing, the CJI made oral observations acknowledging the threat faced by Rohingyas in Myanmar but added that the court cannot do anything about it.

PM's Pak visit

■ Continued from Page 1

claimed in Pakistani media reports, the MEA spokesman termed it as "speculation", adding that he did not have anything to share on this for now.

Just last week, in a "swift U-turn" on Thursday following a "political backlash", the Pakistan government had "deferred" its move to import cotton and sugar from India and linked it to the condition that India should first restore Article 370 on Jammu and Kashmir that was abrogated two years ago. However, some optimistic Pakistani media reports are referring to this as a "temporary bump".

States spar with Centre on vaccine 'shortage'

■ Continued from Page 1

Friday, while several vaccine centres in Maharashtra had to be closed for the want of vaccines.

Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope on Thursday attacked the Central government for playing politics during the pandemic by giving more vaccines to BJP-ruled states and fewer to non-BJP governed states.

Mr Tope accused the Centre of giving Maharashtra only 7.5 lakh doses against its demand for 40 lakh vaccines, which is not enough for the hugely populated state that is reporting the highest number of Covid-19 cases in the country. The minister said the state was aiming to vaccinate five to six lakh people daily to break the chain of transmission. He said vaccination centres at Satar,

Sangali, Panvel, Pune, Mumbai and Navi Mumbai had to shut down due to the unavailability of vaccines, while Buldhana has only one day stock left. He later said that the Centre has promised him more vaccines soon.

"I talked to Dr Harsh Vardhan, and even (NCP supreme) Sharad Pawar talked to him. I raised the issue of discrimination. We have the highest number of active patients, positivity rate and deaths, with a 12 crore population. Why are we given so few vaccines? Harsh Vardhanji assured me that corrections will be done soon. We are still waiting. We want 1.6 crore vaccine doses per month and 40 lakh every week because we are vaccinating six lakh people every day... I have just been informed the Centre increased the Covid-19

vaccine doses from seven lakh to 17 lakhs. Even this is less because we need 40 lakh vaccine doses a week, and 17 lakh doses are not enough," said Mr Tope. He alleged that BJP-governed states like Gujarat, that has a population of six crores, has got one crore vaccine doses.

"Maharashtra's population is double than Gujarat, but we got only 1.4 crore vaccine doses. Why this step-motherly treatment to Maharashtra during this time of crisis?" he said. He further gave data of vaccine distribution, which said Maharashtra got 7.50 lakh doses, Uttar Pradesh 48 lakhs, Madhya Pradesh 40 lakhs, Gujarat 30 lakhs and Haryana 24 lakh doses. Mr Tope said Maharashtra's population was 12 crores, but less doses were given to it by the Centre. He

added that the Central government had told states not to procure any vaccines directly from the manufacturers as the Centre will do it. "Now, they are not giving enough vaccines," he said. Mr Tope also held meetings with the manufacturers of Covid-19 drug Remdesivir and asked them to double the production for the state. In order to increase beds for patients, the Pune administration has tied up with the Army Hospital to provide 40 ICU beds.

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the state has decided to purchase Remdesivir injections as there was a shortage.

Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said: "The hue and cry by certain states about partisanship by the Union government is just a farce, an attempt to

hide their own incompetence. Maharashtra and Rajasthan are two of the top three states based on the allocation of Covid-19 vaccine doses. Both are non-BJP governed states. Let's put an end to the fear mongering now! Covid-19 vaccine doses: Total administered: 9 crore plus, in stock/needing delivery to states: 4.3 crore plus. Where does the question of shortages arise? We're continuously monitoring and enhancing supply."

According to him, Maharashtra was given 1.06 crore vaccine doses, Gujarat 1.05 crore and Rajasthan 1.04 crore, while the country's average distribution was 37.11 lakh.

India on Thursday recorded 1.26 lakh fresh cases of Covid-19 and 685 deaths. Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan tested positive for Covid-19.

SC rejects plea by Maha govt, Deshmukh to halt CBI probe

■ Continued from Page 1

only with the consent of the state government or on the orders of the high court or Supreme Court, Justice Kaul said: "He (Deshmukh) did not resign when the commission of inquiry was ordered... He was clinging to his office... You can't say it affects the federal structure. This does not happen every day. Both have been heads of institutions where something has gone wrong."

Mr Sibal asked the court that if an allegation is made against a minister not supported by evidence, can a CBI probe be ordered?

In Mumbai, meanwhile,

the Shiv Sena, which is part of the state's ruling coalition, claimed that the BJP was playing "dirty politics" to destabilise the Uddhav Thackeray government. A day after suspended API Sachin Waze made serious allegations against the sitting Maha Vikas Aghadi ministers, the Shiv Sena came out in

support of its ministers and defended the government, saying the Opposition was playing "dirty politics" to defame the Maharashtra government. Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut said efforts were being made by some people to destabilise the MVA government.

Mr Waze had on

Wednesday alleged in his four-page letter that senior Maharashtra Cabinet ministers, including transport minister Anil Parab, had asked him to extort money from businessmen and establishments. The suspended API also alleged former home minister Anil Deshmukh had demanded

₹2 crores to allow him to continue in police service.

"From Day 1, efforts are being made to destabilise the Maharashtra government. Few people are making efforts day in and out for it, but the government is stable. Those who are involved in destabilising the government are being exposed," he added.

THE ASIAN AGE

9 APRIL 2021

With Russia, be measured, and keep an open mind

A realistic appreciation of the state of India's relationship with Russia — which remained high in areas such as military sales and energy, nuclear and space cooperation, even after the collapse of Communism, and while New Delhi's convergences with Washington took on strategic dimensions — can be gained when President Vladimir Putin visits India later this year. The compatibility between Indian and Russian political positions in the region, or internationally, is likely to be better in view then.

But there are straws in the wind that can be picked up at this stage. These were available during the visit earlier this week of Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, who held detailed confabulations with external affairs minister S. Jaishankar on a range of bilateral and regional issues, before embarking for Pakistan, with which Moscow has expanded its relationship in recent years, particularly in the field of fighting terrorism, sale of defence equipment and energy.

Mr Lavrov noted that Russia-China ties are 'at the highest' level, historically, but it is not a 'military alliance'. He expressed unease with India being a part of the Quad...

Moscow-Islamabad views on the peace process in Afghanistan, and the place of importance in it given to the Taliban on the question of future power-sharing, appear convergent at this stage. More, they are not different from that of Washington and Beijing, which is happy to go along with Islamabad. The Indian position, although not fully articulated except on first principles, may be seen as differently nuanced on the Taliban factor and in the context of the relationship with the government of President Ashraf Ghani.

And yet New Delhi-Moscow ties have historically had a broad sweep. To what degree this changes, if at all, in the context of India's favourable positioning with the US, Russia's close proximity with Beijing and America's contentious relationship with both China and Russia, can be better understood after Mr Putin meets Prime Minister Narendra Modi later in the year.

But the observations of Mr Jaishankar and Mr Lavrov suggest that there is a desire on both sides to keep the bilateral relationship well-oiled. Will India go ahead with the purchase of the S-400 anti-missile defence system from Russia in the face of serious US reservations on this? This is a serious question for later, the answer to which could have a bearing on India-Russia as well as India-US relations.

In his remarks, the external affairs minister called the relationship "energetic and forward-looking". This is a speculative formulation, which leaves the door open for positivity. The Russian foreign minister said that the bilateral ties were "valuable, mutually respectful" and "not subjected to political fluctuations". The two formulations are far from being at odds. Perhaps they are at the stage of probing. The reference to "mutually respectful" is suggestive of differences at the tactical level in a variety of areas. These will need to be ironed out or taken out of contention in mutually acceptable ways even while cooperating significantly in a range of areas.

Mr Lavrov noted that Russia-China ties are "at the highest" level, historically, but it is not a "military alliance". At the same time he expressed Moscow's unease with India being a part of the Quad, obliquely calling it the "Asian Nato". These observations are not adversarial, as is being sought to be made out in some quarters, but a reflection of the current state of play in the world. India and Russia both need to move with their eyes open and remain carefully calibrated.

Uphold media's right to report

The order of the Jammu and Kashmir police banning live coverage of encounters between the security forces and separatist militants and of "law and order situations", and the subsequent direction to senior police officers to take legal action in such situations, call for clarification by the governments in the Union territory and at the Centre. This has become all the more important since the police officer who issued the directive has quoted the constitutional rights of freedom of speech and expression, and life. The J&K media, which has been walking on the razor's edge for the last several decades, has already registered their strong protest against the new fiat.

The police are stating the obvious when it says it cannot allow live coverage of encounters; nobody has even a case that it should be allowed undermining the very operation the security agencies undertake. The police are right when it invokes Article 21 and says the right to life of men in uniform has to be protected. But how far is it justified when it talks of a media ban in "law and order situations" by which it obviously refers to the protests of the ordinary citizens that erupt in the streets of the Union territory? The same Indian Constitution gives the people the right to speech and expression, which is enjoyed by every citizen, not just journalists. They put that right to use when they protest; the journalists use the same right when they report it. The police can, of course, impose reasonable restrictions, of which the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the media there have quite a clear idea. The protection of basic rights of the citizens is as much the job of the state as the protection of the rights of the security agencies. The state just cannot barter one for the other.

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Subhani



'Force majeure' can't be fig leaf for naked greed



Mohan Guruswamy

The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic is here, across most of the country. Our daily infection peak has crossed that of 2020. It will once again stress the entire system, including our creaking public health infrastructure, and such times of stress are when the "force majeure" clauses in commercial agreements are waved about to renege on the promised word.

Last year, early in the first lockdown in April 2020, a major financial daily had reported that several large retail chains in India, such as Reliance, the Future Group, McDonald's, Domino's Pizza and others were trying to use the omnipresent "force majeure" clause in all agreements and contracts to back out of commercial obligations. Typically, these notices are served on the smaller associates deemed least able to challenge it. Some succeeded.

It will be interesting to know if the government has been told by Reliance or Airtel of their inability to pay the telecom spectrum dues? Or would Prince Mohammed bin Salman take kindly to any attempt to diddle his desert kingdom of payment for oil already processed?

It won't be long before the companies try these tactics again. Several automotive companies also operate their own showrooms, as do oil marketing companies and others. Some of our top business groups like the Tatas, with Croma and Westside, and the Goenkas, with Spencers, have a strong presence in the retail sector. The More retail chain was recently sold by the Birlas to a private investment group. Companies like Godrej, Samsung and LG have nationwide exclusive networks for

their products. These company showrooms are often the anchor stores in a mall or market that because of their perceived creditworthiness manage to get much lower rents.

These companies are citing a letter dated February 19, 2020, issued by the ministry of finance and is in relation to the definition of "force majeure" in the Manual for Procurement of Goods 2017. This manual is in relation to the procurement contracts of the Government of India for goods and services and is not applicable to the interpretation of separate "force majeure" clauses in private contracts.

Unlike with government procurement contracts, the performance of the obligation of contractual payments has not been prevented by any act, proclamation, regulation or ordinance of any government or government agency. The spread of Covid-19 is undoubtedly a public health crisis with multiple measures placed by the state and Central governments. However, the orders of the governments only cover educational institutions, theatres, function halls and cinema halls.

In any event, the Covid-19 virus can't be invoked as a reason to escape all contractual obligations in general by universally invoking "force majeure" clauses. The spread of the Covid-19 virus or the government regulations around it have to directly make the performance of the obligation in a contract impossible in order to invoke the force majeure clause. The force majeure clause in agreements clearly specify the requirement of prevention or delay "by causes beyond the reasonable control of such party, including but not limited to any act, proclamation, regulation or ordinance

All our big companies report significant profits. Reliance Industries Ltd has reported a post-tax profit of over ₹35,000 crores for the year ended March 2019.

of any government or government agency, having jurisdiction over the parties, provided that the affected party take(s) all reasonable action to eliminate the cause of the delay".

Even if a company claims that it may have become onerous to pay the contracted amount as a result of the Covid-19 related government notifications, no government notification has rendered it impossible for the companies to pay for goods and services availed or being availed of. The ability of a company to generate a monthly profit is not linked to the obligation or ability of a profitable public corporation to pay the contracted amount.

Despite the lockdown notifications, these companies continued using the premises for storing commercial goods that were for present or future sale. For instance, most retail verticals continued to take orders and payments online for all postal codes. During the nationwide lockdown too, in the absence of being able to complete the delivery of sale, they still continued to receive payments for products that were being stored in their premises.

Nothing renders the payment of rent impossible. Any kind of temporary business interruption is covered in the risk insurance that these companies are obliged to have. The burden of the rent can't be wriggled out of because of reduced business opportunities in the light of measures taken around the prevention of Covid-19.

With respect to a similar pandemic, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in 2003, the courts did not permit tenants to wriggle out of

their obligations of payment in lease agreements even when the tenant was not permitted to enter the leased premises due to the temporary isolation orders of the government. In that context, the courts held that a two-week period was insigni?cant in view of the long duration of the lease, and that while SARS was arguably an unforeseeable event, it did not "signi?cantly change the nature of the outstanding contractual rights or obligations" of the parties in the case.

The law of the land with respect to lease agreements is that "where the property leased is not destroyed or substantially and permanently unfit, the lessee cannot avoid the lease because he does not or is unable to use the land for purposes for which it is let to him". Additionally, the courts have held that even when the economic conditions are the product of a "force majeure" event, such financial hardship would not excuse performance if the party retained some level of control over its allocation of resources.

All our big companies report significant profits. Reliance Industries Ltd has reported a post-tax profit of over ₹35,000 crores for the year ended March 2019. Its annual report also highlighted that Reliance Retail became the first retailer in India to cross the ₹100,000 crore turnover milestone. Reliance Retail posted a profit of ₹2,727 crores just in Q3 of 2019. Incidentally, Mukesh Ambani's personal wealth went up by 60 per cent in the pandemic year.

It would be a travesty if these big groups should attempt to wrongfully wriggle out of their contractual obligations in such difficult times. Such attempts to renege on performance obligations particularly oppresses their smaller associates.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

LETTERS

TASLIMA'S FALL

English cricketer Moeen Ali was subjected to an Islamophobic attack and his teammates rightly rallied behind him, after Taslima Nasreen's distasteful post about his hairstyle. What a downfall of the feminist from being a secular icon to a rebel without a cause. Contrast this scenario with India, where Muslim actors, sportspersons, celebrities of all fields face vilest attacks routinely and their lifelong colleagues stay mum. Indians should take a lesson while Ms Nasreen, perhaps frustrated by the lack of engagements, could get involved in some social work.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

SUSPEND IPL

THE COVID-19 situation has reached alarming proportions in many states, especially in Maharashtra. As part of the measures taken by the government to contain the spread of the deadly infection, the IPL tournament, which draws huge crowds, should also be suspended to check the onslaught of the pandemic. No doubt there are large financial stakes involved, but concern about public health should receive the topmost priority.

Bhaskar Roy
New Delhi

RISING POVERTY

INDIA HAVING the world's third-highest number of billionaires after the US and China does not mean we are in seventh heaven. Millions of impoverished still grapple to get two square meals a day and making ends meet a daily struggle. The gulf between the haves and the have-nots is ever-widening, and the rising unemployment rate is a concern. For the record, Mukesh Ambani — 10th on the global billionaires' list — became the richest person in Asia, nudging out Chinese business tycoon Jack Ma. Amazon CEO and Founder Jeff Bezos topped the list for the fourth year on the trot. But these are mere numbers for the man on the street!

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

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

Saeed Naqvi

Wide Angle



Syria is still in the eye of the storm even after 10 years

In 1952, like a bolt from the blue, came UP chief minister Govind Ballabh Pant's order abolishing zamindari. The abrupt drop in prestige and lifestyle caused a relative across the Ganga to hide his arsenal of a few rifles and 12-bore shotguns along with boxes of Eley cartridges.

Whenever courtiers in rags, with some previous pique, stoked his fragile ego with stories of rampant lawlessness in villages because "huzoor's" power had ended, "huzoor" would come out with his preferred shotgun. This sad, fake "dadagiri" lasted as long as the boxes of Eleys did.

This trans-Ganga tragic hero came to mind when my eye fell on a bold headline of a piece by Graham E. Fuller, formerly of the CIA, on the aggressive style of Joe Biden's and Anthony Blinken's early outings in *Foreign Affairs*: "Hell Hath No Fury Like A Superpower in Decline".

The subsequent utterances are subdued and moderate but the initial knee-jerk reaction was revealing.

Fuller writes: "The US leadership must have set some kind of new record in managing to personally insult the powers of the world within 48 hours of each other in these early days of the Biden administration.

President Biden called Vladimir Putin a 'killer' and lacking 'a soul'. Blinken was equally insulting on China.

"This country has some grounds for pride in its own-imperfect democratic order. Still, how much reflection does it take to acknowledge what the Chinese Communist Party has accomplished in the past 30 years? Is it more worthy to bring half a billion people out of poverty into middle class life in a mere generation? Or more worthy to maintain intact an American electoral system in which mediocre or bad leaders emerge as readily as good ones?"

Fuller's invective is focused on the Biden-Blinken opening salvos at Russia and China. I would have scoured anything Fuller wrote on the tenth anniversary of the Syrian crisis. Five Western powers observed the occasion with all the fire and brimstone of the past. Fuller knows the area backwards. A key policy document advising the Reagan administration in 1983 on military action against Syria for strategic reasons was his handiwork. I have had this document ever since it was released in 2008, having been in secret vaults for 25 years.

After visiting Damascus and almost all the trouble spots in Syria's neigh-

bourhood, I had written a paper "The Storm in the Arab Spring", the eye of the storm being Syria. I feel qualified to take a critical look at the statement the foreign ministers of the US, France, Germany, Italy and UK issued on the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the tragedy.

One allegation the ministers repeat is straightforward: President Bashar al Assad started the ghoulish operation against his own people who were rebelling against misrule, corruption, economic distress. Not true. I was in Damascus at the outset.

There were reports fairly early in the Obama administration leading the global effort to deploy "shadow" Internet and mobile systems which "dissidents can use to undermine repressive governments that seek to silence them by shutting down communications network". James Glanz and John Markoff of the New York Times described one operation in a fifth-floor shop at Washington's L Street, where "a group of young entrepreneurs, looking like a garage band, are assembling deceptively innocent-looking hardware into a prototype 'Internet-in-a-suitcase'. It was all part of the big push for the Liberation Technology Movement, and how comprehensively it was applied against the Syrian regime".

In Syria's case, the "moderate operation" the "free" world was busting its guts to help, in many cases, turned out to be cover for extreme Islamists like Jabhat al Nusra. One such instance defence secretary Lloyd Austin admitted before the Senate Armed Services Select Committee: A \$500 million project to train "moderates" to fight Assad turned into an embarrassment for Washington. Most trainees disappeared, along with the lethal equipment. Mr Austin mumbled "four or five" of the moderates trained were still with "us".

Among the trick sentences in the foreign minister's statement was one on Daesh (Islamic State). "Preventing Daesh's resurgence remains a priority", the statement says.

Hadn't Daesh, in the administration's words, been "destroyed"? So why is possible resurrection posed as a threat? Because the threat, when live, can justify airstrikes and other forms of intervention?

In America's "sole superpower" moment, countries were averse to calling the US names: how can it be accused of nurturing "terrorists" as possible assets in future contingencies?

The free run the US and regional allies like Saudi Arabia had to alter the ground realities in Syria ended

when the Russians arrived in 2015, boots on the ground.

A brief background to place Baghdadi in perspective. President Barack Obama was livid with Iraqi PM Nouri al Maliki for not signing the status of forces agreement before the US troops' departure. Washington wanted him out.

Just about this time, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi puts out a video from Mosul's main mosque on July 4, 2014, declaring the formation of an Islamic Caliphate. In August 2014, Mr Obama gave a significant interview to Thomas L. Friedman of the *New York Times*. Asked why he didn't order airstrikes against ISIS when it reared its head in June-July 2014, Mr Obama admitted that airstrikes on Baghdadi in July "would have taken the pressure off Nouri al Maliki". Iraq's stubbornly anti-American Shia PM. In other words, the rapid march of ISIS from Mosul to Baghdad's outskirts was "facilitated" to keep the pressure on the PM. In September 2014, Mr Maliki was shown the door. Moral: Terrorists can be assets in certain circumstances!

The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi

SHORT TAKES

LANKA ARRESTS
'MRS WORLD'
OVER ASSAULT

Colombo: Colombo police on Thursday arrested the current "Mrs World" on charges of assault over an on-stage fracas in which she pulled the crown off the head of the new "Mrs Sri Lanka". Caroline Jurie yanked the crown off Pushpika de Silva minutes after she was declared "Mrs Sri Lanka 2020" in a Sunday gala at Colombo's Nelum Pokuna theatre.

Jurie was the previous year's "Mrs Sri Lanka" and had gone on to win the "Mrs World" competition organised by a California-based company.

De Silva needed hospital treatment after the incident, seen by stunned spectators in a packed venue as well as a live social media audience.

"We have arrested Jurie and (her associate) Chula Manamendra in connection with a charge of assault and causing damage to Nelum Pokuna (theatre)," senior police official Ajith Rohana said.

TURKEY BLAMES
EUROPEAN UNION
FOR 'SOFAGATE'

Istanbul: Turkey on Thursday blamed Brussels for seating arrangements that left European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen without a chair during a meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Turkish leader came under a torrent of criticism after images went viral of his Tuesday meeting with von der Leyen and European Council president Charles Michel in Ankara.

The room where the three leaders were hosted had only two chairs arranged next to the corresponding EU and Turkish flags.

Erdogan and Michel quickly seated themselves while von der Leyen — whose diplomatic rank is the same as that of the two men — was left standing.

"Ehm," she said as she spread her arms in wonder and looked directly at Michel and Erdogan.

UK OFFERS
\$59 MN TO HELP
HK MIGRANTS

Hong Kong: The British government said Thursday it is setting up a 43 million pound (\$59 million) fund to help migrants from Hong Kong settle in the country as they escape increasing political repression in the former colony.

The offer extends to holders of British National (Overseas) passports who have been offered special visas, opening a path to work, residency and eventual citizenship to up to 5 million of Hong Kong's 7.4 million people.

The integration program will provide funding to help arrivals access housing, education and jobs. Around 10 per cent of the funds will go toward establishing 12 "virtual welcome hubs" across Great Britain and Northern Ireland to "coordinate support and give practical advice and assistance," the British Consulate-General said.

CYCLONE
SEROJA SET TO
HIT AUSTRALIA

Sydney: Australian authorities on Thursday urged holidaymakers to evacuate a stretch of the country's western coastline in the path of a cyclone that has devastated parts of Indonesia and East Timor.

Tropical Cyclone Seroja is expected to hit Western Australia late Sunday or early Monday after tracking south.

It is forecast to bring "destructive winds with gusts of 150 kilometres per hour (93 miles per hour) and intense rainfall that could cause flash flooding" on parts of the coast, the Bureau of Meteorology said.

Emergency services warned holidaymakers — many camping or travelling in caravans — to leave ahead of forecast weekend storms that would be quickly followed by the cyclone. "If you remain in the area in a tent or caravan, you are at risk," said assistant commissioner Paul Ryan, adding that these structures were "highly dangerous" in wild weather.

Local residents were also urged to prepare emergency kits and ensure their homes were ready for the expected impact. The cyclone is forecast to make landfall in a relatively isolated part of Western Australia — a sprawling, sparsely populated state — as a category 2 or 3 system.

US may extend
its troops stay
in Afghanistan

Washington, April 8: Without coming right out and saying it, President Joe Biden seems ready to let lapse a May 1 deadline for completing a withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

Orderly withdrawals take time, and Biden is running out of it.

Biden has inched so close to the deadline that his indecision amounts almost to a decision to put off, at least for a number of months, a pullout of the remaining 2,500 troops and continue supporting the Afghan military at the risk of a Taliban backlash.

Removing all of the troops and their equipment in the next three weeks — along with coalition partners who can't get out on their own — would be difficult logistically, as Biden himself suggested in late March. "It's going to be hard to meet the May 1 deadline," he said. "Just in terms of tactical reasons, it's hard to get those troops out." Tellingly, he added, "And if we leave, we're going to do so in a safe and orderly way." James Stavridis, a retired Navy admiral who served as NATO's top commander from 2009 to 2013, says it would be unwise at this point to get out quickly.

"Sometimes not making a decision becomes a decision, which seems the case with the May 1 deadline," Stavridis said in an

U.S. RESUMES
PALESTINE FUND
CUT BY TRUMP

Washington, April 8: US President Joe Biden restored aid to the Palestinians to a tune of \$235 million, drawing a rebuke by ally Israel, as he promised to press for a two-state solution.

In his sharpest break on the conflict yet from the staunchly pro-Israel Donald Trump, Biden said the United States would resume funding for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees that his predecessor had severed.

The State Department said the United States would contribute \$150 million to the UN agency and offer \$75 million in economic and development assistance for the West Bank and Gaza as well as \$10 million for peacebuilding efforts.

— AFP

email exchange ON Wednesday. "The most prudent course of action feels like a six-month extension and an attempt to get the Taliban truly meeting their promises — essentially permitting a legitimate conditions based" withdrawal in the fall." There are crosscurrents of pressure on Biden.

— AP

NZ bans travel
from India

Melbourne/Wellington, April 8: New Zealand has for the first time imposed a temporary ban on travellers coming from India, including its citizens, from April 11 to 28 due to a surge in Covid-19 cases among visitors to this country, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Thursday.

The travel restriction comes after New Zealand recorded 23 new positive Coronavirus cases in managed isolation on Thursday, of which 17 came from India, Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield was quoted as saying by media reports. While arrivals from India had triggered the risk assessment, Prime Minister Ardern said the government would be looking at risks posed by other Covid-19 hotspot countries.

The ban will begin from 4pm local time on April 11

and will be in place until April 28, she said. "This is not a permanent arrangement but rather a temporary measure," Ardern said, adding that the temporary hold would also help reduce the risk that travellers themselves faced.

The ban covers all travellers, including New Zealand citizens and permanent residents. While there have been previous travel bans on travellers from some countries, New Zealand has never suspended travel to New Zealand citizens and residents, Ardern said, adding that she "absolutely understands the difficulty that this temporary suspension will cause" for Kiwis in India.

"But I also feel a sense of responsibility and obligation to find ways to reduce risks that travellers are experiencing," she said.

— PTI

S'pore PM-in-waiting bows out

Singapore, April 8: A prominent Singapore minister stepped aside on Thursday as the successor to the premier, in a shock move that upended the tightly-controlled country's carefully planned power transfer.

Finance minister Heng Swee Keat was in 2018 named to a key post in the ruling party that put him in pole position to take over when Singapore's founding family hands over the premiership.

He was expected to replace Prime Minister

Lee Hsien Loong, son of the late founding premier Lee Kuan Yew, who oversaw the country's rapid economic development during three decades of sometimes authoritarian rule.

The power transfer is highly sensitive, as the country of 5.7 million's transformation into one of the world's wealthiest and most stable societies is linked in many people's minds to the Lee family's rule.

Heng was uncharismatic and, following his designation as Singapore's leader

Myanmar actor arrested as
junta hunts 120 celebrities

Celebrities are facing accusations of spreading dissent against military

Yangon, April 8: A leading Myanmar actor, singer and model who has backed the country's anti-coup protests was arrested on Thursday, his sister said, as the junta hunts more than 100 celebrities for supporting the movement.

The country has been rocked by daily protests since the military seized power on February 1, and the authorities have launched a bloody crackdown on dissent, with hundreds killed and more than 2,500 arrested.

Paing Takhon, 24 — a star in both Myanmar and neighbouring Thailand — has been active in the protest movement both in person at rallies and through his massive social media following.

"Some 50 soldiers with eight military trucks," came to arrest him from his mother's home in the North Dagon area of Yangon early Thursday, his sister Thi Lwin posted on Facebook.

"As he's seriously ill, they arrested him calmly without violence. We do not know where he's taken," she added. According to recent posts on his social media — where he had more than a million followers on Facebook and Instagram — Paing Takhon has been in poor health.

"I haven't been in good health for many days. I used to pray whenever I worshipped Buddha for good health and to get peace in Myanmar as soon as possible," he wrote on Wednesday. In February he posted pictures of himself in a white tracksuit with a megaphone, hard hat and a white fluffy dog strapped to his chest at a protest.

"Help us stop crime against humanity," he posted on Instagram in February. His social media pages have been taken down, though it is not clear whether he did this himself.



A Woman looks at shoes displayed with flowers in Yangon's Myaynigone township, as part of the 'Marching Shoes Strike' called on social media to protest against the demonstration against the military coup in Myanmar. — AFP

● PAING TAKHON is also famous in Thailand and has appeared in TV commercials and shows.

Paing Takhon is also famous in Thailand and has appeared in TV commercials and shows.

In January, he shaved his head and briefly joined the Buddhist monkhood, posting pictures of himself in burgundy robes.

The Myanmar authorities have published a list of some 120 celebrities wanted for arrest, including singers Lin Lin and Chit Thu Wai, actors Phway Phway, Eaindra Kyaw Zin and Pyay Ti Oo and model May Myat Noe.

The celebrities are facing accusations of spreading dissent against the military, an offence that carries a three year jail term if convicted.

— AFP

UK condemns 'bullying'

London, April 8: Britain on Thursday condemned "bullying" by the Myanmar junta after the country's ambassador to London was ousted in an extraordinary diplomatic coup after calling for the release of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Diplomats loyal to the Myanmar military authorities seized control of the embassy on Wednesday, leaving ambassador Kyaw Zwar Minn locked out in the street.

The ambassador said the defence attache had taken over the mission in "a kind of coup", two months after the military seized power in Myanmar.

Daily protests demanding a return of democracy

have rocked the country and brought a brutal response from the armed forces, with almost 600 civilians killed according to a local monitoring group.

The coup prompted several high-profile diplomatic defections, including the country's ambassador to the United Nations.

The junta recalled Kyaw Zwar Minn last month after he issued a statement urging them to release Suu Kyi and deposed civilian President Win Myint.

British foreign minister Dominic Raab tweeted his support for the ambassador.

"We condemn the bullying actions of the Myanmar military regime

in London yesterday, and I pay tribute to Kyaw Zwar Minn for his courage," Raab wrote.

"The UK continues to call for an end to the coup and the appalling violence, and a swift restoration of democracy." Protesters gathered outside the mission on Wednesday evening with the ousted ambassador, who told the *Daily Telegraph* that "when I left the embassy, they stormed inside the embassy and took it." "They said they received instruction from the capital, so they are not going to let me in," he added, calling on the British government to intervene.

— AFP

China protests against US destroyer
crossing Taiwan Strait, tensions rise

Beijing, April 8: China on Thursday protested the passage of a U.S. destroyer through the Taiwan Strait in the latest move as both nations increase their naval activity in the region.

China tracked and monitored the USS John S. McCain throughout its passage on Wednesday, Zhang Chunhui, spokesperson for the Chinese military's eastern

theater command, said in a statement. The US move sent the "wrong signal" to Taiwan's government and "willfully disrupted the regional situation by endangering peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," he said.

China firmly opposed the move and Chinese forces will respond with "strict precautions and vigilance," he added.

China threatens to invade Taiwan to assert its claim over the self-governing island democracy, which enjoys strong US support.

In a one-sentence statement, the US Navy said the McCain "conducted a routine Taiwan Strait transit April 7 (local time) through international waters in accordance with international law."

The McCain's transit follows China's announcement on Monday that its

aircraft carrier Liaoning and associated vessels were holding drills near Taiwan meant to help it "safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests," terms often interpreted as being directed at Taiwan's leadership that has refused to give in to Beijing's demands that it recognise the island as part of Chinese territory.

— AP

SOUTH KOREA'S OPPOSITION PARTY
WINS TWO KEY LOCAL ELECTIONS

Seoul, April 8: South Korea's conservative opposition party has won sweeping victories in mayoral by-elections in the country's two biggest cities, votes seen as a test of public sentiment ahead of presidential polls.

Oh Se-hoon of the opposition People Power Party won 57.5 per cent of the votes cast in Wednesday's election in Seoul, the capital city, according to the final vote tally released by the National Election Commission. Park Young-sun of the ruling Democratic Party won

39.2 per cent of the votes. In the mayoral election in Busan, the country's second-largest city, People Power Party candidate Park Heong-joon beat Democratic Party candidate Kim Young-choon by about 28 percentage points, the tally showed.

In recent months, President Moon Jae-in and his ruling party have been grappling with falling approval ratings due to soaring house prices, allegations of real estate speculation involving public officials and other purported policy missteps.

BORIS SLAMS
NORTHERN
IRELAND RIOTS

London, April 8: Britain's prime minister has condemned another night of violence in Northern Ireland, after crowds threw petrol bombs and a bus was set on fire in Belfast.

The violence follows a week of rioting which some have suggested is the first evidence Brexit turbulence may be boiling into unrest in the British province, where post-EU rules are stoking fury among pro-UK sections.

Crowds gathered at Lanark Way in Belfast "where a bus has been set on fire", the Police Service Northern Ireland confirmed, advising people to avoid Springfield and West Circular roads.

"The way to resolve differences is through dialogue, not violence or criminality," PM Boris Johnson tweeted late Wednesday. He added he was "deeply concerned" by the scenes. A set of gates on the Lanark Way peace line — walls separating nationalist and unionist groups — were also set alight, according to the BBC's Northern Ireland correspondent.

— AFP

SOCIAL VISION

Dr Sanduk Ruit has already performed over 1,30,000 cataract surgeries at affordable rates

Nepal's God of Sight to expand work beyond border

Lumbini (Nepal), April 8: Just next to the Mayadevi temple where Buddha was born more than 2,600 years ago, hundreds of people lined up outside a makeshift hospital on a recent hazy day, hoping their fading eyesight could be restored.

A day later, these saffron-robed Buddhist monks, old farmers and housewives were able to see the world again because the nation's renowned eye surgeon Dr Sanduk Ruit was there with his innovative and

inexpensive cataract surgery that has earned him many awards.

At the visitor center turned into eye temporary hospital in Lumbini, located 288 kilometers (180 miles) south west of Nepal's capital Kathmandu, the assembly line surgery made it possible for the nearly 400 patients to get Ruit's surgery in just three days.

"The whole objective, aim and my passion and love is to see there remain no people with unnecessary blindness in this part

● RUIT SAID the idea of the Tej Kohli Ruit Foundation is to make cataract surgeries in Nepal affordable and accessible to all.

of the world," Ruit said, also known as Nepal's "God of Sight."

"It is important that the people do receive equitable service and not that have receive and have not don't receive it. I want to make sure that everybody receives it." Many people in Nepal, most of them

poor, have benefited from Ruit's work where he founded the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology in Kathmandu and regularly visits remote villages high in the mountains and low lands of the Himalayan nation, taking with him a team of experts and equipment bringing surgery to their villages.

Ruit has already performed some 1,30,000 cataract surgeries and is now aiming to expand his work, taking it to as many countries as possible through

ugh a foundation he has formed with a British philanthropist Tej Kohli which targets 5,00,000 surgeries in the next five years.

Ruit said the idea of the Tej Kohli Ruit Foundation is to make cataract surgeries in Nepal affordable and accessible to all. "We will scale it up globally to other parts of the world where it is needed," he said. Ruit began his work in 1984 when the surgery was done by removing the entire cloudy cataract and giving thick glasses. — AP



Dr. Sanduk Ruit checks a patient's eye sight after his eye patches are removed at an eye camp in Lumbini, Nepal. — AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,746.21	0.17
Nifty 50	14,873.80	0.37
S&P 500*	4,094.14	0.35
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)*	63.05	-0.17
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.031	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.640	-0.014

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Srei Equipment to get \$250 mn capital infusion

Srei Equipment Finance said it has received expression of interest of up to \$250 million capital infusion from two international private equity investors. The PE funds are US-based Arena Investors LP, and Singapore's Makara Capital Partners, the subsidiary of Srei Infrastructure Finance said. The firm's Strategic Coordination Committee, chaired by independent director Malay Mukherjee, will engage with the PE investors, it said.

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After eight months of outflows Equity MF schemes see ₹10,000 cr inflow

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 8

After almost a year of monthly outflows, equity schemes of the mutual fund industry saw inflows of over Rs 10,000 crore last month.

Total average asset under management (AAUM) of the industry for March also rose at a new all time high of over Rs 32.17 lakh crore, monthly data released by the Association of Mutual Fund in India showed.

Inflows of Rs 9,115.12 crore were seen across all growth/equity-oriented schemes. In hybrid schemes, which also invest in equities, there was inflow of Rs 6,210.05 crore.

Index funds saw inflows of Rs 2,126 crore. "Equity oriented mutual funds witnessed a month of



positive net flows after eight continuous months of net outflows. Net flows were witnessed across equity fund categories. While it's too early to make any conclusions, it seems like equity investors waiting on the sidelines for a market correction, have started making allocations, taking a long-term investing view on equities," said Kaustubh Belapurkar,

director-Research, Morningstar India.

"FY 20-21 has been net negative for equity fund flows, given the eight months of outflows from July 2020 to Feb. 2021 as investors looked to book profit and rebalance portfolios to other asset classes as markets bounced back sharply from March lows and made new highs," Belapurkar said.

Amazon reveals scorching growth in India

SARITHA RAI
APRIL 8

Amazon.com Inc. offered a rare peek into the Covid-era growth of its Indian business while it battles Walmart Inc in its biggest overseas market.

The US online giant said it has enabled exports of Indian-made goods worth \$3 billion and created over a million local jobs since it began operating in India about a decade ago – about \$1 billion of that and 300,000 jobs since January 2020 alone. About 250,000

new sellers have joined Amazon.in since and more than 50,000 offline retailers and neighbourhood stores are now on the platform.

The numbers illustrate the frenetic pace of growth in Indian online retail after the pandemic accelerated buying and selling in segments beyond smart-phones and fashion. But Amazon has to contend with Walmart's Flipkart and homegrown competitor Reliance Industries Ltd. in India, an increasingly important growth market since Amazon's

exit from China about a decade ago. American firms also face tightening regulations, antitrust scrutiny and accusations they've elbowed local players aside.

Amazon India chief Amit Agarwal said the Seattle giant is on track to fulfill commitments made when founder Jeff Bezos visited India in January 2020: to digitally enable 10 million businesses, handle e-commerce exports worth \$10 billion and create 1 million additional jobs in the five years to 2025. —Bloomberg

NCLAT stays further move against Oyo

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) on Thursday admitted the plea of Oyo's subsidiary Oyo Hotels and Homes (OHHPL) against an insolvency move and ordered a stay on formation of a committee of creditors (COC).

Earlier, the Ahmedabad bench of NCLT had admitted a petition for initiating insolvency proceedings against OHHPL for recovery of Rs 16 lakh under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). Oyo challenged this at the appellate tribunal on Wednesday.

OHHPL, which operates the Weddingz.in brand, was dragged to the NCLT by its creditor Rakesh Yadav for allegedly defaulting Rs 16 lakh.

The NCLT admitted the insolvency plea on March 30. The tribunal had also asked all creditors of OHHPL to submit their claim to the resolution professional by April 15, 2021.

"The NCLAT provided a stay for the formation of COC in IBC proceedings against OHHPL, a subsidiary of Oyo. OHHPL appealed the order in front of NCLAT and explained that a demand draft of Rs 16 lakh was issued to the claimant under protest and the claimant has willingly banked the DD," the company statement said.

Next victim of chip is home internet router

THOMAS SEAL, TAKASHI MOCHIZUKI & DEBBY WU
APRIL 8



Broadband providers are seeing delays of more than a year when ordering internet routers, becoming yet another victim of chip shortages choking global supply chains and adding challenges for millions still working from home.

Carriers have been quoted order times as long as 60 weeks, more than doubling previous waits, according to people familiar with the matter.

Sharp coronavirus manufacturing shutdowns a year ago were exacerbated by a prolonged surge in

demand for better home broadband equipment, said Karsten Gewecke, head of European regional business for Zyxel Communications Corp, a Taiwan-based router-maker. Since January, it's asked customers to order products a year in advance, he said, because the lead time for components like chips from Broadcom Inc. doubled to a year or more since then. Zyxel is a major supplier

of routers, with customers including Norway's Telenor ASA and Britain's Zen Internet.

Adtran, a US network equipment maker picking up market share from China's Huawei Technologies in Europe, has also warned customers of supply chain risks and lead-time extensions in recent months.

No carrier has run out of routers completely yet, but the supply chain looks strained for the next six months, so it's possible, according to Gewecke. "We have been very close several times," he said in a video call. "It could still happen."

—Bloomberg

BUSINESS BRIEFS

RETAIL CAR SALES CLIMB 28% IN MARCH: FADA

Pune, April 8: The Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (Fada) on Thursday said passenger vehicle (PV) retail sales in March rose 28.39 per cent to 2,79,745 units compared with 2,17,879 units in the year-ago period. But two-wheeler sales declined 35.26 per cent to 11,95,445 units last month from 18,46,613 units. Despite the lower base, overall vehicle sales across segments fell 28.64 per cent to about 16.49 lakh units, pulled down two-wheelers.

—Michael Gonsalves

LARGE-CAP FUNDS UNDERPERFORM

Mumbai, April 8: Four-fifths of Indian large-cap funds have underperformed when compared to benchmark indices in 2020. In the equity-linked saving schemes (ELSS) and mid/small-cap funds, the performance was marginally

better with the underperformance of 65 per cent and 67 per cent against the benchmarks, S&P Indices Versus Active (Spiva) said. In H2 of 2020 100 per cent of the large cap funds, 80 per cent of the ELSS funds and 53 per cent of the mid-/small-cap funds underperformed their respective benchmarks. —PTI

MOHALLA BECOMES UNICORN



April 8: Mohalla Tech said it raised \$502 million from investors led by Lightspeed Ventures and Tiger Global, increasing its valuation to more than \$2.1 billion. Mohalla Tech, founded in 2015, has developed products like social media platform ShareChat and the short-video app Moj. Their user community numbers 280 million, the firm said. India's startups have scored a flurry of new fundings this year, with at least five reaching a valuation of \$1 billion or more just this week. They include Meesho Inc, Cred, Groww and API Holdings Pvt Ltd.

—Saritha Rai/Bloomberg

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Sachin discharged from hospital

Mumbai: Former India captain and batting icon Sachin Tendulkar, who was hospitalised as a precautionary measure after testing positive for Covid-19, was on Thursday discharged and is now recuperating in home isolation here. The former player, who will turn 48 later this month, posted a statement on Twitter to confirm the development. "I have just come home from the hospital and will remain isolated while continuing to rest and recuperate. I would like to thank everyone for all the good wishes and prayers. Really appreciate it," Tendulkar said. Tendulkar also thanked the medical staff for taking care of him during the hospitalisation. — PTI

Vihari is all set for Warwickshire

Birmingham: Warwickshire have completed the signing of Hanuma Vihari and the English county side on Thursday said the India allrounder is likely to feature in the early part of the championship, after undergoing six days of quarantine. Warwickshire is hopeful of the Indian playing in next week's match against Nottinghamshire. "Hanuma will arrive in the UK this afternoon," said Warwickshire's director of cricket Paul Farbrace. Vihari was signed up by Warwickshire as cover for South African Pieter Malan after he faced difficulties in obtaining a visa due to travel restrictions owing to the raging pandemic. — PTI

French Open is delayed by a week

Paris: The French Open was on Thursday delayed by a week to May 30-June 13 in the hope that heightened Covid-19 restrictions in France will have eased by then to allow the maximum number of fans to attend the event. The French tennis federation (FFT) said the decision had been made in the wake of French President Emmanuel Macron's announcement last month that the government wanted some cultural venues to be back up and running from mid-May onwards, "subject to the improvement of the health situation". — AFP

Magical Mbappe stars for PSG 4 Indian sailors book Tokyo spot

Kylian, Marquinhos dazzle to get past Bayern 3-2 in first leg of Champions League quarterfinals

Munich, April 8: Kylian Mbappe insisted Paris Saint-Germain still have it all to do after he scored twice in a thrilling 3-2 win at holders Bayern Munich in Wednesday's Champions League quarterfinal first leg.

Bayern had their 19-match unbeaten run in the Champions League ended in a repeat of last year's final, as the German giants suffered their first European defeat since March 2019.

PSG raced into a 2-0 lead after just 28 minutes behind closed doors at the Allianz Arena as Neymar created goals for Mbappe and Marquinhos.

Bayern, whose top scorer Robert Lewandowski is sidelined by a knee injury, drew level courtesy of headers by Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting and Thomas Mueller.

However, Mbappe showed his class with a superb second goal to give the visitors an advantage for the return leg in Paris.

PSG goalkeeper Keylor Navas played a key role with a string of saves as Bayern peppered his goal with 31 shots compared to the French club's six.

The opening goal came after Neymar sprinted through a gaping hole in the defence and laid the ball off for Mbappe, whose shot flew into the net through Manuel Neuer's legs.

PSG forward Julian Draxler had a goal disallowed with Mbappe offside in the build-up as the visitors kept up the pressure.

Bayern midfielder Leon Goretzka powered a header into the feet of Navas just before the hosts fell two goals behind.

A clearance kick only got as far as Neymar, whose ball over the top found Marquinhos unmarked in the area to stroke his shot past Neuer, shortly before the Paris Saint-Germain's captain limped off injured.

Flick responded by bringing on Alphonso Davies to provide pace on the flanks and moved David Alaba into defensive midfield.

The hosts pulled a goal back when Mueller's cross



Paris Saint-Germain's Kylian Mbappe vies for the ball with Bayern Munich's David Alaba during their UEFA Champions League quarterfinal first leg match in Munich, southern Germany, on Wednesday. PSG won 3-2.

— AFP

THE RESULTS

(QUARTERFINALS FIRST LEGS)

Paris Saint-Germain (Kylian Mbappe 3, 68, Marquinhos 28)	3
Bayern Munich (Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting 37, Thomas Mueller 60)	2
Chelsea (Mason Mount 32, Ben Chilwell 85)	2
Porto	0

was headed past Navas by Choupo-Moting to make it 2-1 at half-time.

However, the wintry night in Munich belatedly helped Chelsea to a 2-0 first-leg win over Porto, whose wasteful finishing could have scuppered their hopes of springing another Champions League

with 22 minutes left.

BLUES PIP PORTO

A classy goal from Mason Mount on Wednesday helped Chelsea to a 2-0 first-leg win over Porto, whose wasteful finishing could have scuppered their hopes of springing another Champions League

upset in the quarterfinals. Mount's slick turn and shot in the first half would have been painful enough for Porto, who repeatedly lacked the precision to take advantage.

Instead, their misery was compounded by Ben Chilwell capitalising on a mistake at the back to score a late second that gave Chelsea another away goal and leaves them on the brink of the semi-finals.

They were away goals only in name given both these teams were playing in the unfamiliar Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan, where they will meet again next week, just with the home and away roles reversed.

— AFP

INTER RIDE ON LUKAKU GOAL; JUVE TOO WIN

Milan, April 8: Romelu Lukaku powered Inter Milan closer to their first league title in over a decade by scoring and setting up Lautaro Martinez in Wednesday's 2-1 win over Sassuolo that moved his team 11 points clear at the top of Italian league.

Champions Juventus are 12 points behind Inter in third after beating Napoli 2-1, as Paulo Dybala scored on his return after nearly three months out with the league's leading scorer Cristiano Ronaldo also on target.

Both fixtures had been rescheduled because of Coronavirus outbreaks at Inter last month and Napoli in early October.

Lukaku got his head to an Ashley Young cross to score his 21st league goal this campaign after in the 10th minute at the San Siro and then laid on Lautaro for the second midway through the second half.

Hamed Junior Traore pulled a goal back for the visitors with five minutes to go before Inter claimed a 10th consecutive league win to strengthen their grip on the title.

Antonio Conte's side are on course for a 19th Serie A title and first since 2010.

Juve's push for a 10th consecutive league title had faltered after taking just one point from their last two league games against lowly Benevento and Torino. However their win against Napoli was crucial for their Champions League ambitions next season with both teams equal on points in fourth place before kick-off in Turin.

"Great lads, three very important points! we need this spirit until the end," Ronaldo wrote on Instagram after bringing his tally to 773 career goals, second only to Czech Josef Bican's 805.

— AFP

New Delhi, April 8: In a historic first for India, four sailors from the country will compete at this year's Olympics after Vishnu Saravanan and the pair of Ganapathy Chengappa and Varun Thakkar made the cut for Tokyo at the Asian Qualifiers in Oman on Thursday.

This was after Nethra Kumanan who on Wednesday became the first Indian woman sailor to qualify for the Olympics in the laser radial event in the Mussanah Open Championship, which is an Asian Olympic qualifying event. It is also the first time that India will compete in three sailing events in the Olympics.

So far, India had competed in only one event in all the earlier Olympics

though two sailors represented the country on four occasions.

"Yes, history has been scripted. Four Indian sailors have qualified for Olympics to compete in three events. It's the maximum number of sailors qualified and also in number of events," Yachting Association of India joint secretary general Capt Jitendra Dixit said.

"Nethra already qualified on Wednesday and today Vishnu and then the

pair of Ganapathy and Varun made it," he added.

On Thursday, Saravanan was the first to qualify for the Tokyo Games in Laser Standard Class after finishing second in the overall standings.

Later, the duo of Chengappa and Thakkar finished on top of the points table in the 49er Class. The two had won a bronze medal in the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia.

"I congratulate Indian athletes Nethra Kumanan, KC Ganapathy and Varun Thakkar who have qualified for Tokyo Olympic in sailing. I'm particularly proud of the quota of Nethra, who is India's first-ever female sailor to qualify for the Olympics!" tweeted sports minister Kiren Rijju.

Two sailors make a team in the 49er Class while laser class is a single sailor event.

Also, two sailors qualify for Tokyo Olympics from laser class events while only one team can do so in the 49er class.

Saravanan was third till the penultimate day on Wednesday but won the medal race on Thursday to jump to second place overall with 53 points and book a Tokyo Olympics quota.

— PTI

OVERSPEEDING BEHIND TIGER'S BRUTAL CRASH

Los Angeles, April 8: Tiger Woods was driving more than 80 mph nearly twice the posted speed limit on a downhill stretch of road when he lost control of an SUV and crashed in a wreck that seriously injured the golf superstar, authorities said.

Sheriff Alex Villanueva blamed the February 23 crash outside Los Angeles solely on excessive speed and Woods' loss of control behind the wheel. The athlete will not face any citations for his third high-profile collision in 11 years.

"The primary causal factor for this traffic collision was driving at a speed unsafe for the road conditions and the inability to negotiate the curve of the roadway. Woods was driving 84 to 87 mph (135 to 140 kph) in an area with a speed limit of 45 mph (72 kph)," Villanueva said.

No one else was hurt, and no other vehicles were involved. The stretch of road is known for wrecks and drivers who frequently hit high speeds. Due to the steepness of the terrain, a runaway truck escape lane is available just beyond where he crashed. — AP

