

SHORT TAKES

DU to set up Covid-19 isolation centre in Dwarka

New Delhi: The Delhi University will soon be starting a Covid-19 isolation centre with a capacity of 180 beds in Dwarka, the varsity said on Wednesday. At least 10 staffers of the university have lost their lives due to the virus in the last week while many others are infected. “#Covid Isolation Centre @UnivofDelhi...The University of Delhi with Deen Dayal Upadhyaya College, in association with ISKON Temple, Dwarka supported by Delhi Govt, is starting a COVID Isolation Centre at Hostel Block of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya College, Sector 3, Dwarka, Delhi,” the varsity said in a tweet. The Covid Isolation Centre will have a capacity of 180 beds of which some will have oxygen support system, it said, adding the centre is expected to start by the weekend. The centre will be open to the general public too. Out of 180 beds, 125 will be oxygen beds, an official said. The Delhi government will be providing three doctors and three nurses for the centre. — PTI

Doc seeks to use his closed hospital for Covid patients

New Delhi: A doctor who set up a 150-bed multi-specialty hospital which was closed down due to insolvency resolution process against its parent company requested the Delhi high court on Wednesday to allow it to operate for Covid-19 patients in the national capital. The doctor told the high court that he and his team of doctors and paramedical staff are ready to support operation of the hospital. A bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh issued notice to the health ministry, Delhi government and the resolution professional seeking their stand by May 7 on the public interest litigation (PIL) filed by the doctor. Delhi government additional standing counsel Santosh K. Tripathi opposed the PIL saying it was an attempt by the petitioner to interfere with the ongoing resolution process. Rakesh Saxena, who set up Febris Multispecialty Hospital under the parent company Durha Vitrak Pvt Ltd, said that considering the serious situation in the national capital — grappling with a huge surge in Covid-19 infections and shortage of beds, oxygen and medicines — his hospital be used to help people. — PTI

2 held for black marketing of oxygen cylinders

New Delhi: Two persons were arrested from west Delhi's Punjabi Bagh for alleged black-marketing of oxygen cylinders, police said on Wednesday, amid heightened demand for the life-saving gas due to surging coronavirus cases in the city. The accused have been identified as Shrey Oberai (30), a resident of Vikasuri, and Abhishek Nanda (32), a resident of Shalimar Bagh, they said. Police said they initiated the action following a tip-off that Oberai was allegedly involved in black-marketing of oxygen cylinders. A raid was conducted and he was apprehended with his car and two oxygen cylinders, police said. A senior police officer said Oberai told the police that he had purchased these cylinders for ₹37,000 each and was going to sell them for ₹50,000 each through social media. — PTI

12 Covid deaths in Noida, active cases over 7K

Noida: With 12 more fatalities, the Covid-19 death toll climbed to 192 in Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar on Wednesday, according to official data. The district registered 12 Covid-19 deaths on Tuesday as well. With 903 fresh cases, Gautam Buddha Nagar's Covid-19 tally went up to 38,519, while the active caseload reached 7,202, according to the figures released by the Uttar Pradesh health department for a 24-hour period. A total of 588 patients got discharged during the period with the cumulative number of recoveries reaching 31,125 in the district. — PTI

■ HC expresses unhappiness over non-supply of full oxygen quota allocated to Delhi, appeals suppliers not to hoard cylinders

It appears Centre wants people to die: HC

New Delhi, April 28: The Delhi high court on Wednesday expressed its unhappiness with the Centre over non-supply of the full oxygen quota allocated to the national capital and objected to a “change” in Covid treatment protocol on Remdesivir use, saying “it appears you want people to die”.

“This is wrong. This is a complete non-application of mind. Now people who do not have oxygen will not get Remdesivir either,” Justice Prathiba M. Singh said when the central government submitted that under the Covid treatment protocol being followed now only patients on oxygen support were being given Remdesivir. “It appears you want people to die,” the judge said.

Noting that the nation is facing an unprecedented crisis, the court also appealed to citizens and suppliers not to hoard oxygen cylinders and medicines to avoid creating an artificial shortage.

“People will keep dying and you will keep sitting,” a bench of justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said, questioning the Centre's order which allots oxygen to the national capital from three far off plants in West Bengal and Odisha that consumes a lot of time in transportation.

“The allocation made by the Centre to Delhi is 490 Metric Tonnes per day. Not for a single day, Delhi has been able to get the complete quantity, it said adding that this is primarily because three of the plants are situated in West Bengal and Odisha which are at a distance of 1300-1500 km from here.

The bench, which heard the matter for four hours, asked senior advocate Raj Shekhar Rao, who was appointed amicus curiae, to study the national allo-



Covid-19 patients in a ward at LNJ Hospital during the 2nd phase of coronavirus pandemic in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— G.N. JHA

■ **HOW MANY** states are facing the kind of shortage Delhi is facing, the bench said to the central government officer. The bench said now Delhi government has even arranged the tankers and what was the point of allocating certain quantity of oxygen to Delhi when it was not being supplied.

The bench said to the central government officer. The bench said now Delhi government has even arranged the tankers and what was the point of allocating certain quantity of oxygen to Delhi when it was not being supplied.

It actually pains my heart. I don't know what to say now. At least take empty tankers back by air, Justice Palli said.

The bench further said, You have to do it on SOS basis. You can't say one round of oxygen for Delhi

will take 5 days. You can airlift empty tankers. If your turn around time is five days, we must say your allocation is bad. To this, Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma said whatever is humanly possible is being done and there is a complete coordinated effort in this regard.

During the hearing, Mehta assured the bench that the government will re-apply mind on mapping and said if the amicus looks at it, it will be counter-productive. The bench said the amicus will come up with suggestions and the Centre shall look into the logistic problems relating to transporting oxygen from the far away plants to Delhi.

The court asked the Centre to file its response in this regard by April 30.

Justice Singh also said the court will consider later whether a medical committee should review if

the protocols or guidelines for administering Remdesivir need any modification. “Don't change the protocol only to reduce the shortage. That is wrong. As a result, doctors are not able to prescribe Remdesivir,” the court said and added, “This is complete mismanagement.”

The high court is handling multiple petitions relating to the pandemic with various benches conducting marathon hearings. The bench headed by Justice Sanghi appointed senior advocate Raj Shekhar Rao as amicus curiae to assist the court in dealing with the medical oxygen crisis and other issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It also asked the Delhi government to place a report on the number of RT-PCR tests conducted in the last seven days and the reasons for the reduction in the tests. — PTI

Monitor treatment of ex-RJD MP Shahabuddin, Delhi govt told

New Delhi, April 28: The Delhi high court on Wednesday directed the AAP government and the prison authority to ensure proper medical supervision and care of former RJD MP Mohd Shahabuddin who is suffering from Covid-19 and admitted in DDU Hospital. Justice Prathiba M. Singh said the doctor on duty for looking after Covid-19 patients shall monitor Shahabuddin's health condition and treatment and if required, also consult with senior doctors of the hospital.

The court also directed that the former RJD MP, serving life sentence for murder, be permitted to speak to a family member twice a day and disposed of his plea for protection of his life and monitoring of the treatment being



Mohd Shahabuddin provided to him at DDU Hospital. Delhi government additional standing counsel Santosh K. Tripathi said as per the prison rules, calls to family members are not permitted when a prisoner is outside the jail.

“But he is unwell, no.” the court said.

Subsequently, Tripathi said that the convict can be allowed to speak over the phone with one relative under supervision of the prison official(s). He also told the court that proper medical care was being provided to Shahabuddin and the same shall continue. — PTI

Kejri chairs meeting to increase oxygen beds in Delhi hospitals

New Delhi, April 28: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday chaired a meeting to chalk out a plan for increasing oxygen beds and strengthening home isolation system in the national capital following a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases and deaths. “Convened a meeting with officials. Discussed the plan to increase oxygen beds in the coming days, and strengthen home isolation system in Delhi. Please take all precautions and stay safe,” he tweeted. Delhi logged a record 381 Covid-19 deaths on Tuesday, while the positivity rate stood at 32.72 per cent. This was the sixth day on the trot that Delhi

has recorded over 300 deaths due to coronavirus.

It had reported 380 deaths on Monday, 350 on Sunday, 357 deaths on Saturday, 348 on Friday and 306 on Thursday, according to government data.

The national capital had recorded 20,201 cases on Monday, 22,933 on Sunday, 24,103 on Saturday, 24,331 on Friday, 26,169 on Thursday, and 24,638 on Wednesday.

The positivity rate was 35.02 per cent on Monday, 30.21 on Sunday, 32.27 per cent on Saturday, 32.43 on Friday, 36.24 on Thursday — the highest so far — 31.28 on Wednesday and 32.82 on Tuesday. — PTI

Only 1/3rd beds in ITBP Covid care centre taken as O2 supply ‘limited’

New Delhi, April 28: Only one-third of the total 500 oxygen beds at the ITBP operated Covid care centre in south Delhi are occupied as the border guarding force said the capacity to admit coronavirus infected patients at the facility is “limited” due to supply of oxygen.

The paramilitary force said there is a huge influx of patients demanding admission at the facility and it has requested the Delhi government to increase oxygen supply so that admissions are increased.

As per latest available data of the Sardar Patel Covid care centre (SPCCC) located in the Radha Soami Beas in south Delhi's Chhattarpur area, the facility that began operations on April 26 has taken a total of 176 patients till now.

Out of this, 122 are male while 54 are female patients.

The total occupied beds,

Army's Base Hospital to have 900 oxygen-beds by mid-June

New Delhi, April 28: The Indian Army's Base Hospital in Delhi will augment its capacity and will have 900 oxygenated beds for Covid-19 patients by mid-June, said an official statement on Wednesday. Currently, the Base Hospital has a total of 340 Covid-19 beds, out of which 250 are oxygenated, it noted.

“This resource was being severely stretched for additional capacities due to exponential rise in Covid cases,” the Army's statement noted. Despite the beds being filled to their

as per the data, are 164 while nine patients have been discharged, three referred to hospitals while eight patients have died after admission.

Some patients, out of the 26, were admitted through

capacity, patients over and above this capacity are being treated in the trauma centre after obtaining their willingness to wait for beds, it stated.

It said a plan was quickly put in place to expand the capacity to 650 beds — of which 450 beds will be oxygenated — by April 30. The ICU is also being enhanced from 12 beds 35 beds by April 29, it said. “Next phase of expansion will see the present capacity being augmented to 900 oxygenated beds by the second week of June 2021,” it noted. — PTI

referrals on Tuesday, officials said. The paramilitary force on Tuesday night had issued a statement and said that “almost all patients are in need of uninterrupted oxygen.” “The Delhi government

has been requested to increase oxygen supply so that admissions are increased,” it said.

The statement said “there is a huge influx of patients demanding admission but our capacity is limited by supply of oxygen”.

“Efforts are on to gradually increase the capacity of the centre,” it said.

Officials had said though the Delhi government has not issued any official order doing away with the mandatory process of getting an approval of the district surveillance officer (DSO) for admitting patients at this Centre, some were allowed in “on the basis of referrals, considering the condition of the patient and following due processes”.

The facility has been opened in view of Delhi registering a sharp rise in coronavirus cases, a shortage of oxygen beds and its healthcare system not being able to handle the pressure. — PTI



Relatives and family members push a cart full of fire wood near mass cremation of Covid-19 victims at Gazipur Crematorium in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— PTI

Complaints galore about glitches on CoWIN app

New Delhi, April 28: As the registration of all citizens above 18 years of age for vaccination against Covid-19 started on the CoWIN portal at 4 pm on Wednesday, many people took to social media to complain about the technical problems they faced trying to register themselves for the third phase of the inoculation drive that is scheduled to begin from May 1. Some of them complained that the portal was not responding while others complained that it had crashed. At 4.35 pm, a tweet from the verified Twitter handle of the Aarogya Setu mobile application said the CoWIN portal is working and that there was a minor glitch at 4 pm, which was fixed. “Covin portal is working. There was a minor glitch at 4 pm that was fixed. 18 plus can register,” it said. — PTI

As bodies continue to pile, breathing becomes a luxury

SANJAY BASAK
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

“There's no oxygen, no hospital beds, no crematorium,” “Oh god! This is so traumatic. These kids are alone at home and they are not well. Their father passed away. Pls HELP!!!” Ajay's (name changed) sister Tanvi is no more now, due to the non-availability of ICU bed,” is the kind of tweets, social media posts and WhatsApp messages, which keep appearing every five minutes.

As hospitals in Delhi and other states shut their doors for lack of oxygen, bodies pile up at crematoriums.

While India on Wednesday saw a record single-day rise of 3,60,960 coronavirus cases, which pushed the total tally to 1,79,97,267, and the death count crossed two lakh following 3,293 fresh fatalities, according to Union health ministry data, Haryana chief minister M.L. Khattar felt that counting dead bodies was futile. “Making noise will not bring back the dead. The focus should be on relief

measure”, Khattar said. Also amidst a severe shortage of oxygen, hospital beds, vaccines, work on the contentious Central Vista, a ₹1,000 crore project, which has been declared “essential”, continues unhindered. Hitting out, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said: “Central Vista is not essential, Central government with a vision is essential.”

As cases continue to rise, some say that this perhaps is just the tip of the iceberg. Experts have predicted that Covid cases could peak in mid-May. “We have found that there is a reasonable chance that the active cases in India could peak sometime between May 11-15 with 33-35 lakh cases...” M. Aggarwal, professor at the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, IIT-Kanpur had told a news agency. He also claimed that “It is a sharp slope, but on the way down, it would likely be equally sharp, coming down very fast and by end of May, we might see a dramatic reduction.”

During the recently held meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the

■ **AT A time** when Covid drugs are disappearing from markets and injections like Remdesivir, oxygen cylinders are being sold at exorbitant prices at the black market, BJP MP Gautam Gambhir was found distributing Fabiflu “free” to the voters of his constituency. Incidentally, Fabiflu cannot be procured without a prescription.

chief ministers, some of the key points discussed included the surge of Covid cases in mid-May and states which are at “particular risk.” According to reports, some of these points were “flagged” during a presentation made by NITI Aayog member Dr VK. Paul. Congress leader and eminent lawyer, Kapil Sibal stated: “Emergency measures should have been put in place in advance for creating facilities for the next wave of the pandemic...”

As Covid cases raged across the nation, the government's image continued to take a severe drubbing in the global media. *The New*

York Times stated, “how despite surging infections, the BJP and other parties continued to hold rallies with unmasked crowds.” *The Australian*, Australia's largest circulated newspaper argued that “arrogance, hyper-nationalism and bureaucratic incompetence have combined to create a crisis of proportions in India...” Of course, the Indian High Commission described the article as “completely baseless, malicious and slanderous.” On Tuesday *The Guardian* quoted WHO saying that India's “deadly Covid-19 second wave was caused by a perfect storm of mass gatherings, low vaccination rates and more contagious variants.”

As corpses overwhelm the crematoriums, burial grounds and breathing becomes a luxury in India, the additional secretary in health ministry went on record saying: “India has enough medical oxygen available, the challenge is to transport it to hospitals...”

Incidentally, as signs of a second wave became somewhat imminent, some of

the BJP leaders, including the Union ministers appeared to be in a denial mode.

Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said on March 7: “We are in the end game of Covid-19 pandemic in India...”

During the first week of April, Assam health minister and BJP heavyweight, Himanta Biswa Sarma declared: “The pandemic is over, we don't need masks.” Uttarakhnd chief minister Tirath Singh Rawat assured: “Maa Ganga's blessings in flow so there should be no corona.”

BJP leader from Gujarat, Govind Patel said: “Covid doesn't affect hardworking BJP workers.”

And of course, the mother of all quotes came from the Prime Minister: “India's fight against Covid is inspiring the world.”

The government, the Election Commission stand accused by the opposition and the High Courts of criminal negligence for holding mammoth election rallies and Kumbh Mela. As per Mr Sibal, the slogan was: “*Kumbh ki aastha coronavirus se bahut badi*

hain”(faith of Kumbh is above coronavirus).” Both election rallies and the Kumbh are being viewed as the super spreader.

Meanwhile, at a time when Covid drugs are disappearing from markets and injections like Remdesivir, oxygen cylinders are being sold at exorbitant prices at the black market, BJP MP Gautam Gambhir was found distributing Fabiflu “free” to the voters of his constituency. Incidentally, Fabiflu cannot be procured without a prescription.

While the BJP MP apparently hoarded the drugs for free distribution, the Delhi High court raised some pertinent questions. On Tuesday the court asked “how Gambhir procured Covid-19 drugs in large quantities and distributed them.” The court wondered: “Are these prescription drugs? How is anybody able to procure large quantities? Is he holding license to deal in drugs? Does this not require a license or what?” The silence as always has been deafening from the ruling side.

SHORT TAKES

Cong leader Eknath Gaikwad dies at 81

Mumbai: Former Maharashtra minister and senior Congress leader Eknath Gaikwad died of Covid-19 infection here on Wednesday, party sources said. He was 81. The former MP, who was the father of Maharashtra School Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad, succumbed to the viral infection at a city hospital around 10 am, the sources added. Eknath Gaikwad had also served as the president of the Mumbai Congress. Describing Gaikwad as a "father-like figure and mentor", Maharashtra Congress spokesperson Sachin Sawant said the death was "quite saddening", "Congress party and I have suffered immense loss. Short of words. Tributes!" Sawant tweeted. — PTI

DRDO to set up 500 medical O2 plants

New Delhi: The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) will set up 500 medical oxygen plants within the next three months from the allocation made by the PM Cares Fund, defence minister Rajnath Singh said on Wednesday. "The medical oxygen plant (MOP) technology developed by DRDO for on-board oxygen generation for light combat aircraft (LCA) Tejas will now help in fighting the current crisis of oxygen for Covid-19 patients," the minister said on Twitter. India is grappling with the rising number of coronavirus cases and hospitals in several states are reeling under a shortage of medical oxygen and beds. The DRDO, in a statement, explained that transfer of MOP technology has been done to Bengaluru-based Tata Advanced Systems Limited and Coimbatore-based Trident Pneumatics and these two companies will set up 380 plants. Moreover, 120 plants of 500 litres per minute capacity will be set up by industries working with the Indian Institute of Petroleum. — PTI

Bihar: Night curfew from 6 pm to 6 am

Patna: Amid surging coronavirus cases, the Bihar government on Wednesday ordered that shops/commercial establishments will close at 4 pm daily while the timing of the night curfew will now be from 6 pm to 6 am. Presently, the timing for shops/commercial establishments functioning was till 6 pm and night curfew was in force from 9 pm to 5 am. These decisions were taken at the meeting of the crisis management group chaired by chief minister Nitish Kumar during the day. Development commissioner Amir Subhani and principal secretary health Pratyaaya Amrit briefed media persons about the decisions. Amrit told reporters that congregation at the marriage functions have been lowered to 50 persons from 100. — PTI

SUSPECTED COVID PATIENT JUMPS OFF AIIMS, DIES

AGE CORRESPONDENT
RAIPUR, APRIL 28

A suspected Covid-19 patient committed suicide by jumping off the second floor of the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), Raipur early on Wednesday morning. This was the third such incident in the AIIMS, Raipur in the last ten months, hospital authorities said. "A 26-year-old man who was admitted in AIIMS, Raipur on April 26 after showing symptoms of Covid-19 jumped off the second floor of D-block of the hospital at 2.30 am. He was rushed to the emergency. He was declared dead by the doctors", Dr S.S. Sharma of AIIMS, Raipur told this newspaper. According to him, the deceased's wife also attempted to commit suicide by jumping off the building. But, she was stopped by the hospital staff. The deceased, Dilip Kumar, hailed from Baloda Bazar in Chhattisgarh. He was admitted to AIIMS, Raipur, on Monday after developing a fever. However, his report of a coronavirus test that was released after his death came negative, the doctor said. This was the third such incident in AIIMS, Raipur in the last ten months. Earlier, two elderly persons who were admitted to the AIIMS, Raipur after they tested positive for the virus committed suicide by jumping off the hospital building last year.

J&K declares 84-hour long lockdown in 11 districts

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, APRIL 28

Eleven out of twenty districts of Jammu and Kashmir are being brought under a 84-hour strict lockdown from 7 pm on Thursday as daily Covid-19 cases and deaths rise alarmingly in the Union Territory (UT). Earlier on Wednesday, the management of Srinagar's Jama Masjid announced that all congregational prayers at the historic grand mosque have been suspended for the time being "for the safety of worshippers". Srinagar's DC, Mohammad Ajaz Asad, said that in view of the rising number of Covid-19 cases, the district administration has ordered a "complete lockdown" for 84 hours in Srinagar from Thursday evening. He also tweeted, "There will be complete Lockdown in Srinagar district from 7:00 pm Thursday (29/04/2021) to 7:00 am Monday (03/05/2021)". Exemptions apply to essential services. Detailed order shall follow". The official sources said that similar restrictions will be enforced in ten more districts including Anantnag, Kulgam, Pulwama, Budgam, Ganderbal and Baramulla in Kashmir Valley and Jammu, Kathua, Reasi, and Udhampur in Jammu region as these too have witnessed an upward trajectory in both fresh cases of Covid-19 and deaths due to the virus over the past couple of weeks.

The authorities on Wednesday said that J&K reported 30 more Covid-19 deaths during the past 24 hours—the highest number of fatality count in a single day, so far-taking the toll to 2,227. More than two hundred fatalities were added this month alone, they said. Also, 3,023 fresh positive cases were reported, the highest 951 from Srinagar district followed by 499 in Jammu district. With these fresh cases, the number of infections has gone to 169,077.

Govt Will ensure no vaccine shortage for 18+ age drive

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

Centre will ensure that the rollout of the massive Corona vaccination drive starting May 1 in which all people above the age of 18 will be covered is completed without any problems and adequate quantity of vaccines were available to all state governments. Home minister Amit Shah chaired a high level meeting on Wednesday along with health minister Dr Harshvardhan and railway minister Piyush Goyal, cabinet secretary and senior officials from ministries of home, health, railways and others. Sources claimed that home minister gave strict instructions that all stake holders both in Centre and state government must ensure a smooth rollout of the vaccination programme. Adequate quanti-

Drive may not start from May 1 due to vaccine shortage
Free vaccines for all aged 18-44 years in Maharashtra

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, APRIL 28

Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday formally announced the free of cost vaccination for all people in the age group of 18 to 44 years in government hospitals. However, there is still an ambiguity over when the inoculation drive for this age group in the state will start. It was clear that it will not start from May 1 due to the shortage of vaccines.

"The state government has decided to vaccinate citizens in the age group of 18 to 44 free of cost. The schedule for the vaccination drive is being planned by the health department and will be informed to all accordingly," said Mr



Security close the barrier outside a Covid-19 coronavirus vaccination centre as vaccination stopped due to shortage of supplies in Mumbai on Wednesday. — PTI

Thackeray after chairing a Cabinet meeting.

"The state is faced with financial problems, but top priority has been given to the health of the citizens. Hence, a decision has been taken in the Cabinet meet-

ing to provide free vaccines to all from 18 to 44 age group," he said.

We are holding talks with the Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech to procure maximum quantity of vaccines

4 die in hospital fire in Maha, probe ordered

Short circuit behind fire, no Covid patient among dead

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, APRIL 28

In yet another hospital fire incident in Maharashtra, four patients died in a fire that broke out in the wee hours of Wednesday at a private hospital in Thane district. The state government has ordered a probe into the incident.

According to a civic official, the fire broke out in the meter room of the Prime Criticare Hospital at Kausa-Mumbra at 3.40 am. The fire took place due to a short circuit and it soon spread to the other areas of the premises. The first floor of the hospital was completely damaged in the fire.

There were no coronavirus patients in the hospital. The patients died while being shifted to other hospitals after the blaze and not due to burns. They may have inhaled smoke after the fire, he added.

Maharashtra minister and local NCP MLA Jitendra Awhad visited the spot. He said, "Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has been informed of the tragedy.



A person inspecting the damage caused by a major fire at a hospital, where four patients died, in Thane on Wednesday. — PTI

The family of each deceased will be given a compensation of five lakh and those injured will get one lakh each."

A high-level enquiry committee has been constituted to find the cause of the fire. It will comprise officials from the Thane Municipal Corporation and also police and medical personnel, he added.

Maharashtra has witnessed a spate of fire incidents in hospitals in recent months. On April 23, as many as 15 coronavirus patients had died after a fire broke out in

the ICU of a private hospital in Virar. Twenty two Covid patients on ventilator or oxygen support were suffocated to death when their oxygen supply stopped suddenly due to a malfunction in the main storage at a civic hospital in Nashik last week.

A fire broke out in Mumbai's Dreams Mall, which housed a Covid-designated hospital, on the intervening night of March 25-26. The fire, which raged for over 40 hours, claimed nine lives, including those of patients on ventilator support.

Kerala will buy 1 cr vaccines directly from manufacturers

GILVESTER ASSARY
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 28

The Kerala government has decided to purchase 1 cr vaccine directly from the manufacturers during the next three months.

The decision was taken at the Cabinet meeting in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday. While 70 lakh doses of Covishield vaccine would be purchased from Serum Institute of India, the remaining 30 lakh doses of Covaxin would be obtained from Bharat Biotech.

Chief minister Mr Pinarayi Vijayan said the government had already decided to provide vaccine free of cost to all including those in the age group of 18-45 years. He said 70 lakh vaccine

Kerala sees record 35,013 1-day cases

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 28

Kerala on Wednesday reported 35,013 cases of Covid 19 taking the total number of active cases in the state to 2,66,646. During the last 24 hours 1,38,190 samples were tested and the test positivity rate in the state stood at 25.34 percent. The state also reported 41 more deaths on Wednesday taking the death toll to 5211.

doses would be purchased from Serum Institute of India for ₹294 cr at the rate of ₹400 per dose plus 5 pc GST. The government would

for the state, Mr Thackeray added. However, state health minister Rajesh Tope has made it clear that the vaccination drive of the 18-44 age group cannot be launched from May 1 due to unavailability of adequate doses. "The vaccination will not start from May 1 as sufficient vaccines are not available immediately with us. People will have to keep patience and act sensibly. The state government plans to vaccinate the citizens in the next six months in a planned manner," he said.

People in the age group of 18 to 44 years will receive free vaccines at state-run centres, but citizens will have to pay for the jobs at private facilities, the health minister said.

Breather for MP as Oxygen Express with O2 arrives

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, APRIL 28

In a breather to crisis-ridden Madhya Pradesh where at least 14 Covid-19 patients died in three hospitals reportedly due to lack of O2, Oxygen Express carrying six tankers of life saving gas arrived at different railway stations in the state on Wednesday.

The Oxygen Express carrying two tankers of the life saving gas arrived here on Wednesday morning. The two tankers carried 16 MT of oxygen each.

Similarly, the train carried three oxygen tankers and one O2 tanker to Sagar and Jabalpur respectively.

The oxygen tankers were carried from Bokaro in Jharkhand.

This apart, oxygen tankers have also arrived in different districts in Madhya Pradesh by road from different parts of the country in the past couple of days. "We have made arrangements of 540 MT of oxygen to hospitals in 18 districts against their total requirement of 470 MT of oxygen on Wednesday", a spokesman of the MP government said.

purchase 30 lakh doses of Covaxin from Bharat Biotech at a cost of ₹189 cr at the rate of ₹600/dose including GST.

Mr Vijayan said the price of vaccine would be subject to the outcome of cases regarding the pricing which are pending before the Supreme Court and various high courts.

He said the entire purchase would be completed by July. The first lot of 10 lakh vaccine would be received in May.

The chief minister reiterated the state's demand for change in Centre's new vaccine policy. "The Centre and states should get vaccine at the price. Three should not be any discrimination as far as the price is concerned. We hope to have a positive response from the Centre," he said.

WB: Vaccination & -ve report must to enter counting hall

New Delhi, April 28: Candidates or their agents will not be allowed inside counting halls without a negative coronavirus report or without having both Covid-19 vaccine doses, the Election Commission said Wednesday in its latest guidelines for counting of votes on May 2.

Issued amid spiralling coronavirus cases, the guidelines bar public gatherings outside venues during the counting process, but allow candidates to name a fresh agent if the first one tests positive for Covid-19.

Counting of votes for assembly polls in Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, besides various other assemblies and Lok Sabha bypolls begins at 8 am on May 2.

"No candidates or agents will be allowed inside the counting hall without undergoing RT-PCR/RAT test or without having two doses of vaccination against Covid-19 and will have to produce negative RT-PCR report or RAT report or vaccination reports within 48 hours of start of counting," the guidelines read.

The district election officers will organise Covid tests for candidates and their counting agents, it said.

The Madras high court had earlier this week made harsh observations against the EC for failing to ensure Covid-appropriate behaviour during campaigning. The poll panel has to apprise the high court on April 30 about steps it has taken to ensure a Covid-safe counting process.

The fresh EC guidelines go beyond the ones issued by poll panel for the Bihar

Bengal reports new 17,207 Covid cases

Kolkata: West Bengal on Wednesday logged 17,207 fresh Covid-19 cases, the highest-single day spike recorded in the state so far, pushing the tally to 7,93,552, a bulletin issued by the health department said.

The death toll climbed to 11,159 with 77 more fatalities which is also the maximum count during a day, it said. The metropolis accounted for 22 fatalities, followed by neighbouring North 24 Parganas (16) and Howrah (5). The remaining deaths were reported from several other districts. The new infections include 3,821 cases in Kolkata and 3,778 in North 24 Parganas. — PTI

Assembly elections last year which were being used as a template for elections being held during the coronavirus pandemic.

On Tuesday, the poll panel had barred victory processions after counting to check large gatherings amid rising coronavirus cases.

It had also restricted the number of people who could accompany the candidate to collect his or her election certificate from the returning officer.

As per the latest guidelines, there should be sufficient number of personal protective equipment (PPE) kits for counting agents and candidates.

"The counting agents' sitting arrangement shall be made in such a way that between 2 counting agents 1 agent shall be in PPE," the guideline read.

— PTI

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is notified for the information of rail passengers that Railways have decided to change the timings of Train No. 02963 Hazrat Nizamuddin - Udaipur City Special Express at following stations w.e.f. 01.05.2021 as per the details given below:-

Revised Timings of 02963 Hazrat Nizamuddin - Udaipur City Special Express					
STATIONS	Existing Timings		Revised Timings		Train No. 02963
	ARR.	DEP.	ARR.	DEP.	
Hazrat Nizamuddin	--	16:40	--	18:25	
Ballabgarh	17:01	17:03	18:46	18:48	
Kosi Kalan	17:50	17:51	19:50	19:51	
Mathura Jn.	18:49	18:54	20:25	20:30	
Bharatpur Jn.	19:17	19:19	20:48	20:50	
Bayana Jn.	19:44	19:46	21:14	21:16	
Hindaun City	20:06	20:08	21:36	21:38	
Shri Mahabir Ji	20:17	20:19	21:48	21:50	
Gangapur City	20:47	20:49	22:18	22:20	
Sawai Madhopur	21:24	21:26	23:03	23:05	
Kota Jn.	22:39	22:59	00:25	00:45	
Bundi	23:47	23:49	01:38	01:40	
Chittaurgarh	02:45	03:00	04:40	04:55	
Kapasan	03:42	03:43	05:37	05:38	
Mavli Jn.	04:10	04:12	06:04	06:06	
Rana Pratap Nagar	04:46	04:48	06:47	06:49	
Udaipur City	05:20	--	07:20	--	

The above Special Train will have the reserved accommodation only.

For any kind information passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may 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., may 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

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929/21

IMPORTANT NOTICE

It is notified for the information of passengers that services of following Special Express trains will be discontinued due to operational reasons from the dates shown against each:-

CANCELLATION OF MAIL/EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAINS	
Train No. & Name	Dates of Cancellation
05733 Katihar Jn.-Amritsar Jn. Special	30.04.2021 to 31.05.2021
05734 Amritsar Jn.-Katihar Jn. Special	30.04.2021 to 31.05.2021
05483 Alipur Duar Jn.-Delhi Jn. Special	01.05.2021 to 31.05.2021
05484 -Delhi Jn.-Alipur Duar Jn. Special	01.05.2021 to 31.05.2021

Note: For any kind of information passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website: www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in

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"SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"

934/21

SHORT TAKES

ODISHA SURPASSES
PREVIOUS RECORDS
WITH 8,386 CASESAKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 28

The Covid-19 situation in Odisha on Wednesday reached an alarming stage as the state reported its highest-ever spike of 8,386 cases. The previous highest was recorded on April 24 when the state clocked 6,647 new cases. Of the fresh 8,385 cases, Khurda district registered a mammoth 1,840 fresh cases, followed by Sundargarh (933) and Cuttack (496). The state also recorded 10 death cases, taking the total number of fatalities to 2017. Of the 8,386 new cases, 4,781 cases were from quarantine while 3,605 were local contacts. On Tuesday also, the state had recorded 6,073 Covid-19 cases. The high jump in the positivity case has come as a major cause of concern to the state government which a couple of days ago had claimed that the Odisha had entered the “plateau” stage and the Covid-19 cases would soon decline. With Wednesday’s figure, the cumulative case-load went up to 4,28,515 in the state. As many as 4,089 patients have recovered during the period pushing the total recovery tally to 3,71,200. Active cases stand at 55,245. Nabarangpur witnessed a daily spike of 388 cases and Bolangir saw 358 positive cases. Angul and Sambalpur districts posted 347,307 cases respectively.

BUDDING SOUTH
ACTRESS KILLS
HER BROTHER

Hubballi: A promising Kannada actress and her live-in partner allegedly killed her brother and disposed of the body in a jungle here, for objecting to their relationship, police said. The young actress was allegedly in a relationship with a small-time realtor, which her brother opposed, the Dharwad Superintendent of Police P Krishnakant said on Tuesday. “Rakesh was a major hurdle to her love affair. Hence he was murdered and the body burnt,” Krishnakant told reporters. According to police, a charred and badly mutilated torso packed in a plastic bag was found dumped in the Devaragudihal forest area on April 12. Subsequently, a case was registered and special teams were formed to nab the culprit. The teams gathered lots of inputs and finally learnt that Rakesh Katve, a housekeeper in a bar, was missing. Probe revealed that the victim’s sister Shanaya Katve was in a relationship with Niyaz and has been living with him as a paying guest. Further inquiry in the case led to the arrest of Shanaya Katve, Niyaz, his three friends who have been remanded in police custody.

■ Buildings damaged, epicentre was in Sonitpur district’s Dhekiajuli town

6.4 earthquake rocks Assam

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, APRIL 28

A massive earthquake measuring 6.4 on Richter scale rocked Assam and other north-eastern states on Wednesday morning. The epicentre of the earthquake was in Sonitpur district’s Dhekiajuli town, 140 km north of Guwahati. The National Center for Seismology said that tremors were felt in parts of the northeast as well as north Bengal.

Informing that there were reports of at least three casualties in earthquake-related incidents, state government sources said that many buildings in Guwahati and Tezpur, the district headquarters of Sonitpur and epicentre of the tremor have developed cracks.

According to the National Centre of Seismology, the earthquake measuring 6.4 on the Richter Scale originated in Sonitpur district. The first earthquake was



People look on at debris after a portion of few shops were damaged due to earthquake at Bhetapara in Guwahati, on Wednesday.

— PTI

recorded at 7.51 am and according to the seismology centre, it was centred 43 km west of Tezpur in Assam.

There were six aftershocks following the first major earthquake, one at

7.58 am and another at 8.01 am. The six aftershocks of magnitude 3.2 to 4.7 were recorded over the next 2 hours 30 minutes in the vicinity of Sonitpur. A road in Sonitpur that was the epicentre of the

earthquake has developed a crack following the impact of the earthquake while several buildings and walls in the area have also suffered damages. Many visuals from the Dhekiajuli area reflected

how water was gushing out of cracks developed in the farm land.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that he spoke with Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and promised help from the Centre. “Big earthquake hit Assam. I pray for the well-being of all and urge everyone to stay alert. Taking updates from all districts,” Mr Sonowal tweeted.

Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who tweeted minutes after the earthquake, also shared photos of broken walls inside a building and of a broken boundary wall, showing the impact of the earthquake.

The National Disaster Management Agency was assessing reports of destruction and casualties after the earthquake. The State Disaster Response Force and Assam police have also started visiting apartments and buildings to assess the damages caused due to tremor.

SC ruling huge relief,
says journalist’s wifeAGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
APRIL 28

Jailed journalist Siddique Kappan’s wife Rehana Wednesday said the SC court directive brought huge relief to her and the entire family. She said that the SC has ensured justice to her husband as he required immediate medical treatment. The family said it had earlier moved a bail plea and hoped to get a positive verdict.

Kerala Union of Working Journalist, which had filed the plea for shifting Kappan to Delhi and provide him treatment, had also organised protests

across the state on Tuesday demanding justice for Kappan.

Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan, Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala, and several MPs had demanded immediate medical assistance for Kappan.

Kappan was arrested on way to Hathras following the death of a 19 year old dalit girl who was allegedly gang raped on September 14, 2020 in a village.

On Saturday, Raihanth wrote to CJI Ramana alleging that her husband was “chained like an animal to a cot” at K.M. Medical College and is not permitted to move.

Strict curbs
in Bihar,
all shops to
shut at 4 pm

Patna, April 28: Amid surging coronavirus cases, the Bihar government Wednesday came out with more stringent restrictions, ordering closure of shops/commercial establishments at 4 pm daily while the timing of the night curfew will now be from 6 pm to 4 am.

Presently, the timing for shops/commercial establishments functioning was till 6 pm and night curfew was in force from 9 pm to 5 am.

These decisions were taken at the meeting of the crisis management group chaired by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar during the day after taking stock of the situation.

Considering the continuous rise in infections, the chief minister held high-level meeting consecutively on Monday and Tuesday before going for more curbs to rein in the rampaging coronavirus.

Development commissioner Amir Subhani and principal secretary health Pratyaya Amrit briefed media persons about the revised decisions.

Bihar added 13,374 more cases Wednesday, taking the tally to 4,41,375. While with 84 fresh fatalities the death toll has risen to 2391.

Patna is the worst-hit both in terms of daily caseload and the deaths. — PTI

Relief to Indiabulls
as HC stays probe
in Palghar FIRSHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, APRIL 28

In a relief to Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited, the Bombay high court has stayed the police investigation against them. The HC held that prima facie the complaint filed against the company appears to be “malafide and deficient”.

The firm approached the HC challenging the order dated April 07 passed by judicial magistrate first class, Wada, who issued directions for registration of FIR and for quashing of FIR dated April 13 registered in pursuance of the said order at Wade police station.

A division bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and Manish Pitale passed order on Tuesday granting interim relief to Indiabulls group companies and its flagship Indiabulls Housing Finance (IBHFL) and granted stay on an order passed by the judicial magistrate asking police to register an FIR against the company on a private complaint filed by one Ashutosh Kamble, a shareholder of IBHFL.

Kamble in his complaint has alleged that all the accused entered into a meticulously planned systematic criminal conspiracy with each other, with an object of causing wrongful gain to themselves and wrongful loss to innocent investors like

► **THE COMPANY** approached the HC challenging the order dated April 7 passed by the judicial magistrate first class, Wada, who issued directions for registration of FIR

him. He has also made allegations of misappropriation of funds by the company and has levelled several allegations against company’s promoter Sameer Gehlaut.

It is further alleged in the complaint that all the accused are involved in diverting and siphoning off huge amounts of public money by way of creating dummy companies and then siphoning off funds from one company to another and finally sending the public money outside the country through illegal ways by buying shares at inflated rates and then may be by claiming losses in such companies.

Advocate Amit Desai, who appeared for the company, argued that the complaint that led to registration of the FIR was itself malafide. He also claimed that the complaint was part of similar attempts made earlier against the petitioners by certain persons seeking to initiate criminal proceedings on the basis of false and frivolous allegations in order to extract money from the petitioners.

PM thanks Putin

■ **Continued from Page 1** noted that while India already has a good domestic presence of oxygen used by its steel industry, that is now being used for medical purposes, the country needs large and small oxygen tanks in which these can be transported. India is also looking to source as many oxygen cylinders as possible. The government has eased restrictions and removed the import duties in several cases, the sources added.

Chinese companies have sent the first batch of oxygen concentrators to India with the support of the Chinese government, China’s ambassador in New Delhi Sun Weidong tweeted on Wednesday, adding that “China is ready to provide support and help to the Indian people at any time as per India’s needs”. However, sources in New Delhi made it clear India “does not recognise” nor will participate in the current series of meetings on China-led initiatives among South Asian countries for Covid-related cooperation, including the supply of Chinese vaccines to South Asia.

On Pakistan, sources said there was “no response” by India to the reports of offers of help from Pakistani NGOs like the Edhi Foundation.

On his conversation with Mr Putin, Mr Modi tweeted: “To add further momentum to our strong strategic partnership, President Putin and I have agreed to establish a 2+2 ministerial dialogue between our foreign and defence ministers. We also reviewed our diverse bilateral cooperation, especially in the area of space exploration and renewable energy sector, including in hydrogen economy. Our cooperation on the Sputnik-V vaccine will assist humanity in battling the pandemic. Had an excellent conversation with my friend President Putin today. We discussed the evolving Covid-19 situation, and I thanked President Putin for Russia’s help and support in India’s fight against the pandemic.”

As already reported, urgent oxygen-related and other supplies and equipment are also pouring in from various corners, including the United States, Britain, France, Germany and even small nations like Mauritius, which gifted 200 oxygen concentrators to India. German ambassador to India Walter J. Lindner tweeted that with the help of the German Association of Small & Medium Enterprises, India’s business chamber Ficci has procured 1,500 oxygen concentrators from Germany.

SC says shift journalist

■ **Continued from Page 1**

chargesheet against him in a Mathura court early this month.

The court said it was only considering the issue of medical treatment for Kappan, who suffered a fall in jail and is suffering from comorbidities like diabetes and blood pressure.

“We have to consider the suggestion to shift him to Delhi in the context of his precarious health conditions. Will he be able to get adequate medical help in jail?” the court asked. Solicitor-general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the UP government, however, insisted that the facilities in the Mathura hospital are sufficient. “Why should the accused get special treatment just because a so-called association of journalists has filed a habeas corpus petition? Why should an accused, who is associated with a banned organisation, get preferential treatment over honest taxpayers who are also treated in the Mathura hospital,” he asked.

He submitted Kappan’s medical records and vehemently opposed his being shifted to Delhi, on the ground that he is a Covid negative person and his admission to a Delhi hospital was unjustified when several thousands of Covid positive persons are running around to get hospital admissions. “I have difficulty if he is given one bed at the cost of a Covid positive patient,” Mr Mehta argued. The court, however, did not accept his arguments, and asked why the state shirked from its responsibility of taking full care of a person in its custody. Mr Mehta said: “I have been arguing from day one that this man has to go to a competent court and apply for bail. Instead of doing that, he is fighting the case here coming under an association.”

In the course of the hearing in the morning, the court asked the Uttar Pradesh government to say in 45 minutes if Kappan can be shifted to Delhi for better treatment. The court said it will hear the matter at 1 pm.

When the S-G resisted the court’s suggestion, Chief Justice Ramana said: “It is a humanitarian issue for the court to protect the life of even those jailed for an alleged offence.”

L-G now ‘Govt of Delhi’

■ **Continued from Page 1**

as well as hospitals and transport.

The L-G can also pass directions to officials directly without consulting the city government while elected representatives will have to take the L-G’s consent for the implementation of any of its orders as well as transfers, officials explained.

According to officials, Delhi is a Union Territory with a legislature like Jammu and Kashmir and Puducherry but does not have powers similar to them.

Three key subjects in Delhi — public order, police and land — were already with the Central government. But now no law passed by the Delhi Assembly — from the state list or concurrent list — shall come into force until the L-G gives his assent. “Any of the rules made in contravention of this proviso, before the commencement of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2021, shall be void,” states the new Act.

In the case of J&K and Puducherry, land is with the local government and public order and police with the Central government. Other UTs — Chandigarh, Ladakh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep and Dadra and Nagar

Haveli and Daman and Diu — don’t have legislative assemblies and are under direct control of the Central government.

The Centre has been maintaining the Act is in line with the Supreme Court’s July 2018 ruling on the ambit of powers of the Lieutenant-Governor and the Delhi government after a series of run-ins between the two.

Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy had said in Parliament that Delhi is not a full-fledged state and does not have full power. “The said Bill will promote harmonious relations between the legislature and the executive, and further define the responsibilities of the elected government and the L-G, in line with the constitutional scheme of governance of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, as interpreted by the Supreme Court,” the statement of objects of the Bill had said.

In June 2018, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Cabinet Ministers had staged a sit-in at the L-G’s office as a power tussle between the then L-G and the AAP government had intensified. The Supreme Court had in July 2018 ruled that the L-G cannot interfere in every decision of the Delhi government and that he must act on aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.



IAF’s C17 transport aircraft gearing up to airlift more empty oxygen containers from Singapore Wednesday. These containers will further boost oxygen availability in the country in view of the current Covid - 19 surge. The airlift is being co-ordinated by MHA.

— PTI

to ensure faster coordination with different ministries and agencies on Covid-related operations.

Aircrew for all fleets have been augmented to ensure round-the-clock opera-

tions, Mr Bhaduria added. Hospitals under the IAF have increased Covid-19 facilities and are also allowing civilians wherever possible, the statement said, quoting the air chief.

— PTI

IAF on 24X7 readiness: IAF chief to PM

During the review meeting, Mr Modi stressed the need to increase the speed, scale and safety of operations in transporting oxygen tankers and other essential material.

He also spoke about the need to ensure that the IAF personnel engaged in Covid-19 related operations remain safe from infection and emphasised the need to ensure the safety of all Covid-related operations.

Mr Modi enquired about the health of IAF personnel and their families and was informed by the Air Chief that a near saturation vaccination coverage has been achieved in the IAF. — PTI

Last phase of polls today

■ **Continued from Page 1**

Sudeep Jain in a serious complaint to the Khardah police station on Tuesday of “culpable homicide not amounting to murder” over her husband’s death due to Covid-19 after he contested the polls from Khardah in North 24 Parganas.

She demanded that Mr Jain, entrusted to supervise the Assembly polls in the state, and other EC officials be booked under IPC Sections 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life), 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) for her husband’s death.

She said Mr Sinha was “compelled to carry out his public duties and election campaign as a candidate due to the self-sewing blind motives” of the EC, which did not club the last three poll phases despite the TMC’s pleas amidst the huge fresh Covid-19 surge. Ms Sinha claimed: “The EC has acted

in the most careless and negligent manner to risk the lives of people, including my husband, while neglecting the harsh reality and the numerous reminders... Moreover, despite being in control of the law and order (situation) in the State of West Bengal and deployment of Central paramilitary forces, the EC intentionally failed to take steps to ensure that Covid protocols are maintained at public political rallies/meetings.”

She argued: “It is humanely not possible for a candidate to control the crowd at any rally or meeting, and it is completely within the domain of the EC. Despite earlier deaths of candidates from different political parties, the EC has done nothing to ensure compliance with the Covid protocols and has sat tight-lipped over the entire issue. The EC is solely liable for my husband’s death caused by the rapid surge in coronavirus cases in West Bengal as it has neither ensured the safety of candidates or the general public during the ongoing elections.”

SII cuts vaccine price for states

■ **Continued from Page 1**

Corporation announced that due to insufficient vaccine stock, 40 private vaccination centres will be closed on April 29, while the remaining 33 private centres will give only the second dose. Some cities in Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have also reported a shortage of vaccines.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday, sanctioned the procurement of one lakh portable oxygen concentra-

tors from the PMCare Fund as the government also intensified efforts to improve Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) supply for Covid management. As per officials, PM has instructed that these oxygen concentrators should be procured at the earliest and provided in states with high case burden.

In addition to the earlier sanctioned 713 Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) plants under PMCare Fund, 500 new PSA oxygen plants have been sanctioned.

THE ASIAN AGE

29 APRIL 2021

India must clear the air on Pak's 'feelers' claim

After an off-the-record interaction of Pakistan's Army chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa with some 20 top journalists on April 23, scattered details of which emerged in an Indian publication on Wednesday, we should have to swallow mortification on two counts as Indians.

One, while Pakistan's military leadership chose to engage journalists in its country on topics ranging from the pandemic to India-Pakistan relations, and for a timespan stretching to four hours, in the past seven years this country's democratically elected Prime Minister has not shown journalists the courtesy of engaging them in an open exchange for even seven seconds. This mocks not just journalists, but all Indians; indeed, it mocks our democracy.

Two, Gen. Bajwa made assertions on bilateral ties as well as the Kashmir question. On an immediate basis these must be officially confirmed or denied or elaborated for clarity in a manner that best preserves the Indian position and understanding. A hesitation to do so would make New Delhi look ridiculous, not least in Kashmir.

The first of the Pakistan military leader's spectacular claims is that India sent Pakistan "feelers" for talks in December 2020, which led up to the February 25 agreement between the two militaries (to seriously observe the 2003 ceasefire agreement). Gen. Bajwa played down the advertised intermediary role of the United Aran Emirates.

If the disclosure about "feelers" has merit, then it signifies a subtle change to the Narendra Modi government's long-held position that "terror and talks cannot go together". In international hotspots, no substitute has been found for eventual discussions, whatever the form these may take, the impetuosity or assumed hauteur of individual leaders or governments notwithstanding.

On the Kashmir issue, Gen. Bajwa claims India had assured Pakistan (in secret talks) about the restoration of J&K's statehood and about not making "demographic changes". These were the important considerations for Islamabad on a resolution of the Kashmir issue, and not the reading down of Article 370 to which, he said, Pakistan never attached importance since it had not accepted the validity of that provision of the Indian Constitution.

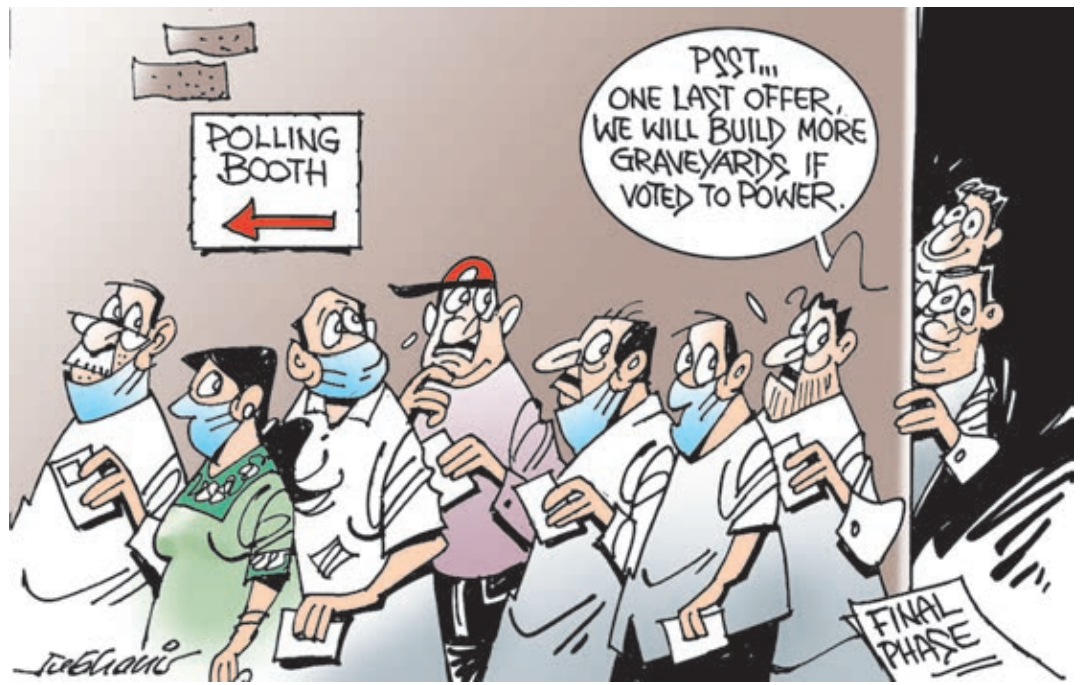
In India's domestic context, this would seem to imply that — since retaining or ending the provision is no skin off Pakistan's nose — bringing on the avalanche of emasculating Article 370 — could have only had communal triumphalism as its purpose and may have nothing more than marginal significance in regional affairs and in India-Pakistan relations.

Was India persuaded by influential international friends to send "feelers", and if so then what were the circumstances and implications? It will be useful to know this to evaluate the Modi government's policy. However, if Gen. Bajwa is overstating his case and India sent no "feelers", then what's the magic potion drunk by the two sides?

Gen. Bajwa said India's NSA Ajit Doval and ISI chief Lt. Gen. Faiz Hameed met at least once in the UAE and intelligence chiefs of the two countries met in "neighbouring countries". Mr Doval's association in these confabulations without doubt indicates Prime Minister Narendra Modi's involvement.

There has been no contact since the February agreement, according to Gen. Bajwa. But he indicated, responding to questions, that Pakistan resiling from importing cotton and sugar from India due to PM Imran Khan's "political compulsions" can only be temporary. Trade between neighbours is important to peace, he said. He also said outsiders didn't understand how much the Pakistan Army had changed. That position is worth exploring.

Subhani



China's new weapon is 'political archaeology'



Claude Arpi

In February this year, the Communist Party of China (CPC) started a new campaign called "Party History Learning and Education"; it will continue in full swing through the year as the CPC celebrates its centenary in July.

Neican, a weekly brief on China published from Australia, observed: "The CPC's official historiography is a product of politics and serves a political agenda." There is no doubt about this, and India should closely watch the new campaign.

Neican's analysts said: "In the case of the current campaign, it aims to strengthen ideological cohesion, confidence, and a sense of historical destiny. In doing so, it will likely reinforce the legitimacy of Xi Jinping as the party's helmsman and his political project of national rejuvenation."

Like everything in China these days, the crusade originated in an "important" speech by President Xi Jinping, the new Great Helmsman. On February 20, at a gathering in Beijing, Mr Xi spoke of "the importance of learning the history of the CPC, so as to let the party better serve the people and lead the country to fully build a modern socialist country."

Xinhua commented that the CPC has achieved its first centenary goal "to complete building a moderately prosperous society in all respects", and now embarks on the second: "The learning [of history] will help ensure the whole party to remain true to its original aspiration."

Being purely an ideological move, archaeology plays a crucial role in the new scheme of "national rejuvenation". If Beijing is able to prove that China dominated large parts of Asia, let us say 3,000 or 4,000 years ago, the ideological foundation of the rejuvenation will be established.

Already in September last year, Mr Xi presided over a meeting of the party's politburo and dis-

cussed "the latest archaeological discoveries in China and their significance". The CPC general secretary showed a great interest in excavating the past; he spoke of "developing archaeology to better understand the long-standing and profound Chinese civilisation".

He said that he attached "great importance to archaeological research to deepen people's understanding of Chinese civilisation that features a long history and profoundness, thus providing strong support for promoting fine traditional culture and strengthening people's confidence in Chinese culture".

You could ask: how does this concern India?

Unfortunately, it does, especially after China's new territorial claims in Ladakh as well as the older ones in Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

On April 14, the *China Daily* mentioned with fanfare an event highlighting "China's Top 10 New Archaeological Discoveries of Year 2020"; the annual awards function was dubbed the "Oscars of Chinese archaeology". The idea was to promote new archaeological findings among the masses, with a 21-expert judging panel selecting the 10 sites.

One of them is the Sangdsar Lungmgo graveyard site in Tsanda county of Ngari prefecture of Western Tibet. Tsanda, or Zanda, is located near the historical vestiges of Tholing, close to the Indian border, north of Uttarakhand. The findings date from the 4th century BC to 7th century AD and though it is not officially said, it belongs to the Kingdom of Zhangzhung, which spread across Western Tibet and Northern India. The site was presented as a key finding "of early-stage history of Tibet, showing frequent communication among the region with the area to the south of Himalayas as well as today's central China and Xinjiang".

India should be con-

cerned because "political archeology" has always helped China to substantiate its territorial claims at a later date.

Zhangzhung was an ancient kingdom which spread in Western Tibet and Northern India; it predates the culture of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet and is usually associated with the Bon faith. The inhabitants are often mentioned in ancient Tibetan texts as the original rulers of central and western Tibet. Only in the last two decades or so, have archaeologists started to excavate areas once ruled by the Zhangzhung kings.

Though very little is known about the extent of the kingdom, it is said to have had extensive contacts with its neighbours, particularly Northern India (and not China). While Beijing has now taken up a large number of excavation sites to demonstrate Zhangzhung's relations with the mainland, very little is done in India, where archaeology is still under the slumberous Archaeological Survey of India and the babus of the ministry of culture.

At the same time, China is moving ahead with the blessings of the People's Leader; for example in November 2017, *China Tibet Online* mentioned a group of 2,000-year-old sarcophagi tombs "recently discovered in Jomdo County, Chamdo, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region, in which the cultural features not only possess strong local characteristics, but also have very clear similarities with sarcophagus remains found in the Min Jiang River and Yarlung River basin in the west part of southwest China's Sichuan Province".

Quoting a Chinese archaeologist, the article further argues: "This discovery confirms that around 2,000 years ago, there had been frequent

Unless India decides to heavily invest in the archaeology of the Himalayas, which will prove the Indic origin of the Zhangzhung kingdom, China will rewrite the history of India's borders

communication and exchanges between the people living in the east part of Tibet and those in the plateau areas of western Sichuan."

Another article in *China News* mentions the Western Tibet tombs; quoting Dr Feng Yang from the School of Archaeology, Culture and Science of Sichuan University, it speculated that the tombs dated back to the seventh century BC. During a seminar on "2020 Tibet Cultural Relics and Archaeological Achievements" recently held in Lhasa, Dr Feng gave a report on the latest stages of excavations: "Seven archaeological surveys and trial excavations were carried out from 1994 to 2001. In order to explore the early society and civilisation of western Tibet and clarify its status in Tibetan civilisation, archaeological excavations in this area continued from 2018 to 2020; 10 new cemeteries were discovered (eight of them were date-tested), 68 tombs were cleared, 10 new sites were excavated and one stone tool site found. Systematic carbon fourteen dating was done, and a basic chronological framework could be established."

According to Feng Yang, the 68 tombs are divided into four phases: "Tombs are rich in burial goods, including pottery, iron, bronze, seashells, mussel decorations, beads, woodware, etc. The phenomenon of burial of animals is common, including sheep, horses, and cows."

The article added: "The cultural connotation of this area is obviously diverse, and cultural connections with different surrounding areas can be seen, including cultural connections with the mainland."

Unless India decides to heavily invest in the archaeology of the Himalayas, which will prove the Indic origin of the Zhangzhung kingdom, China will rewrite the history of India's borders. But how many politicians understand this in New Delhi? Probably no one.

The writer is based in South India for the past 42 years. He writes on India, China, Tibet and Indo-French relations.

LETTERS

DON'T REWARD ARORA

Apropos your editorial, "EC failed in duty" (April 28), isn't it proper that the government takes cognisance of the Madras high court observations and initiate appropriate steps to book the officials culpable for the breach of Covid-appropriate electoral protocols in the multi-phase polls in West Bengal? As the former chief election commissioner, Sunil Arora must own up for playing his part. The government can still make amends by rescinding its forthcoming order appointing Mr Arora governor of Goa. Though belated, such a step will help restore its image in the public eye.

Amit Banerjee
Mumbai

KEJRIWAL'S HASTY VOW

THE GOVERNMENT of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2021, which gives primacy to the lieutenant governor (L-G) over the elected government in the city, has come into force from April 27. According to the legislation, the "government" in Delhi means the "lieutenant governor" and the city government will now have to seek the opinion of the L-G before taking any executive decision. So the question is, how come the chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, is promising imported oxygen tankers and plants from, respectively, Thailand and France? Is he going to receive help from the Centre in making these procurements?

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

FOLLOW SINGH, ISRAEL

BY NOT CREATING a centralised vaccine procurement system, the government has thrown the country open to chaos, come May 1. The idea of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of allowing other vaccine manufacturers to expand production capacity by invoking compulsory licensing of vaccine technology can cater to the needs of a populous country like India. Israel's successful rollout is a case in point. Such cross-national learning from developments across the world can help us fight against the virus.

Vijay Singh Adhikari
Nainital

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

Right to Covid accountability

While the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh is trying to make the state a fortress from where information about the inadequacies people face while trying to get treated for Covid-19 does not go out, the Allahabad high court has chosen to do otherwise. It has issued a series of directions on patient care in hospitals in seven major cities. In a state where people can be booked for tweeting in search of a hospital bed, the court has ordered that major government hospitals in the seven cities, including the capital, should have a health bulletin system twice a day apprising people of health updates of patients and to declare on the district portal the position of occupied and vacant beds in Covid wards and ICUs of all government hospitals and Covid-assigned private hospitals. It has also asked district judges in the seven districts to depute a senior judicial officer in each to ensure that its orders are implemented. The court also took note of the reports on the death of 135 teachers who were on duty conducting panchayat elections and issued notice to the state election commission to explain why action should not be taken against it for the failure to ensure compliance of the Covid-appropriate protocol.

It looks like the coronavirus has not only attacked human bodies but also exposed the moribund, archaic, self-serving and graceless governmental structures, which have the welfare of the people last on their agenda. A bit of planning would have saved citizens of India, a nation which prided itself as the pharmacy of the world till a couple of weeks ago, from gasping for breath in major cities and proper use of the law would have left the government with adequate stocks of life-saving drugs to treat the victims of the pandemic. Judicial interventions to make the rulers accountable are welcome but they can do only so much. It is for the people to do that job in a democracy.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:

New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 25211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



CVC ups ante, asks ministries to sort complaints within 3 months

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has run into a wall of bureaucratic denial. The anti-corruption watchdog regularly reviews pending cases and even called for a probe into pending corruption cases, but little has resulted from its efforts. Earlier this year in January, the commission set a timeline to finalise pending cases. It directed all chief executives and vigilance officers in various government organisations to finalise pending cases from the period between January 2011 and December 2018 by end of May this year.

With just about a month left for the deadline, chief vigilance commissioner Sanjay Kothari has now upped the ante and advised Union ministries to sort out complaints against officers within three months of their receipt. Reminding

them of the May 31 deadline, Mr Kothari has now mandated that at the end of the third month from the date of receipt of the complaint and after deciding on a course of action, a copy of the complaint shall be made available to the concerned employee within 15 days. Once a decision is made to pursue the vigilance case, the concerned organisation shall send its inquiry report to the CVC or chief vigilance officer seeking first stage advice within three months of registration of a case.

KEY UT APPOINTMENT HANGS IN BALANCE

Away from the Covid din, there is a tussle going on between the Punjab government and the Centre over the naming of 2002 batch IAS officer Vijay Namdeoao Zade as the finance secretary of the Chandigarh Administration. Mr

Zade was nominated by the UT administration for the post, which is reserved for Punjab cadre officers and is the third most important post after the UT advisor and home secretary.

According to sources, the ministry of home affairs (MHA) has sought details about Mr Zade's professional profile and other information in a 17-point proforma. It wanted to know about Mr Zade's completion of service in the cadre, the reason for seeking deputation, vigilance status and details of annual property returns, etc.

Sources say that this is the first time the ministry has asked for such details and there is no convention for this. Despite their reservations, the Punjab government has responded by providing all the information that was sought about the official. There has been no action from the MHA since then. It

has to be remembered, sources say, that the recommendation of Mr Zade was forwarded to the Centre last year but there is no sign of any movement on the issue.

MAHARASHTRA POLITICAL RIVALRIES AFFECTING BABUS

The churning in police circles in Maharashtra continues unabated even after the unsavoury Param Bir Singh episode. And, not surprisingly, politics seems to drive most of what is going around these days between the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government and the Opposition BJP.

The state government has now tasked Mumbai police to investigate the leaking of a report on corruption in the state police to BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis. The report, sources say, was prepared by former state intelligence chief Rashmi Shukla but landed into the

hands of Mr Fadnavis. As part of the probe, the Mumbai Police has summoned Ms Shukla, who is now ADG of CRPF, to Mumbai to join the investigation.

The back story is interesting. The FIR was filed at the behest of state chief secretary Sitaram Kunte, who had reportedly alleged in a report to chief minister Udhav Thackeray that the "finger of suspicion" seemed to point at Ms Shukla herself. The episode has split opinion within the babu corridors with many murmurs about the probe as more of a hatchet job than a fair inquiry into the truth. The political waters in Maharashtra are roiled as it is, and this is hardly going to make way for more clarity.

Share a babu experience! Follow [dilipthecherian](https://twitter.com/dilipthecherian) on Twitter. Let's multiply the effect.

SHORT TAKES

18 INJURED IN KNIFE ATTACK IN CHINA SCHOOL

Beijing, April 28: Sixteen children and two teachers were injured in a knife attack on a kindergarten school in China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on Wednesday, police said.

The suspect has been arrested and all the injured have been sent to hospital, state-run China Global Television Network, (CGTV) reported. An investigation into the incident is underway, the report said.

Knife attacks mainly targeting kindergarten and middle schools and unarmed civilians in China are a common occurrence.

EIGHT PEOPLE DEAD IN LATVIAN BUILDING BLAZE

Helsinki (Finland), April 28: Eight people, some of them foreign nationals, died early on Wednesday in a fire at a building housing a hostel that was apparently operating illegally in the center of Riga, the Latvian capital.

Firefighters and rescuers from the Latvian State Fire and Rescue Service said they were alerted to the scene on the Merkela street in the heart of Riga about 5 am. The building's sixth floor and the roof were on fire, and rescuers found eight people dead.

They evacuated a further 24 from the premises, news agency *Baltic News Service* said. Latvian state TV broadcast footage of flames pouring out of the top of the building, multiple fire engines and a ladder extending to the top, from where two firefighters were aiming a hose at the blaze.

ARIZONA GOV. SIGNS ABORTION BAN FOR GENETIC ISSUES

Phoenix, April 28: Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey has signed a sweeping anti-abortion bill that bans the procedure if the woman is seeking it solely because a fetus has a genetic abnormality such as Down syndrome.

Doctors who perform an abortion solely because the child has a survivable genetic issue can face felony charges. The proposal also contains a raft of other provisions sought by abortion opponents. The measure passed the Republican-controlled Legislature on party-line votes over unanimous opposition from minority Democrats. The Republican governor is an abortion opponent who has never vetoed a piece of anti-abortion legislation.

UNITED NATION LAUNCHES CYPRUS TALKS

Geneva, April 28: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres held brief meetings with leaders of war-divided Cyprus in the Swiss city of Geneva in an effort to revive talks toward a settlement.

Guterres met with Greek Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and Ersin Tatar, leader of the breakaway Turkish Cypriot republic in the north of the island, ahead of more detailed discussions planned for Wednesday.

The Mediterranean island was split along ethnic lines in 1974 when a coup aimed at union with Greece triggered a Turkish invasion. The three-day meetings in Geneva are aimed at gauging willingness to resume formal peace negotiations that have been stalled since 2017.

AMERICANS IN GHOSN CASE TO BE TRIED IN JUNE

Tokyo, April 28: The trial of two Americans accused of helping former Nissan Chairman Carlos Ghosn escape from Japan while out on bail will open on June 14, the Tokyo District Court said Wednesday.

Michael Taylor and his son Peter are accused of hiding Ghosn in a music box so he could flee to Lebanon in late 2019. The Taylors have been denied bail at the Tokyo Detention Centre and not available for comment.

Ghosn, arrested in 2018, was awaiting trial on financial misconduct allegations, including under-reporting his compensation and breach of trust in diverting Nissan Motor Co. money for personal gain, when he fled. He says he is innocent.

WHO finds 'Indian strain' of Coronavirus in 17 countries

'Double Mutant' found to have higher growth rate than other circulating variants

Geneva, April 28: The 'Indian strain' of the Coronavirus, also known as B.1.617 or a 'double mutant', has been found in at least 17 countries, the WHO has said, as the world grapples to contain the surge in the Covid-19 cases with 5.7 million infections detected last week, surpassing previous peaks.

The B.1.617 variant of SARS-CoV2 or the 'Indian strain', feared to be contributing to a surge in Coronavirus cases in India, has been designated as the Variants of Interest (VOI) by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the UN health agency said in its weekly epidemiological update on Tuesday.

"As of 27 April, over 1,200 sequences have been uploaded to GISAID and assigned to lineage B.1.617 (collectively) from at least 17 countries," it said, adding that most sequences were uploaded from India, the United Kingdom, USA and Singapore. GISAID is a global science initiative and primary source established in 2008 that provides open-access to genomic data of influenza viruses and the coronavirus responsible for the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants within Pango lineage B.1.617 were recently reported as a VOI from India and have recently been designated as VOIs by WHO," it said. The WHO said that studies have highlighted that the spread of the second wave has been much faster than the first in India. "Preliminary modelling by WHO based on sequences submitted to GISAID suggest that B.1.617 has a higher growth rate than other circulating variants in India, suggesting potential increased transmissibility, with other co-circulating variants also demonstrating increased transmissibility," the report by the global health body said.

"Other drivers may include challenges around the implementation and adherence to public health and social measures (PHSM), and social gatherings (including mass gatherings during cultural and religious celebrations, and elections). Further investigation is needed to understand the relative contribution of these factors," it said. In many cities in Maharashtra — the worst-hit state in India — the B.1.617 variant was found in more than 50 per cent of samples on which genome sequencing was conducted. Sujet Singh, the Director of the National Centre for Disease Control, had said in a webinar on genome sequencing last week.

The B.1.617 variant comprises several sub-lineages, including B.1.617.1, B.1.617.2 and B.1.617.3, which slightly differ by their characteristic mutations, the WHO report said. Both B.1.617.1 and B.1.617.2 were first identified in India in December 2020, and have been detected at increasing prevalence concurrent to the major upsurge observed in the country.



Russian policemen guard in front of the WWII victory anniversary parade decorations at Red Square in central Moscow on Wednesday. Despite the outbreak of Covid-19, Russia will hold an annual military parade at Red Square on May 9.

BioNTech expects Europe to get herd immunity by Aug.

Berlin, April 28: Europe can achieve herd immunity against the Coronavirus within the next four months, the head of German pharmaceutical company BioNTech, which developed the first widely approved Covid-19 vaccine with US partner Pfizer, said on Wednesday. While the exact threshold required to reach that critical level of immunisation remains a matter of debate, experts say a level above 70 per cent would significantly disrupt transmission of the Coronavirus within a population.

"Europe will reach herd immunity in July, latest by

SAHIN SAID data from people who have received the vaccine show that the immune response gets weaker over time, and a third shot will likely be required

August," Ugur Sahin, BioNTech's chief executive, told reporters. His company's vaccine makes up a large share of the doses administered in Europe and North America, where it is more commonly known as the Pfizer shot.

Sahin said data from

people who have received the vaccine show that the immune response gets weaker over time, and a third shot will likely be required. Studies show the efficacy of the BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine declines from 95 per cent to about 91 per cent after six months, he said. "Accordingly, we need a third shot to get the vaccine protection back up to almost 100 per cent again," Sahin said. Vaccine recipients currently receive a second dose three weeks after their first shot, although some countries have longer intervals.

— AP

BRAZIL

BRAZIL: SENATE INQUIRES INTO VIRUS CONTROL

Sao Paulo (Brazil), April 28: Brazil's Senate on Tuesday began an inquiry into the government's management of the Covid-19, a probe that analysts say could jeopardise the reelection of President Jair Bolsonaro.

Bolsonaro has been one of the world's most prominent opponents of restrictions aimed at curbing the disease, whose effects he has often downplayed. He has encouraged use of medications that scientists say are worthless. Critics say his policies, have contributed to the world's second-highest death toll from the Coronavirus.

— AP

GERMANY

GERMAN SPY AGENCY TO MONITOR COVID-19 SCEPTICS

Berlin, April 28: Germany's domestic intelligence agency will monitor leading protesters against Covid restrictions, the interior ministry said Wednesday, over concerns they pose a threat to democracy and have ties to right-wing extremism.

The monitoring will focus on members of Germany's "Querdenken" (Lateral Thinkers) movement, which has emerged as the loudest voice against Covid curbs and an active promoter of conspiracy theories that deny basic facts about the pandemic.

Some protest organisers "have clearly demonstrated that their agenda goes beyond simply mobilising protests against the government's Corona measures", a ministry statement said. Their main aim appears to be to "permanently undermine trust in state institutions and their representatives", it added.

— AFP

SRI LANKA

HINDU TEMPLE STAFF FLOUT VIRUS RULES IN LANKA, ARRESTED

Colombo, April 28: Top officials of a Hindu temple in Sri Lanka have been arrested for holding a festival despite a ban on large gatherings amid a surge in Covid-19 cases, according to a media report.

A huge crowd attended the festival at the Sri Kamakshi Amman Kovil temple in Tamil-dominated Jaffna without maintaining social distance or wearing face masks, the Colombo Gazette newspaper reported.

Police said that the Chairman and Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the temple have been arrested for holding the event despite a ban. Last week, the government announced that tuition classes, parties and public gatherings have been banned until May 31st after Sri Lanka was placed on Alert Level 3 following the Sinhala and Tamil New Year.

— PTI

Lankan President meets Chinese defence minister

Colombo, April 28: Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Wednesday said he had a "fruitful discussion" with Chinese Defence Minister Gen. Wei Fenghe here and emphasised that the high-level visit will further strengthen bilateral ties.

Wei arrived here on a two-day visit for bilateral talks with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa.

"Had a fruitful discussion with #china defense minister General Wei Fenghe this morning. This visit will further strengthen the ties between two countries," the president tweeted along with photographs of their meeting.

The Sri Lankan president and the Chinese defence minister were donning face masks.

Wei was received at the Colombo international airport by Sri Lanka Army's Commander Gen. Shavendra Silva.

The Chinese defence minister will hold bilateral talks with President Gotabaya's brother and Prime Minister Mahinda.

Gen. Wei is the second high-ranking Chinese official to visit the island nation after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In October last year,



Gotabaya Rajapaksa

Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs of the ruling Communist Party of China Yang Jiechi visited Colombo.

The Chinese Defence Minister's visit assumes significance in the backdrop of a public diplomacy campaign launched by the Chinese embassy on the Chinese-built Port City in Colombo.

Last week, Sri Lanka's Supreme Court heard petitions on the constitutionality of the administrative body of the Port City built on reclaimed sea.

The Port City commission bill was challenged by the Opposition parties and civil society groups over its constitutionality. They want the bill to be subject to a referendum and a special two thirds mandate in Parliament.

— PTI

US fires warning shots in encounter with Iran military

Dubai, April 28: An American warship fired warning shots when vessels of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard came too close to a patrol in the Persian Gulf, the US Navy said on Wednesday. It was the first such shooting in nearly four years.

The Navy released black-and-white footage of the encounter on Monday night in international waters of the northern reaches of the Persian Gulf near Kuwait, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In it, lights can be seen in the distance and what appears to be a single gunshot can be heard, with a tracer round racing across the top of the water. Iran did not immediately acknowledge the incident.

The Navy said the Cyclone-class patrol ship USS Firebolt fired the warning shots after three fast-attack Guard vessels came within 68 yards (62 meters) of it and the US Coast Guard patrol boat USCGC Baranoff. "The US crews issued multiple warnings via bridge-to-bridge radio and loud-hailer devices, but the (Guard) vessels continued their close range maneuvers," said Cmdr.

Rebecca Rebarich, a spokeswoman for the Mideast-based 5th Fleet. "The crew of Firebolt then fired warning shots, and the (Guard) vessels moved away to a safe distance from the US vessels," she added.

— AP

THE NAVY said the Cyclone-class patrol ship USS Firebolt fired the warning shots after three fast-attack Guard vessels came within 68 yards (62 meters) of it.

US naval forces continue to remain vigilant and are trained to act in a professional manner, while our commanding officers retain the inherent right to act in self-defense," she said.

The last time a Navy vessel fired warning shots in the Persian Gulf in an incident involving Iran was in July 2017, when the USS Thunderbolt, a sister ship to the Firebolt, fired to warn off a Guard vessel. Regulations issued last year give Navy commanders the authority to take "lawful defensive measures" against vessels in the Mideast that come within 100 meters (yards) of their warships.

While 100 meters may seem far to someone standing at a distance, it's incredibly close for large warships that have difficulty in turning quickly, like aircraft carriers.

Even smaller vessels can collide with each other at sea, risking the ships.

HANDS-FREE | RIDE

Cars would automatically monitor speed

Self-driving cars likely in UK soon

London, April 28: Self-driving vehicles could hit the road this year on motorways in Britain, the government said on Wednesday, under plans to permit motorists to temporarily take their hands off the wheel.

The Department for Transport (DfT) said in a statement that it will allow hands-free driving in cars equipped with lane-keeping technology, for use during slow motorway traffic.

Automated Lane Keeping System (ALKS) technology, which has been internationally adopted for the development of autonomous cars, limits speed to 37 miles (60 kilometres) per hour.

THE TECHNOLOGY could improve road safety by reducing human error that contributes to more than 85 percent of accidents, according to the DfT.

The "first type of self-driving vehicles could be on UK roads by the end of this year," the DfT said on Wednesday, adding this could "ease congestion, cut emissions and reduce human error".

Drivers will hand control over to the car, which then automatically monitors speed and keeps a safe distance from other vehicles, but can swiftly

resume control when required.

The technology could improve road safety by reducing human error that contributes to more than 85 percent of accidents, according to the DfT.

"This is a major step for the safe use of self-driving vehicles in the UK, making future journeys greener, easier and more reliable," said Transport Minister Rachel Maclean.

"But we must ensure that this exciting new tech is deployed safely, which is why we are consulting on what the rules to enable this should look like.

"In doing so, we can improve transport for all, securing the UK's place as

a global science superpower," she added.

The UK government predicts that autonomous vehicle technology could create 38,000 jobs by 2035 in an industry worth billions of pounds.

International regulations which came into force in January establish strict requirements for ALKS, which can control the vehicle when the driver is behind the wheel and wearing a seatbelt.

The rules ensure the ALKS can be activated only on roads equipped with a physical separation dividing traffic moving in opposite directions and where pedestrians and cyclists are prohibited.

— AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,733.84	1.61
Nifty 50	14,864.50	1.44
S&P 500*	4,183.95	-0.07
Dollar (₹)	74.36	0.40
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.28	0.36
Euro (₹)	89.74	0.36
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,518	505 1.08
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.80	2.08
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.053	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.629	0.007

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Bajaj Finserv Q4 profit jumps over four-fold

Bajaj Finserv reported a more than four-fold jump in its consolidated net profit to Rs 979 crore for Q4 against Rs 194 crore posted in the year-ago quarter, driven by its insurance business. The total consolidated income rose to Rs 15,387 crore from Rs 13,294 crore. The board recommended a dividend of 3 per share, or 60%, on the face value of Rs 5 per unit. FY21 PAT rose to Rs 4,470 crore from Rs 3,369 crore.

SBI board okays raising up to \$2 bn via bonds



State Bank of India said its central board has approved raising up to \$2 billion (around Rs 14,880 crore) through bonds this fiscal. The executive committee of its central board has approved long-term fund raising in single / multiple tranches up to \$2 billion, SBI said in a filing. The funds are to be raised through a public offer and /or private placement of senior unsecured notes in US dollar or any other convertible currency.

MassMutual aims to double headcount

US life insurer Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company (MassMutual) said will more than double its employee base to 1,000 and raise the physical space of its Global Capability Center (GCC) in Hyderabad despite the pandemic challenges. "We are currently a workforce of approximately 450 associates...we are targeting to reach more than 1,000 by the end of this year," Ravi Tangirala, head of GCC in India, said.

Hatsun Agro reports ₹57 crore net profit in Q4

Chennai-based dairy products-maker Hatsun AgroProduct Ltd has clocked a net profit of Rs 57.13 crore for the March quarter against Rs 7.95 crore in the year-ago quarter. For the year ending March 31, 2021 profits grew to Rs 246.35 crore from Rs 112.27 crore. The total income for the quarter surged to Rs 1,570.37 crore from Rs 1,262.55 crore. The total income for FY21 stood at Rs 5,575.50 crore against Rs 5,316.98 crore.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Info Edge to sell shares worth ₹750 cr Zomato files for ₹8,250-crore IPO

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD with agency inputs MUMBAI, APRIL 28

Restaurant aggregator and food delivery company Zomato has filed draft red herring prospectus with the Securities and Exchange Board of India for a Rs 8,250-crore initial public offering. Apart from food delivery options, Zomato provides information, menus and user-reviews of partner restaurants.

The IPO will have a fresh issue of shares worth Rs 7,500 crore and an offer for sale of shares worth Rs 750 crore from one of its existing investor, Info Edge, which holds over 18 per cent stake in Zomato.

Naukari.com promoter Info Edge shares climbed 1.52 per cent on the BSE to Rs 5,019.90 on Wednesday.

Ant Group and Uber also hold stake in Zomato.

Launched in Delhi 12 years ago, Zomato has grown from a home project to one of the largest food aggregators in the world. It is present in 24 countries and 10,000 plus cities globally.

Zomato was founded by Pankaj Chaddah and Deepinder Goyal in 2008, earlier it was called Foodlebay.

Zomato competes with another home grown food ordering and delivery platform Swiggy.

"Except for Info Edge, which holds 18.55 per cent of the equity share capital of our company as on the date of this DRHP on a



MARKET LOOKS BEYOND COVID CRISIS

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 28

With the government getting into a fire fighting mode and medical supplies being brought in for the Covid-affected, the market's upward momentum sustained for the third consecutive day. The Sensex gained 789 points, or 1.61 per cent, and the Nifty-50 was up 211 points, or 1.44 per cent, on Wednesday.

"Despite the sharp surge in both daily cases/daily deaths in India, and extension of lockdown by Maharash-

tra till May 15, investors seem to be looking beyond the current scenario, building in optimism from the vaccination drive and the strong earnings season so far," said analysts. Both Sensex and Nifty-50 have gained over 3.5 per cent in the last three sessions and investors' wealth has risen by Rs 6,39,437.31 crore. FPIs and domestic institutions were net buyers of equities worth Rs 766.02 and Rs 436.02 crore. Most sectors gained, with banks and financials leading the rally.

fully diluted basis, and Alipay and Antfin, which together hold 16.53 per cent of the equity share capital of our company as on the date of this DRHP on a fully diluted basis no shareholder controls 15 per cent or more of the voting rights in our company", the company said in the DHRP.

Info Edge on Tuesday said it will sell stake worth Rs 750 crore in the IPO. In

a regulatory filing, Info Edge said Zomato is proposing an IPO of its equity shares, comprising a fresh issue of equity shares by Zomato Ltd and an offer for sale by Info Edge (India) Ltd.

In February, Zomato had raised \$250 million (over Rs 1,800 crore) in funding from Tiger Global, Kora and others, valuing the online food-ordering platform at \$5.4 billion.

SPICEXPRESS AIRLIFTS 1,000 O2 CONCENTRATORS

Mumbai, April 28: SpiceJet's dedicated freighter arm SpiceXpress on Wednesday said it has airlifted 1,000 oxygen concentrators from Hong Kong to Delhi amidst a nationwide shortage of medical oxygen.

Ordered by SpiceHealth for emergency use and distribution across India, the oxygen concentrators will reach Delhi via Kolkata, SpiceJet said. An oxygen concentrator takes oxygen from ambient air.

This is the second big consignment of oxygen concentrators ordered and delivered to SpiceHealth with more than 2,000 such concentrators getting transported in the last two weeks, SpiceJet said.

The company is looking at bringing about 20,000 oxygen concentrators in the coming days. —PTI

Maruti Suzuki advances maintenance shut down

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, APRIL 28

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest carmaker, on Wednesday said it will shut down for nine days its factories in Haryana's Gurugram and Manesar to make oxygen available for medical needs as coronavirus ravages the country.

The Delhi-based automajor, which sells one out of two cars sold in India, has decided to advance its maintenance shutdown, originally scheduled for June, to May 1-9.

Production in all factories will close for maintenance during this period. As part of the car manufacturing process, Maruti Suzuki uses a small amount of oxygen in its factories while relatively much larger quantities are used by the manufacturers of components.

"In the current situation, we believe that all available oxygen should be used to save lives. Accordingly, Maruti Suzuki has decided to advance its maintenance shutdown, originally scheduled for June, to 1st to 9th May. Production in all factories will close for maintenance during this period," the company said in a stock exchange filing.

JASON SCOTT APRIL 28

Japan, India and Australia's trade ministers have met to officially launch the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative, following reports that the three nations are working together to counter China's dominance on trade in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan's Hiroshi Kajiyama, India's Piyush Goyal and Australia's Dan Tehan agreed in a video conference on Tuesday to instruct their officials to share best practices on supply chain resilience. Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Samsung's Lee family to pay \$10.8 bn inheritance tax

JOYCE LEE & HEEKYONG YANG APRIL 28

The family of late Samsung Electronics Co Ltd chairman Lee Kun-hee said on Wednesday they will pay over 12 trillion won (\$10.8 billion) in inheritance tax for his estate and donate his vast private art collection to state curators.

Lee, who is credited with transforming Samsung into the world's largest smartphone and memory chip maker, died on October 25 with an estate local media valued at around 26 trillion won.

The inheritance tax bill — one of the largest in South Korea and globally — has been closely watched for its potential to dilute the family's controlling stake in Samsung.

The family said it planned to pay the bill over five years in six instalments, starting this



Lee Kun-hee

month. "It is our civic duty and responsibility to pay all taxes," the family said in a statement released by Samsung.

The share price of Samsung C&T Corp — the Samsung conglomerate's de facto holding company — dropped 5.5 per cent after the statement, which provided no detail on how Lee's shares would be distributed or sold, nor specifics on how the family planned to fund the payments.

"There was general investor disappointment as no details about how the stakes will be divided

were revealed," said analyst Lee Sang-hun at HI Investment & Securities.

Investors will instead need to wait for regulatory filings to discover changes in shareholding by Lee's son and Samsung Electronics' vice chairman Jay Y. Lee or other family members.

The family had been discussing using shares in affiliated companies as collateral for personal loans to pay part of the tax bill to avoid selling Samsung holdings.

Analysts have said the family is likely to use loans and dividends from both their own and Lee's shares to pay the tax.

Jay Y. Lee is the largest shareholder of Samsung C&T with a 17.33 per cent stake. The heir is currently halfway through a 30-month jail sentence. The presidential Blue House on Tuesday dismissed calls from business lobby groups for a pardon. —Reuters

ADB commits \$8 billion funding for India in 2020

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 28

India was the third highest recipient of ADB funds in 2020, having received commitments for close to \$9 billion support.

The country received \$8.7 billion of funds as loans, special funds, Covid-19 response funds and co-financing arrangements last year. Around \$4,177 million came as loans, \$2,570 million as Covid-response and \$1,548 million as co-financing for projects. Another \$100 million came in as equity investment apart from \$4,155 million in the form of Trade Finance Programme and Micro Finance Programme.

Indonesia and Philippines were the top two recipients of ADB funds in 2020.

Most of the funding made by ADB in India was in the social sector, infrastructure and renewable energy. ADB committed a \$1.5 billion CARES Program loan for India to support health initiatives and fund social protec-



tion for more than 800 million people, including families below the poverty line, women, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and low-wage earners among others.

The development bank is supporting the Delhi-Meerut regional rapid transit system with a \$500 million loan. The project, through ADB's technical assistance and knowledge advice, will support systematic land-use planning and promote vertical and dense development of urban buildings, along with municipal resource mobilisation, to create an efficient and clean urban environment.

The ADB committed \$300 million financing for

power distribution improvement project in rural Uttar Pradesh.

The ADB also signed a \$50.9 million financing agreement with ReNew Power to help finance its working capital needs amidst the pandemic. The bank committed a long-term loan of \$62.41 million to the Engie Group for construction and operation of a 200-megawatt solar power plant at Raghnesda Solar Park in Gujarat.

It provided a \$100 million loan to India for a smart energy project that will convert overhead distribution lines to underground cables. A \$50-million programme to support public financial management reforms in West Bengal will strengthen procedures and operational efficiencies to enhance service delivery.

ADB invested \$75 million in OrbiMed Asia Partners, a private equity fund managed by OrbiMed Advisors, to enhance health-care capacity, innovation, and resilience in India.

Oz, Japan and India form supply chain initiative to counter China

JASON SCOTT APRIL 28

Japan, India and Australia's trade ministers have met to officially launch the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative, following reports that the three nations are working together to counter China's dominance on trade in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan's Hiroshi Kajiyama, India's Piyush Goyal and Australia's Dan Tehan agreed in a video conference on Tuesday to instruct their officials to share best practices on supply chain resilience. Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

said in a statement. They also committed to holding investment promotion events to explore the possibility of diversification of their supply chains.

The three nations are seeking to build stronger supply chains to counter China's dominance as trade and geopolitical tensions escalate across the region, Bloomberg reported in August.

While China wasn't specifically addressed in Tuesday's statement, the ministers said that "some supply chains have been left vulnerable due to a range of factors," while "the pandemic had revealed supply-chain vulnerabilities globally and in the region."

The ministers agreed to convene once a year to progress the initiative, which could be expanded in the future based on consensus.

"Australia's supply chains have generally proven resilient, but the pandemic has highlighted the need for greater international cooperation to strengthen supply chains," Tehan said in a separate statement. "Japan and India are important partners for Australia. I look forward to working closely together to strengthen supply chain resilience in our region." —Bloomberg

Over 8,600 line up for agri infra loan

New Delhi, April 28: The Centre on Wednesday said it has so far received 8,665 applications seeking subsidised loan worth Rs 8,216 crore under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) scheme launched to augment post-harvest infrastructure in the country.

Under the AIF scheme,

implemented in 2020-21 for ten years, about Rs 1 lakh crore will be provided by banks and financial institutions as loans with interest subvention of 3 per cent per annum and credit guarantee coverage under CGTMSE (Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises) for loans up

to Rs 3 crore.

Maximum applications have been received from Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) followed by agri-entrepreneurs and individual farmers, it said.

These investments are for a wide range of projects which will unlock value for farmers. —PTI

ROBBING | PETER \$1.5 trillion to come from taxing wealthiest Americans; welfare of families in focus

Biden's \$1.8 tn spending plan: Taxes double for millionaire households

LAURA DAVISON APRIL 28

President Joe Biden's administration on Wednesday unveiled a \$1.8 trillion, 10-year plan to ramp up federal support for American families, with a major expansion in spending on child care, paid leave and education. The "American Families Plan," which Biden will tout in a joint address to Congress Wednesday night, is funded in part by \$1.5 trillion of tax hikes on the wealthiest Americans. The proposals still face major changes in Congress, with Republicans set against higher taxes and Democrats hav-

ing their own priorities.

Ambitious as it is, Biden's programme omits some of his campaign-trail agenda items and lacks any move to address a cap on state and local tax deductions that Democrats from high-tax states want removed. Following are key elements to the plan:

Income taxes

Biden is calling to raise the top personal income tax rate to 39.6 per cent for those among the highest 1 per cent of earners. "No one making \$400,000 per year or less will see their taxes go up," the White House said in a fact sheet on the plan. Still, the document didn't specify if that

threshold applies to both single earners as well as married couples.

Capital gains

Biden would increase the capital gains rate to 39.6 per cent from 20 per cent for those earning \$1 million or more—0.3 per cent of taxpayers or roughly half a million households—equalizing that rate with the top marginal income tax rate. A 3.8 per cent Obamacare tax on investment would then be added on top, meaning the richest would pay a 43.4 per cent federal rate on realised investment returns. State taxes could put the combined tax bill north of 50 per cent.



Joe Biden

The plan would also end a long-standing capital gains tax break on inheritances known as "step-up in basis," which allows heirs to use the market value of assets at the time of inheritance rather than the actual purchase price as the cost basis for capital gains.

Carried interest, real estate

The carried interest tax break used by private equity and hedge fund managers to lower their tax bills would be eliminated under Biden's plan. In what critics call a loophole, which allowed for a share of income being classed as a capital gain, with an associated lower tax rate.

The administration also would eliminate a real estate tax break for when property investors sell one holding for a more expensive one.

IRS audits

The plan calls for increased audits on high-

earners that could collect an additional \$700 billion in tax revenue, with funding increases for the Internal Revenue Service. Biden is also proposing to require banks to report information on account flows, so that earnings from investments and business profits are reported to the IRS like wages are.

Child tax credit

Biden is proposing to extend through 2025 an enhanced version of the child tax credit. The credit, increased for 2021 in the March pandemic-relief package, provides a \$3,600 credit for children under six and \$3,000 for those six

and older. The IRS is slated to send the payments regularly, which amounts to \$250 or \$300 per child per month, depending on their age.

Child care

The plan includes \$225 billion to help low-income families pay for child care, provide funding to child care providers and boost wages for child care workers to \$15 an hour. Biden is also proposing to make permanent a tax credit for child care costs that would reimburse families for care of children 12 and under with a credit worth up to \$4,000 for one child or \$8,000 for multiple children. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Kohli stays fifth in T20 rankings

Dubai: India captain Virat Kohli and senior opener K. L. Rahul maintained their fifth and seventh places respectively in the latest ICC's ranking for T20 batsmen. Pakistan's Mohammed Rozwan made an entry into top-10. The 28-year-old wicketkeeper-batsman's unbeaten knocks of 82 and 91 in the first and third matches have helped him gain five slots to reach 10th position, overtaking the likes of England captain Eoin Morgan and India opener Rohit Sharma. Rizwan is the second-highest ranked Pakistan batsman in the list, only behind captain Babar Azam, who is now in third place. However India has no representation in the top-10 of either bowlers or all-rounder's list. In the list of Test batsmen, Kohli is again placed fifth while Rohit Sharma is tied seventh. — *PTI*

Women's tourney unlikely at IPL

New Delhi: The three-team Women's T20 challenge, which is held during the IPL, is unlikely to go ahead this year given the current restrictions imposed by countries on air travel with India due to the massive spike in COVID-19 cases here. While the BCCI was planning a camp for the Indian women, the tournament has hit choppy waters as none of the Australian, English, South African or West Indies cricketers will be able to travel to India because of the unprecedented "health crisis". "Getting Indian players quarantined is not an issue even now but no foreign player is keen to travel in the current climate. We can find a window later when things get better," a top BCCI source said on conditions of anonymity. — *PTI*

IOA vice-prez Gehlot no more

New Delhi: Indian Olympic Association vice-president Janardhan Singh Gehlot died in Jaipur on Wednesday after prolonged illness. Gehlot, a former Rajasthan minister, was also the founder president of International Kabaddi Federation. He was in his 70s. He was the head of the Amateur Kabaddi Federation of India for 28 years till 2013. He was also serving as the president of the Rajasthan Olympic Association at the time of his death. Gehlot was elected as one of the nine IOA vice presidents in the 2017 elections. "On behalf of IOA family, our heartfelt condolences to Gehlot family on the sad and untimely demise of IOA vice president and president of Rajasthan Olympic association Janardhan Singh Gehlot," IOA President Narinder Batra said. — *PTI*

Delhi loses Asian boxing to Dubai

New Delhi: The Asian Boxing Championship which was scheduled to be held here next month was on Wednesday moved to Dubai because of the deepening Covid-19 crisis in India but the national federation will remain a co-host along with its UAE counterpart. The tournament was to be held at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium from May 21 to 31 in the capital. "In the wake of international travel restrictions to India, the Boxing Federation of India, in consultation with Asian Boxing Confederation, has decided to conduct the upcoming 2021 edition of the ASBC Asian Elite Men and Women Boxing Championships in Dubai," the BFI said. — *PTI*

Live on TV

CRICKET

IPL: Mumbai Indians vs Rajasthan Royals from 3.30 pm; Delhi Capitals vs Kolkata Knight Riders from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Europa League: Semifinal First Leg — Manchester United vs Roma from 12.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2, 3; Villarreal vs Arsenal from 12.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1

AFC Champions League: Persepolis vs Al Rayyan from 8 pm; FC Goa vs Al Wahda from 10.30 pm on Star Sports 3

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C - 9, Sector - III, Noida - 201301. Editor - T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep Rs. 20.00 per copy.

CSK IS BIG BOTHER

Super Kings anna-hilate Sunrisers to spring back to top of table

New Delhi, April 28: Chennai Super Kings showed Sunrisers Hyderabad who the big brother is as they hammered them by seven wickets in their Indian Premier League match, here on Wednesday.

For SRH, skipper David Warner scored 57 runs while Manish Pandey came up with a 61-run knock to help their side to 171 for 3.

It was a smooth chase for CSK with Faf du Plessis (56) and Ruturaj Gaikwad (75) sharing a 129-run opening partnership.

Earlier, Warner and Pandey added 106 runs for the second wicket at the Kotla but it was Williamson's 26 not out off 10 balls and Kedar Jadhav's 12 off 4 balls which ensured a competitive total for SRH.

Lungi Ngidi was the best bowler for CSK, returning figures of 2 for 35 from 4 overs while Sam Curran (1/30) got the other wicket.

Warner, who passed 10,000 T20 runs during the course of his innings, appeared frustrated at times at the inability to force the pace on a track where ball wasn't always coming onto the bat.

He 50th IPL half-century had three fours and two sixes but it was not his usual aggressive, bustling knock. He could not get going and his powerful hits went straight to the fielders. Ngidi ended Warner's misery by having caught (by Ravindra Jadeja) attempting a big shot off a widish delivery.

Pandey, in contrast, was faster. Back in the side after being dropped following a few patchy knocks, the right-hander showed intent from the beginning. He hit Moeen Ali for a huge six early in his innings but could not get the big hits on a consistent basis. — *PTI*



Faf du Plessis of Chennai Super Kings plays a shot during the IPL match against Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in Delhi on Wednesday.

— *IPL*

KNIGHTS RUN INTO CRACK CAPITAL TEAM

Ahmedabad, April 28: Kolkata Knight Riders' floundering batting will be put to test once again as they look to build a winning momentum against a star-studded Delhi Capitals in their Indian Premier League match here on Thursday.

KKR's batting woes emanate right from the top with the highly talented Shubman Gill continuing his poor run — 89 runs from six outings.

While their bowling, especially the 'master-apprentice' spin duo of Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy, have done an excellent job in restricting the oppositions, KKR's top-order batting has hurt them the most.

Thursday's clash will see a mini battle between the Caribbean duo of Andre Russell and Shimron Hetmyer, both explosive on the field, especially while wielding the willow.

KKR batting will be put to test against the likes of Ishant, Kagiso Rabada and young gun Avesh Khan, while the spin duo of Amit Mishra and Axar Patel will also look to make an impact. — *PTI*

SCORECARD

Sunrisers Hyderabad: David Warner c Ravindra Jadeja b Lungi Ngidi 57, Jonny Bairstow c Deepak Chahar b Sam Curran 77, Manish Pandey c Faf du Plessis b Lungi Ngidi 61, Kane Williamson not out 26, Kedar Jadhav not out 12. **Extras (LB-2, WD-6) 8. Total (for 3 wickets in 20 overs) 171. FoW:** 1-22, 2-128, 3-134.

Bowling: Deepak Chahar 3-0-21-0, Sam Curran 4-0-30-1, Shardul Thakur 4-0-44-0, Moeen Ali 2-0-16-0, Lungi Ngidi 4-0-35-2, Ravindra Jadeja 3-0-23-0.

Chennai Super Kings: Ruturaj Gaikwad b Rashid Khan 75, Faf du Plessis lbw b Rashid Khan 56, Moeen

Ali c Kedar Jadhav b Rashid Khan 15, Ravindra Jadeja not out 7, Suresh Raina not out 17. **Extras (WD-3) 3. Total (for 3 wickets in 18.3 overs) 173. FoW:** 1-129, 2-148, 3-148.

Bowling: Sandeep Sharma 3.3-0-24-0, Khaleel Ahmed 4-0-36-0, Siddharth Kaul 4-0-32-0, Jagadeesha Suthith 3-0-45-0, Rashid Khan 4-0-36-3.

Real, Chelsea locked in draw

Madrid, April 28: Karim Benzema came to Real Madrid's rescue again on Tuesday, his acrobatic volley earning them a 1-1 draw against an impressive Chelsea side in the first leg of the Champions League semifinal.

Christian Pulisic grabbed Chelsea a deserved away goal in a soaking wet contest at Valdebebas but they might regret not pulling away, with the struggling Timo Werner again missing a golden chance.

It means Madrid will be satisfied too, after recovering from a chastening opening half an hour before Benzema's brilliance left the tie in the balance.

Eden Hazard was given 24 minutes off the bench against his former club but despite some twinkling touches, he was unable to add a late twist. "It's always good to play against friends," Hazard told BT Sport afterwards.

By the time the Belgian entered the contest, it was drifting, the early adrenaline lost, with both teams seemingly content to defer to the return leg at Stamford Bridge next Wednesday.

Benzema's goal was his 71st in the Champions League, making him the joint-fourth top scorer in the competition's history with Raul, behind only Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and Robert Lewandowski.

When Real Madrid were suffering, and in the absence of the injured Sergio Ramos, Benzema was the one dragging his team back into this match, at times through sheer force of will.

With Werner clearly short of confidence, the Frenchman's precision at the other end could yet prove the difference.

"We should have won the first half. We should have scored at least one more," said Chelsea coach Thomas Tuchel.

"The result is fair. Our first half wasn't the best, their pressure caused us difficulties but we adapted and in the second half we were better," said Zinedine Zidane. — *AFP*



Real Madrid's French defender Raphael Varane (left) challenges Chelsea's American midfielder Christian Pulisic during their Champions League semifinal first leg match at the Alfredo di Stefano stadium in Valdebebas, on the outskirts of Madrid, on Tuesday. The match ended 1-1.

— *AFP*

Fiery Arsenal train guns on former coach in semi

London, April 28: Arsenal are relying on Europa League success to save a sorry season, but face former manager Unai Emery with a point to prove in Thursday's semifinal first leg against Villarreal.

Sitting 10th in the Premier League, the Gunners are on course for their worst league finish since 1995.

But Mikel Arteta's men are also just three games away from only the club's third ever European trophy and a much-needed ticket back into the Champions League for the first time in five seasons.

All is not well at the Emirates on or off the field. Ahead of Friday's 1-0 defeat by Everton, thou-

sands of fans demonstrated against Arsenal's owner Stan Kroenke, calling on the American billionaire to sell the club following his role in a collapsed European Super League.

Arsenal were one of 12 breakaway clubs seeking the reassurance of top level European football every season without facing the perils of having to qualify.

It is easy to see why Kroenke sought the guaranteed income the Super League would provide.

For 19 seasons between 1998-99 and 2016-17, the Londoners never failed to qualify for the Champions League. Now they are set to finish outside the Premier League's top four for a fifth consec-

IPL POINTS TABLE						
Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
CSK	6	5	1	0	10	+1.475
RCB	6	5	1	0	10	+0.089
DC	6	4	2	0	8	+0.269
MI	5	2	3	0	4	-0.032
KKR	6	2	4	0	4	-0.305
PBKS	6	2	4	0	4	-0.608
RR	5	2	3	0	4	-0.681
SRH	6	1	5	0	2	-0.264

ORANGE CAP		
Faf du Plessis, CSK	270	
Shikhar Dhawan, DC	265	
KL Rahul, PBKS	240	

PURPLE CAP		
Harshal Patel, RCB	17	
Avesh Khan, DC	12	
Rashid Khan, SRH	9	

Mumbai look to roll blues away

New Delhi, April 28: Defending champions Mumbai Indians will look to sort out their middle-order woes and bring their campaign back on track when they take on Rajasthan Royals in an IPL game here on Thursday.

MI are coming into the match after suffering back-to-back losses, the last one being a nine-wicket defeat against Punjab Kings in Chennai and need to start the Delhi leg afresh.

The Sanju Samson-led Rajasthan have lost thrice in the tournament so far and will seek to build on the six-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders in the previous match.

Mumbai's middle-order, which boasts of hard-hitting batsmen like Suryakumar Yadav (154 runs), Hardik Pandya (36 runs), Krunal Pandya (29 runs) and Kieron Pollard (65 runs), hasn't fired in unison so far.

Rajasthan, on the other hand, have a lot of issues to ponder over, particularly in the absence of key players Jofra Archer, Ben

HEAD to HEAD			
Matches	22		
MI	11	RR	11

FOR THE RECORD

● Kieron Pollard who hit 199 fours in 152 innings of 169 matches, needs just one four to become only fourth batsman to complete a double century of fours for Mumbai Indians.

● Sanju Samson with 97 sixes in 80 innings of 84 matches, needs three more sixes to become the second Rajasthan Royals batsman after Shane Watson (109 sixes in 76 innings) to complete a century of sixes in IPL.

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

● Mumbai Indians defeated Rajasthan Royals by 57 runs at Abu Dhabi.

● Rajasthan Royals beat Mumbai Indians by 8 wickets at Abu Dhabi.

STATS: S. PERVEZ QAISER

Stokes, Liam Livingstone and Andrew Tye. Englishman Jos Buttler would need to score big to compliment his skipper Sanju Samson, who is the team's leading run-scorer (187) despite being inconsistent. — *PTI*

RELAY TEAM IS SET TO MISS KEY TOKYO EVENT

New Delhi, April 28: Star sprinters Hima Das and Dutee Chand might miss the Olympic qualifying World Athletics Relays in Poland on May 1 and 2 as the Indian team's connecting flight to Amsterdam has been suspended following the record-shattering spike in the country's Covid-19 case load.

The women's 4x100m and the men's 4x400m relay teams were to board a KLM flight to Amsterdam in the wee hours on Thursday but the Dutch government has suspended flights from India effective Monday evening.

The Athletics Federation of India is trying to book an alternate flight available to any European city en route to Silesia in Poland where the event will be held. There is no direct flight to Poland from India. — *PTI*

SPRINT STAR BLAKE SAYS BE SAFE INDIA

Kingston, April 28: Jamaican sprint star Yohan Blake has sent his love to India as the country battles a lethal second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, "begging" the people of the country to do all that they can to stay safe.

The 2011 100m world champion is an avid cricket fan and an ambassador of the Road Safety World Series T20 event. He was in India last year.

"Just want to take this time to send my love to India. I am begging everyone please do what you can to stay safe. I know it may be difficult but imagine if we work together," Blake tweeted.

"I have been watching cricket over the years. I have grown to love the country so much. Wonderful people all around," said Blake who was also a part of the Jamaican men's 4x100m gold winning teams in the 2012 and 2016 Olympics. — *PTI*