

IN BRIEF

CISF conducts bomb detection drill

New Delhi: The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and other agencies Monday conducted a "dummy check" outside the National Media Centre here by placing a toy-shaped object to examine the response of security personnel to any bomb scare, officials said. "It was a dummy check conducted by our government building security (GBS) unit to check the response of our teams to such threats," CISF chief spokesperson DIG Anil Pandey said. According to the Delhi Police, a CISF team was examining the area outside National Media Centre around 10 am when they spotted a suspicious object. "They observed a toy-shaped item wrapped in a polythene. Immediately, the local police was informed. The bomb detection squad (BDS) team of CISF checked the item thoroughly and presence of any explosive was ruled out. "The BDS of CISF and new Delhi district of police thoroughly searched the area for any other suspicious article in the vicinity. Nothing else was found," a senior police officer said.

4 of gang held after encounter in Noida

Noida: Four alleged members of a gang involved in over five dozen cases of street crimes in Noida-NCR were held after a gunfight with the police in Noida on Monday, officials said. One of them was injured in the exchange of fire that took place near the Radisson Hotel in Sector 57 that falls under the Sector 58 police station, while the other three were held during a combing operation, they said. Noida's additional deputy commissioner of police Ranvijay Singh said the four arrested men are "key members" of the infamous Durgesh Gang of Delhi, which has 60 to 70 cases lodged against them in the National Capital Region.

Man's body found in Mangolpuri area

New Delhi: The body of a 35-year-old man was found on Monday morning in northwest Delhi's Mangolpuri area, police said. According to police, information regarding the body with injury marks was received at 9.35 am at Mangolpuri police station. "Police reached the spot and identified the deceased as Chandarbhan, a resident of Mangolpuri. He used to work as a cardboard box painter in Rampura Industrial area," deputy commissioner of police (outer) Parminder Singh said. The body has been sent for post-mortem. A case under appropriate section has been registered and an investigation into the matter is underway, the deputy commissioner of police said.

IMD: HEAT WAVE UNLIKELY FOR ANOTHER WEEK

New Delhi: The maximum temperature crossed the 40 degrees Celsius-mark in parts of Delhi on Monday, but a heat wave is "unlikely" for another week, the India meteorological department (IMD) said. The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded a maximum of 38.8 degrees Celsius, four notches above normal. The minimum temperature settled at 18.5 degrees Celsius, normal for this time of year, the IMD said. The weather stations at Najafgarh, Narela and Pitampura recorded a maximum of 40 degrees Celsius, 40.3 degrees Celsius and 40.1 degrees Celsius, respectively. Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the regional forecasting centre of the IMD, said Delhi is unlikely to witness a heat wave till April 11-12. "The temperature is likely to rise on Tuesday. However, it will drop again (by two to three degrees) in the coming days," he said. For the plains, a "heat wave" is declared when the maximum temperature is more than 40 degrees Celsius, and at least 4.5 notches above normal. A "severe" heat wave is declared if departure from normal temperature is more than 6.5 degrees Celsius, according to the IMD. — PTI

4th wave of Covid-19 pandemic in Delhi: Jain

Says micro-containment zones being created where 2 or more cases are reported

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

Delhi is witnessing a fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic and to tackle it the testing capacity has been ramped up while micro-containment zones are being created where two or more cases are being reported, health minister Satyendar Jain said on Monday.

The national capital recorded 4,033 coronavirus cases on Sunday, taking the tally to over 6.76 lakh while the death toll mounted to 11,081 with 21 new fatalities being reported, according to a bulletin issued by the health department.

Mr Jain, on Monday, said Delhi is witnessing a fourth wave of the pandemic and the government is taking all relevant measures to contain its spread. "The case positivity rate is 4.64 per cent. Random tests are being done at a fast pace and the capacity is being ramped up. More than 80,000 tests are being conducted a day which is five times more than the national average," he told reporters.

The Arvind Kejriwal government is taking a number of other decisions to contain the contagion, the minister said, adding that micro-containment zones are being created wherever two to three Covid-19 cases are getting detected.

Mr Jain, a Covid survivor, appealed to the people who have recuperated from the disease to donate plasma.

"I appeal to all citizens of Delhi to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour and not show any negli-

ARVIND KEJRIWAL government is taking a number of other decisions to contain the contagion, the minister said, adding that micro-containment zones are being created wherever 2 to 3 Covid cases are getting detected

gence. I believe that taking necessary precautions is of utmost importance to stop the spread of the infection," he said.

When asked about the surge in the number of Covid-19 cases and deaths, Mr Jain said, "The severity of the cases (this time) is comparatively lower vis-à-vis the previous waves." "The Delhi government is taking appropriate measures, the most significant one being boosting daily testing capacity. Around 80,000 tests are being done each day. Moreover, asymptomatic and mildly symptomatic patients are being kept in home isolation while moderate to severe cases are being treated in the hospitals," he said.

"Genome tracing is also being carried out. Additionally, micro-containment zones are being created to prevent the spread of the virus," he added.

About the coronavirus variants, he said let scientists look into the variants.

"It would not make much difference. Scientists say that the current coronavirus variant is spreading at a fast pace with less severity and the mortality rate is also low. The central lab is carrying out a study on the variants," he said.



A health worker takes sample from a man for Covid test as coronavirus cases surge across the country in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

City records 3,548 new cases of Covid, 15 more deaths in a day

New Delhi, April 5: The national capital recorded 3,548 fresh cases of Covid on Monday, while 15 more people succumbed to the infection taking the death toll to 11,096, according to the Delhi health department.

The case positivity rate also rose to 5.54 per cent amid a massive surge in cases in the last few weeks.

Meanwhile, Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain said on Monday said as the city is reeling under the fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic and as such

testing capacity has been ramped up and micro-containment zones being set up in areas where two or more cases are getting reported.

The number of cumulative cases on Monday stood at 6,79,962. Over 6.54 lakh patients have recovered from the disease.

Delhi had reported 4,033 cases and 21 deaths on Sunday. The city had recorded 3,567 cases on Saturday and 3,594 cases on Friday. On December 8, last year, the city had recorded 3,188 cases and 2,706 on December 6.

According to the latest bulletin, 15 more people died due to the disease taking the toll to 11,096.

The number of active cases rose to 14,589 from 13,982 a day before.

A total of 64,003 tests, including 43,960 RT-PCR tests and 20,043 rapid antigen tests, were conducted a day ago, the bulletin said.

The number of people under home isolation increased to 7,983 on Monday from 7,144 on Sunday, while the number of containment zones mounted to 3,090 from 2,917 a day before. — PTI

CM asks officials to expedite projects of wastewater reuse

New Delhi, April 5: Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday directed officials to expedite all ongoing projects related to wastewater reuse and groundwater recharge to increase the availability of drinking water in the national capital.

At a review meeting with officials from the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) and the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC), Mr Kejriwal asked officers to expedite negotiations with neighbouring

states to exchange treated wastewater for drinking water. Twenty-five million gallons of treated water a day will be diverted from the Rithala sewage treatment plant to the Auchandi canal, "in return of clean water that will be received from Haryana for drinking purposes," a DJB statement said.

The Delhi government had earlier proposed providing treated wastewater to neighbouring states for irrigation in exchange for drinking water. — PTI



Traffic jam at Gurugram-Delhi expressway due to construction of Dwarka Expressway Link Road in Gurugram district on Monday. — PTI

Tax consultant held for killing friend over money dispute

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

Over two months after the body of a 30-year-old electrical shop owner was recovered from Delhi's Anand Vihar area, the police, on Monday, said it has arrested his friend for allegedly killing him following an argument over monetary dispute.

Accused Rajneesh Kumar Jain (49), a tax consultant, and his accomplice Shamsher Singh (51), a property dealer by profession, were arrested in the case on Sunday, it said.

The police said that

accused Jain had borrowed ₹1 lakh from his friend Deepak.

When the victim asked him to return the borrowed amount, an argument broke out between them and Jain strangled him while Deepak was asleep.

The incident took place on the intervening night of January 22 and 23 at Jain's flat in Arjun Nagar area, where Deepak had been staying for a few days to hide from his friends and acquaintances from whom he had taken some loan and was unable to pay back, a senior police officer said.

THE POLICE said that accused Jain had borrowed ₹1 lakh from his friend Deepak. When the victim asked him to return the borrowed amount, an argument broke out between them and Jain strangled him while Deepak was asleep

"The autopsy report stated the cause of death to be asphyxia as a result of strangulation. A case of murder under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code was registered at Anand Vihar police sta-

tion," said deputy commissioner of police (Shahdara) R. Sathiyasundaram.

"During the course of investigation, the statement of the deceased's elder brother was recorded. Deepak's friends, with whom he was in contact, were interrogated and their call detail records and locations at the time of incident were also analysed," deputy commissioner of police said.

"Many suspects, including his co-workers in the shop, were also questioned since Deepak also reportedly took some loan from some of his friends

and didn't return the money," deputy commissioner of police said.

With the help of technical surveillance and the statements recorded, accused Rajneesh Kumar Jain was identified and later arrested in connection with the case on Sunday after he confessed to have killed the victim over monetary dispute, deputy commissioner of police said.

On his disclosure, his accomplice Shamsher Singh was arrested from his house in Arjun Nagar in connection with the case, the deputy commissioner of police said.

38-yr-old arms supplier held after gunfight

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

A 38-year-old arms supplier and a member of interstate gang of robbers was arrested on Monday evening after a brief exchange of fire near Shanti Van Chowk in central Delhi, police said. The accused has been identified as Raju, a resident of Binor district in UP, they said, adding that he was absconding in a case of Arms Act in Vasant Vihar after jumping bail granted to him.

"Police received information that Raju would come on a scooter at Geet Colony flyover from Shanti Van between 4 to 5 pm, following which a team was deployed at the stretch.

Man, friends arrested for firing at 18-year-old for talking to his sister

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

A 21-year-old man and his two associates were arrested for opening fire on a first-year college student in Outer Delhi's Alipur area for allegedly chatting with his sister, the police said on Monday.

The victim, Karan Thapa (18), sustained two gunshot injuries and was taken to a nearby hospital for treatment where he is currently under observation, it said.

According to the victim's father, on Sunday night when Thapa was standing at an open space near his house three bike-borne men arrived there and opened fire on him before escaping on their vehicle, the police said. During preliminary

ACCORDING TO the victim's father, on Sunday night when Thapa was standing at an open space near his house three bike-borne men arrived there and opened fire on him before escaping on their vehicle

investigation, it emerged that Mr Thapa used to chat with a girl and has known her for over a year now but her brother, Vikrant, took offence at this. He, along with his associates Vikas Pandey and Ashish, shot the victim multiple times with a country-made pistol and an automatic pistol and thereafter fled from the spot on a bike, according to the police. A case of attempt to

murder was registered and two empty and one live cartridge of 7.65 mm, an empty cartridge of 8 mm calibre, and two misfired rounds were recovered from the scene of crime, said deputy commissioner of police (Outer North) Rajeev Ranjan Singh.

"After the names of the accused were disclosed, multiple raids were conducted at possible hide-outs and accused Vikas Pandey was arrested with one automatic pistol and two live cartridges in his possession from Alipur area," he said.

Later, Ashish and Vikrant were nabbed near Valmiki Chowk and the weapon of offence along with the bike used during the offence was also taken into possession, he added.



Preparations underway for a junction improvement trail at Delhi Gate intersection to enhance road safety for commuters in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

COMPLETELY
BASELESS: BJP ON
RAFALE CHARGES

New Delhi, April 5: The BJP on Monday dismissed as “completely baseless” the allegations of corruption in the Rafale deal, stressing that the Supreme Court had rejected a demand for a probe in the purchase of the fighter aircraft and the CAG also found nothing wrong.

Responding to a question about the Congress’ attack on the Modi government over the bribe allegations, senior BJP leader and Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said at a press conference that the opposition party made it a big issue in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls but lost badly. He said the allegations of corruption were “completely baseless” and suggested that a report in the French media about the alleged financial irregularity in the deal may be due to “corporate rivalry” in that country.

Noting that the Congress had raised the issue earlier too, he said the Supreme Court rejected the demand for a probe and the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) also found nothing wrong in the fighter aircraft deal.

COURT REJECTS
KANGANA'S PLEA
AGAINST AKHTARBHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, APRIL 5

A Mumbai sessions court on Monday dismissed an application filed by Kangana Ranaut challenging the proceedings initiated against her by a magistrate court in connection with a defamation complaint lodged by veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar.

Ranaut had filed the revision application seeking to quash the process issued against her by the Metropolitan Magistrate on the basis of a complaint filed by Akhtar. Her plea was heard and decided by the Sessions court situated at Dindoshi. She had said the procedure under section 200 of the CrPC, which requires the complainant as well as witnesses to be examined on oath, before the issuance of process, was not followed.

Akhtar opposed Ranaut's plea through Advocate Jay Bhavadwaj. He had argued that by issuing summons, Ranaut was given a fair chance to respond to the complaint.

SELECTION OF CBI
CHIEF: SC ASKS GOVT
TO CONVENE MEET

New Delhi, April 5: The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Centre to consider convening before May 2 the meeting of a high-powered committee consisting of the Prime Minister and others for appointment of CBI director observing that in-charge arrangements for the post cannot go on.

A bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Vineet Saran was informed by the Centre that meeting of the committee — consisting of the Prime Minister, leader of the single largest opposition party and the Chief Justice of India or any judge of the apex court nominated by the CJI — will be convened after May 2.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner NGO Common Cause which has sought direction for appointment of a regular CBI director, claimed before the bench that the Centre is delaying the meeting of the committee as it wants to bypass the present CJI S.A. Bobde who is retiring on April 23.

STUDENTS CREATE RUCKUS IN SASARAM
OF BIHAR AMID ANTI-COVID-19 DRIVENAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, APRIL 5

Amid rising corona cases mob of students attacked administrative officials and the police for implementing state government directives to shut down private coaching centres in Sasaram Bihar which falls in Rohtas district.

According to reports around eight students were taken into custody following the violent agitation. Sources from Sasaram said that the incident occurred on Monday after the state government decided to shut down educational institutions due to the rising number of corona cases in the state.

Students allege that the

government has been enforcing corona guidelines on educational institutions but does not take action against those who have been holding political rallies and other gatherings. The officials however feel that few coaching institute owners could be behind the violent attack on the administration and the police who had gone to enforce the corona guidelines. “A mob attacked the officials while they were trying to enforce coronavirus guidelines on Monday. We feel that the situation occurred after students were provoked by few people. We have so far taken few students in custody and have also decided to file an FIR against those who instigated the attack”, Rohtas SP,

Ashish Bharti said.

Sources from Sasaram told this newspaper that the students burnt down many private and police vehicles. They also actively participated in arson and damaged government properties and tried to block the state highway. Fresh restrictions have been enforced in Bihar to stop the spread of coronavirus cases, which has seen a country-wide surge in the recent past.

According to fresh guidelines all schools, colleges and other educational institutions which were to reopen on April 5, have been ordered to remain closed till April 11. Institutions have also been instructed to strictly follow Covid guidelines during examinations.

LDF hopes to return,
UDF confident of win

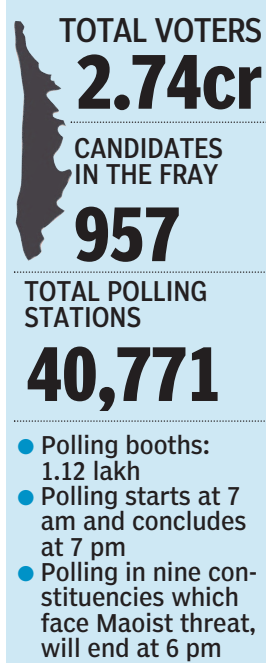
BJP eyes significant percentage of minority votes in polls

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
APRIL 5

After witnessing a hectic month-long campaign, Kerala's 2.74 crore voters will vote on Tuesday to elect their representatives for the 140 Assembly constituencies.

Notwithstanding the Covid safety protocols, the principal political parties carried out a high-voltage campaign. All top leaders led their respective front's campaign for the high stake electoral battle.

The ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) hopes to create history by retaining power, which has never happened since the 1970s, — the LDF and the Congress-led United Democratic Front have won alternate elections since then. The LDF campaign was led by Chief Minister Pinrayi Vijayan, who was bestowed the title ‘Captain’. Though prominent Left leaders including CPM general secretary



Sitaram Yechury, Prakash Karat, Brinda Karat and D. Raja campaigned extensively; the focus was on Vijayan who by all means

was the “super star” campaigner for the LDF.

It claimed that during the last five years the Vijayan government had ensured corruption-free governance, people-friendly administration, social welfare measures, speedy implementation of development projects and fought effectively against the Covid pandemic and Nipah virus and had dealt stoutly with back-to-back floods.

In the outgoing Assembly the LDF had 91 members, and Left leaders claim that this time they would do even better.

The UDF which lagged behind during the first phase of campaigning picked up significantly with the arrival of party leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi on the poll scene. The election meetings and road shows of the two leaders galvanised the Congress workers across the state whose morale was down because of the back-to-

back surveys predicting LDF victory.

With Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi campaigning aggressively, people are keenly watching which way the minority votes would shift this time. In 2016, a significant section of minorities especially Muslims had voted in favour of the LDF which came to power. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the minorities supported the Congress-led UDF which won 19 of the 20 seats.

The minority swing in favour of UDF happened mainly because of Rahul Gandhi's decision to contest from Wayanad.

The LDF says the minorities are aware of the ground reality and who has taken an unwavering position against politics of hatred and communal divide. The BJP says the party would attract a significant percentage of minority votes because of the Modi government's policies.

EC SEIZES GOLD,
ALCOHOL IN TN
APART FROM
₹428 CR CASHA. ARUL PALANI
CHENNAI, APRIL 5

The Election Commission seized precious metals, alcohol, cash and other items worth ₹428 crore before the elections in Tamil Nadu.

Revealing details of seizures, Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo, said that they included cash of ₹91.56 lakh in Ranipet district, ₹1.23 crore in Thousand lights constituency, Chennai and ₹1.15 crore at Veerapandi, Salem, ₹1.06 crore in Vellore district; ₹98 lakh in Coimbatore, ₹1.13 crore in Saidapet and ₹65 lakh in Virudhunagar Assembly Constituency.

“The last 72 hours are extremely sensitive from an expenditure standpoint. Towards this, round the clock surveillance along with CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) teams has been taken up,” he added.

Special teams detected suspicious transactions of ₹5 lakh in from an account of a woman in Coimbatore, which amount has been distributed to a number of voters through G-Pay. The officials have ordered a probe, sources said.

Meanwhile, hours before the state goes to the poll, the teams seized unaccounted cash of ₹35 lakh from premises in Vedia Rasapalayam, Pallipalayam, near Coimbatore on Monday.

The EC has deputed nearly 150 General Observers and over 118 Expenditure Observers to monitor the model code of conduct, including cash-for-votes transactions. About 105 expenditure sensitive constituencies have been identified.



Polling officials carry Electronic Voting Machines and other materials as they leave for polling stations from a distribution centre on the eve of the third and final phase of Assam Assembly elections in Guwahati on Monday.

— PTI

Coal scam: ED is probing role
of several senior Bengal copsAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

A day after arresting West Bengal Police officer Ashok Mishra, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is now probing the role of several other senior cops of the state police in connection with the coal scam.

Sources in the agency said, “More arrests are likely to be made in a day or two. The role of several other senior officials of West Bengal Police is also under the scanner of the ED”. Mr. Mishra, the inspector-in-charge of the Bankura police station, was arrested by the central probe agency from Delhi. He is alleged to have links with Anup Majee, alias Lala, who is considered to be the kingpin of the scam. This is the second arrest in the case.

In a related development on Monday, the ED pro-

● **THE ED INITIATED investigation on the basis of FIR registered by CBI in the case and the probe under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)**

sionally attached immovable assets, worth ₹165.86 crore, owned by Anup Majee as part of its investigation into the case. Sources said these assets include land, factory premises, plant and machinery and other assets of two companies namely “M/s Ispat Damodar Private Limited and M/s Sonic Thermal Private Limited”. The manufacturing plants of both these companies are situated in Purulia and Bankura districts of West Bengal and owned by Majee, they added.

The ED initiated investigation on the basis of FIR registered by CBI in the

case and the probe under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) revealed that Majee had transferred proceeds of crime to the tune of ₹67.80 crore to both the companies in the guise of share purchase for acquiring the plants/assets.

“Additionally, the proceeds of crime to the tune of ₹98.06 crore were also transferred to both the companies. Thus Majee transferred ₹165.86 crore to the companies in a layered manner though through the maze of shell firms,” sources said. In the case, the ED has so far arrested two persons — Vikas Mishra and Ashok Mishra—for their role in laundering the proceeds generated from the illegal coal mining. Vikas Mishra, who is considered to be close to TMC leaders, is in judicial custody and Ashok Mishra is in ED custody till April 7, 2021.

NADDA CANCELS
2 RALLIES DUE
TO THIN CROWD
IN WEST BENGALRAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, APRIL 5

At a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah are frantically repeating their claims of the BJP coming to power with more than 200 Assembly seats in West Bengal, a low turnout at poll campaign rallies continues to haunt their forecasts and plague their party. Monday witnessed the cancellation of BJP president J.P. Nadda's two major campaign rallies in Hooghly, apparently due to poor crowds.

The ominous sign, that has been casting a shadow on the saffron party's prospects for quite some time, resurfaced only a day before the state goes to the third phase of polls with 31 seats on Tuesday.

Nadda, who reached Kolkata on Sunday night, was scheduled to address a public rally each in Shreeampore and Chinsurah apart from a roadshow in South Kolkata in between. Though his first rally was supposed to start from 11.30 am at Shreeampore Stadium for four BJP candidates, it appeared to have failed in attracting the party workers and local residents in large numbers even after an hour.



Jaya Bachchan

becomes the CM again here. I am sure about it.”

In a veiled warning to the BJP, she observed, “Bengalis have always done what they felt in their heart. No one became successful by intimidating the Bengalis always. No one can be too now. There are many things which I think of. But I always follow my heart. I am a Bengali. I want to say: Do not hijack my religion, democracy and democratic rights from me. Never. When I say ‘me,’ I represent all.”

Praising West Bengal as “the safest state for women in the country” she also castigated the BJP saying, “Those who spew venom against Mamataji, I tell them: Shame, Shame.”

SEARCH FOR MISSING



Soni

General public is hereby informed that this girl (depicted in the photo) namely: **Soni D/o Rajesh R/o H.No. K-38, Pana Paposiya Gandhi Ashram Chowk, Narela, Delhi** has been missing/kidnapped from the area of Narela, Delhi since **27.02.2021**. In this regard DD No. **65/2021** dated **04.03.2021**, U/s 363 IPC has been registered at **PS. Narela, Delhi**. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the girl but no clue has come to light so far.

Her physical description is as under:-
Sex: Female, **Age:** 16 years, **Height:** about 4'5" ft., **Complexion:** Fair, **Built:** Thin, **Face:** Round, **Wearing:** Govt. School Uniform.

Any person is having information or clue about this missing/kidnapped girl may kindly inform to the following:-

Website: <http://cbi.nic.in> **SHO P.S. Narela, Delhi**
E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in **Ph. No.: 011-27280435**
Tel. No.: 011-24368638/24368641 **Mob. No: 7065036323**
Fax No.: 011-24368639 **DP/891/ON/2021**

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED



General public is hereby informed that one female namely **Suman Singh, W/o Satish, R/o H.No. 12/4 E-Block, Shahbad Dairy, Rohini, Delhi, Age: 34 years, Height: 4'8", Complexion: Fair, Face: Long, Built: Medium, wearing Salwar Kurti and Chappal** in feet, has been missing/kidnapped since **26.02.2021**. In this regard a DD No. **069A, dated 26.02.2021** has been registered at **P.S. Shahabad Dairy, Delhi**.

Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the female but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about her please inform undersigned.

Website: <http://cbi.nic.in> **SHO P.S. Shahabad Dairy, Delhi**
E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in **Ph. No.: 011-24368639**
Ph. No.: 011-24368638, 24368641 **DP/887/ON/2021**

Ph. No.: 011-27822207, 27821047

SHORT TAKES

'Rape case against Soren being annuled'

Mumbai: The Mumbai police on Monday told the Bombay high court it cannot not carry out probe into the allegations of rape and criminal intimidation levelled against Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren as the victim wants to withdraw her petition filed in HC seeking for FIR to be lodged. Public prosecutor Deepak Thakare told a division bench of Justices S S Shinde and Manish Pitale that the woman had, in 2013, filed a complaint before a magistrate's court seeking for a rape case to be lodged against Soren. "The woman, however, withdrew her complaint the same year. Last year, in August, the woman filed a petition in HC saying she had met with an accident and suspected Soren to be behind the same. The woman later sought to withdraw this plea too," Mr Thakare told the court. — PTI

UP: 4 given lifer for killing 7-year-old

Muzaffarnagar: A court here Monday awarded life sentence to four people including a school manager for shooting dead a seven-year-old boy and injuring his father about 4.5 years ago over old enmity. Additional district sessions judge Nishant Dev also imposed a fine of ₹30,000 each on Amit Kumar (the school manager), Abid, Rahul and Ajay after holding them guilty under Sections 302 (murder) and 307 (attempt to murder) of the Indian Penal Code. Government counsels Niraj Kant Malik and Perdeep Sharma said Vinod was injured while his seven-year-old son died after they were fired upon on the Khatauli Jansath road, while returning to their home on July 18, 2016. Vinod's wife had lodged an FIR against four people including Amit alleging that they had launched the attack over rivalry to run the school. — PTI

2 SC judges to hear coal scam cases

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday decided to appoint two judicial officers, Arun Bhardwaj and Sanjay Bansal, as special judges to conduct trials in the sensational coal scam cases pending since 2014 here. The two judges would replace special judge Bharat Parashar who was holding trials in 41 coal scam cases. A Bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde took note of a letter from the Delhi high court's registrar general that permission be granted to nominate or post another suitable presiding judicial officer as special judge in place of Parashar. Special public prosecutor R. S. Cheema had suggested that it would be appropriate to appoint two special courts instead of one for disposal of 41 pending cases. The bench, also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian, noted the concurrence of the Central government to the proposal and went on to appoint Bhardwaj and Bansal as special judges to preside over two courts to deal with the cases. Tushar Mehta, Solicitor General appearing for the respondent-Union of India, agrees to the aforesaid suggestion. — PTI

VVIP CHOPPER SCAM: BAIL TO BUSINESSMAN

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Monday granted bail to businessman Anoop Kumar Gupta in connection with a money laundering case related to the alleged ₹3,600-crore VVIP chopper scam. Special Judge Arvind Kumar granted the relief to the accused noting that the investigation will take time to complete and he has been in custody since January 29, 2021. As per Enforcement Directorate's allegations, the accused had through his companies committed the offence of money laundering in respect of proceeds of crime amounting to \$24,624,298. The accused is admitted to bail on his furnishing personal bond in the sum of ₹5 lakh with two sureties of the like amount with further conditions that the accused shall not tamper with evidence and shall not try to contact or influence the witnesses., the court said. It further directed the accused to join the probe as and when called by the investigating officer, and will not leave India without the permission of the court.



Construction of the arch for the world's highest railway bridge over river Chenab nears completion in Chenab on Monday. The arch, the most difficult part of the multi-crore bridge over Chenab, is a major leap towards the completion of the 111-km long-winding stretch from Katra to Banihal. — PTI

Russian foreign minister to hold Delhi talks today

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will have detailed discussions on Tuesday with visiting Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov on Russian bilateral ties during which the "Special and privileged strategic partnership" and close defence ties between the two nations including the Russian S-400 air defence systems that India is acquiring from Russia as well as the evolving and fluid situation in Afghanistan that is expected to be discussed. Mr. Lavrov is reaching New Delhi late on Monday evening. Describing India as a "responsible and influential global player", ahead of the talks on Tuesday, Russia on Monday said both countries "share the same vision of the model of the emerging polycentric world order ... (and) attach great importance to collective work based on the principles of good will, consensus and equality, rejection of confrontation and bloc-type approaches". It added that "important set of topics related to the situation in the Asia-Pacific region and Afghanistan will be

Kerry hails India's role in climate change crisis, science, innovation

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

With US Special Presidential Envoy on Climate Change John Kerry beginning his four-day visit to India on Monday, the United States on Monday hailed India "as one of the world's largest economies and a global leader in science and innovation" and said "India is a critical part of the solution to the climate crisis" and that it "sees India as an important partner on future clean energy research, development, and deployment, not least because of their successful domestic agenda in this area". It further said "a key focus for our (Joe Biden) Administration is supporting and encourag-

discussed". The two foreign ministers are also expected to review preparations for the bilateral annual summit this year for which Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to visit New Delhi.

Russia's carefully-chosen words including "rejection of bloc-type approaches" and its reference to the "Asia-Pacific region" which India and the US describe as the "Indo-Pacific" are also



John Kerry

ing India's decarbonisation efforts through clean, zero, and low-carbon investment, and supporting India in mitigating its fossil energy use."

The US embassy spokesperson said, "Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry is traveling to Abu Dhabi, New Delhi and Dhaka on April 1-9, 2021 for consultations on increasing climate ambition ahead of President Biden's Leaders Summit on Climate on April 22-23 and the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) later this year."

being seen in the context of its poor ties with the West, particularly the United States, and the Russian discomfort with the four-nation Quad arrangement that includes both India and the US besides Japan and Australia. Another interesting aspect that has not gone unnoticed by New Delhi is that the Russian Foreign Minister will be leaving for Pakistan on an official visit on Tuesday evening from New Delhi.

Amid Covid spurt, PM to talk to CMs

■ Continued from Page 1 that include imposing prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC. All beaches and outdoor activities will remain out of bounds, while malls and shops will remain closed. Their staff will have to get vaccinated during this shutdown period. Mumbai's Siddhivinayak Temple will be closed from Monday evening onwards till further orders for "darshan" and the regular aarti and puja can be seen by devotees through webcasts. Similarly, the Saibaba temple in Shirdi in the state will also remain shut from Monday midnight.

Delhi on Monday had 3,458 new cases while Karnataka reported 5,279 cases, of which 3,728 cases were from Bengaluru Urban alone. Kerala, with 2,357 daily cases on Monday, saw a fall in its spike while new cases have started coming from Bihar while Tamil Nadu had 3,672.

The Delhi government has announced that one-third of all vaccination centres in all Delhi government hospitals will operate 24 hours from Tuesday. However, the Centre has asked Delhi to keep a watch on the beneficiaries, saying it has found cases of some people under 45 and healthcare and frontline workers being vaccinated in private centres despite a restriction on them.

In a letter to Delhi's principal secretary (health), the Union health ministry pointed out that there were serious lapses in the registration of beneficiaries by VIMHANS (Vidyasagar Institute of Mental Health, Neuro and Allied Sciences) operating

as a private Covid vaccination centre. VIMHANS has been found to register beneficiaries below 45 as Health Care Workers (HCWs) and Front Line Workers (FLWs), and vaccinate them.

Noting vaccines were a precious commodity, these serious lapses at the VIMHANS CVC in compliance of Covid-19 vaccination guidelines harm the countrywide vaccination exercise as eligible beneficiaries may get deprived from vaccination. The Delhi administration has been asked to immediately issue a showcase notice to VIMHANS on such wrong practices which violate Covid-19 vaccination norms and seek a written explanation from them within the next 48 hours. Appropriate monetary fines may also be imposed on the hospital. Further, it has been suggested that depanelment of the hospital may be considered if the explanation to the showcase notice was found unsatisfactory.

In another case, the Delhi Government, in pursuance of the advice from the Union health ministry, has issued a showcase notice to Bensups Hospital, Sector 12, Dwarka, for violation of the guidelines issued by the Centre on the eligible population groups for receiving Covid vaccination, where persons below the age of 45 have been wrongly registered as HCWs and FLWs.

Meanwhile, Zyudus Cadila sought the approval of the Drugs Controller General of India for the use of Pegylated Interferon alpha-2b in treating Covid-19.

Fresh Rafale claims spark Cong-BJP row

■ Continued from Page 1 make a replica of its aircraft at 20,000 euros per piece. AFA enquired whether these replicas, supposed to be the size of a car, were really ever made? Dassault was unable to provide single document or photograph showing that these models existed and were delivered, said the news report.

The news report said inspectors suspected this was a bogus purchase designed to hide a hidden financial transaction.

On reports that some of these models have been put out in India including at the Indian Air Force Chief's residence, Yann Philippin, the journalist who wrote the story, said that besides the huge price of these models, what was strange was that Dassault refused to confirm if they were the same models manufactured by DefSys. "Dassault refused to confirm to me that these are the same models. Are they the same model that were ordered to this Indian company? We don't know. What is strange is that if there was no problem and that was just an Indian company manufacturing models, Dassault should have spoken to us and told us everything was clear. We ordered these models they are to be given to institutions in India to celebrate the Rafale deal. They could have explained to us. They said no comment. There seems to be some kind of embarrassment regarding these plane models at Dassault headquarters," he told a news channel.

Tikait threatens tractor rally, blockade of Gujarat roads

Ahmedabad, April 5: After protesting for months in Delhi, Bhartiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait on Monday said farmers will hold an agitation in Gujarat using their tractors. "Time has come to gherao Gandhinagar and block roads. If needed, we will have to break barricades too," he threatened amid protests against the Centre's three farm laws.

Talking to reporters outside the Sabarmati Ashram here, Tikait claimed farmers in Gujarat were unhappy and suffering.

Hundreds of farmers have been camping at Delhi's borders since November last year against the Centre's three agriculture reform laws. They are demanding a repeal of the three laws along with a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) for their produce.

The protesting farmers took out a tractor rally in Delhi on January 26. Refuting claims that farmers have left protest sites along the Delhi border, Tikait had earlier said they had gone to the fields to work and would return when the Central government was "free from West Bengal elections". — Agencies

CHHATTISGARH NAXAL ATTACK

Missing jawan likely to be held 'hostage'

Maoists reportedly called a journo to inform his captivity

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, APRIL 5

The jawan of a Cobra (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) unit of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) who went missing in the April 3 Maoist ambush on security forces in Terram area on Sukma-Bijapur border in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar region that left 22 jawans dead, may have been held "hostage" by the Naxals.

A phone call from "Maoists" came to a reporter of a local news channel on Monday claiming that the missing Cobra commando Rakesh Singh Manhas has been "captured" by them and is "safe in their custody".

"I received a call from a 'general number' (in which Maoists call to inform about release of their press matters) at 11.30 in the morning informing that the missing Cobra commando has been captured by them and is safe in their custody.

The caller said that the jawan will be released at the appropriate time and informed me that I will be updated about it from



Rakesh Singh Manhas

time to time", Raja Rathore, the local correspondent of a Hindi news channel, told this newspaper from Sukma on phone.

Mr Rathore, the news channel's Sukma correspondent, said that he passed on the information to the family members of the jawan, a native of Jammu, in the presence of a couple of local CRPF officers on Monday.

"The jawan's wife and mother have appealed to the Maoists not to harm him and release him without any delay. The jawan's 5-year-old daughter has also made an appeal to the Naxals to release her father safely", Mr Rathore said.

The Cobra commando was part of a 750 odd

strong contingent of security personnel that was ambushed by Maoists in the Terram area on Saturday.

He has been "declared missing" in the operation by the CRPF.

However, CRPF as well as the security forces have so far maintained silence on the issue.

"The commando is still missing. We have no information if he has been held hostage by Maoists", a senior CRPF officer here told this newspaper requesting not to be quoted.

"We are trying to locate the missing jawan", a senior police officer posted in Bastar said, unwilling to be quoted.

Sources said a back channel effort has begun by the security establishment to secure release of the jawan from Maoist captivity.

Meanwhile, "Jailbandi Rihai Samiti" (committee for release of under-trials), an outfit floated to secure release of under-trials facing charges of involvement in Naxal activities in Bastar, on Monday demanded the Maoists to release the jawan immediately without causing any harm to him.

SC stays proceedings against Yedi

Relief to K'taka CM in case of 'illegal denotification of govt land'

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

In a relief to Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa, the Supreme Court on Monday put on hold the Karnataka high court's order directing a special court to take cognizance of allegation of gratification in the denotification of 24 acres of government acquired land in Bengaluru and releasing them to private individuals.

Yediyurappa has challenged March 17, 2021, order of the Karnataka high court directing the special judge



B.S. Yediyurappa

of the trial court to take cognizance of the alleged offences in the final report of the State Lokayukta police against him under the provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

While staying the high court order, a bench

headed by Chief Justice Sharad Arvind Bobde also comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian issued a notice to one A. Alam Pasha on whose petition the high court had passed March 17, 2021, order reinstating the alleged corruption case against Yediyurappa and another state minister Katta Subramanya Naidu.

The case pertains to the illegal denotification of large tracts of land in Whitefield IT Corridor, which was acquired for an infotech related project in 2006-07 when he was the deputy chief minister in the BJP-JD(S) coalition

government headed by H.D. Kumaraswamy.

The case was registered under the Prevention of Corruption Act on the direction of the Lokayukta Court to Lokayukta police on February 21, 2015, based on a complaint by Pasha.

Besides Yediyurappa, Nirani, former principal secretary V.P. Baligar and former managing director of Karnataka Udyog Mitra Shivaswamy K. are the other accused.

They have been accused by Pasha of committing forgery of documents.

Initially, the lower court had in 2013 dismissed a complaint filed by her.

New Covid restrictions in Maharashtra triggers panic among migrant workers

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, APRIL 5

Migrant workers were seen making a beeline at various railway terminuses in Mumbai to leave the city even before strict restrictions imposed by the Maharashtra government came into force from 8 pm on Monday.

Migrant workers were spotted at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) and Lokmanya Tilak Terminus (LTT) waiting to board a train to their hometown in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West

Bengal.

At LTT, from where trains for Uttar Pradesh and Bihar depart, there has been a rise in number of passengers in the past two days, said officials. Bookings on trains to some towns in Uttar Pradesh are full until April 8, according to reports. In 2020, tens of thousands of migrant workers gathered at the stations trying to catch the trains for Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.

"Though there is no lockdown at present, we fear that it would be imposed soon as the coro-

navirus cases are increasing in Mumbai and train services would be stopped. In such a case, we don't want to get stuck in the city like last year," said one of the migrant workers.

Meanwhile, despite the State Government warning to take strict measures against the violators of Covid-19 guidelines, people have continued to flock the public places. At Dadar vegetable market, a huge crowd was seen on Monday morning. Of them, many were seen not wearing mask and maintaining social distance.

Maha home minister forced to resign...

■ Continued from Page 1 resign to honour the high court decision. He went to meet Pawar Saheb and expressed his willingness to step down. The NCP chief gave him the go ahead."

However, Leader of the Opposition Devendra Fadnis from the BJP said that Mr Deshmukh delayed his decision to step down. "The home minister should have resigned immediately after he was accused of corruption by Mr Singh and after the (former intelligence department) head Rashmi Shukla report on the transfer scam was unearthed."

On March 20, Mr Singh had accused Mr Deshmukh of asking police officers to collect money from bars, restaurants and hookah parlours in Mumbai. In a letter to the chief minister, the former police commissioner wrote that Sachin Waze told him that the minister had asked him to collect ₹100 crores every month from nearly 1,750 bars and restaurants in Mumbai.

The state government has appointed a one-member panel, comprising retired Bombay high court judge Kailash Chandiwal, to probe the allegations against Mr Deshmukh and submit a report in six months.

Mr Deshmukh is the second minister to resign from the MVA government in just more than a month's period.

Mamata targets BJP, EC; vows to return...

■ Continued from Page 1 seats. After Tuesday's voting, only the five remaining phases of the polls in West Bengal will have to be held, before the results are declared for all states on May 2.] The TMC supremo also teased the BJP over the low turnout at its rallies in an oblique reference to the cancellation of two public meetings of BJP president J.P. Nadda in the district during the day. "Their rallies do not attract crowds. The grounds remain empty. That is why they distribute money of a few hundreds to the public to get their votes," she alleged.

Undeterred by the Election Commission's warning to her over her allegations of electoral malpractices in Nandigram, the TMC supremo however said the ongoing Assembly election could have been of four phases instead of a lengthy one like eight rounds due to the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

She also challenged the BJP to contest all the remaining rounds of the polls rather than fleeing due to a dearth of candidates.

Ms Banerjee said: "What was the need for an eight-phase election when they could not give vaccines to all? It was done by BJP mandals. In view of the present situation (Covid-19), shouldn't the polls have been wrapped up within four phases? Now the BJP must not flee. When the rounds have been set so many, they would also have to contest with me till the end."

Maha CM lost moral authority to rule: BJP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

Questioning the "consistent conspicuous silence" of Maharashtra chief minister and Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray over the events leading to home minister Anil Deshmukh's resignation after the Bombay high court asked the CBI to probe into allegations of corruption against him, the BJP on Monday claimed Mr Thackeray has "forfeited the moral authority to govern the state" as "democracy is run by standard of probity and propriety.

Senior BJP leader and Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, while addressing the media at the party headquarters, said so many major incidents have happened under Mr Thackeray's leadership of the Maharashtra government, referring to the Sachin Waze case and former Mumbai Police commissioner Param Bir Singh's corruption allegations against Mr Deshmukh.

Mr Prasad said that NIA will probe all allegations in the case and the BJP expects that all issues are investigated fairly and properly but it needs to be found out whether Mr Deshmukh for asking the former Mumbai police commissioner to collect ₹100 crore every month from various establishments in Mumbai through Waze, was for himself, his party or the state government.

THE ASIAN AGE

6 APRIL 2021

Govt must rework its entire Naxal strategy

In yet another massive ambush in South Bastar, just a couple of kilometres away from their camp and on the edge of the Bijapur forest, the entrenched Maoists took a big toll of the security forces, chiefly the CRPF, in broad daylight on Saturday. It was only the following day that the enormity of the tragedy, that should make us ask serious questions, was revealed. It was found as many as 23 uniformed personnel were killed, as many as 33 were injured, and one was missing.

The questions are pressing because this was not a routine tragedy in which an IED blows up a truck ferrying troops. In this particular case, the forces were out to launch an attack on the Naxalites, presumably fully prepared; they were the hunters. And yet, they were ambushed not 2 km from their base, if early reports are anything to go by. They were chased down a hill with automatic weapons raising bullets on them. Then they ran into what looked like deserted village houses. The insurgent cadres were waiting. More were killed in gruesome ways.

Union home minister Amit Shah quite rightly cut short his election visit in Assam and rushed back to take stock. It does look like deep-going failures of an all-round variety. And yet, even before the post-mortem is complete, the CRPF's director-general is announcing prematurely that there was no intelligence failure. He does not substantiate the assertion, which appears shallow. The forces try to draw comfort from other wholly unsubstantiated assertions when they speak of high numbers of Maoists killed.

It is self-evident that our forces did not expect to be surrounded and chased down a slope and then end up facing murderous Naxalite cadres when they attempt to seek shelter in seemingly empty houses. Should this have happened reportedly 2 km from base camp if the intelligence was good when the soldiers set out to track and capture/kill?

Sad events like these have been occurring for the past 15 years or more. Under various names and fanciful acronyms, plans are drawn up to deal with the armed Maoist cadre. But our soldiers are dying. The data for the last decade is 175 uniformed men dead. The Maoist movement, however, is nowhere near dead.

What happened on Saturday was a part of a proper plan to launch an attack on the Maoists before they go on the rampage in the pre-monsoon summer season. It was meant to be a pre-emptive action. It ends up like little boys playing soldier with their toys and the nation must mourn.

If dealing with armed guerrillas well-entrenched among the people requires a military approach as well as plans to win hearts and minds, then it seems evident that the Indian State has floundered on both counts. Year after year, Bastar in Chhattisgarh becomes the killing field of valiant men who appear short on training, supportive intelligence and possibly also morale, though the last is not clear. It is important to return to the drawing board, call in the specialists, look at the causes of repeated military failures, revamp the development and population-centric paradigm, and jettison smooth talking police officers who do not lead well. The careful training of the state police is much needed, as was done in Jammu and Kashmir where the police now excels in counter-insurgency operations. The local police are the real intelligence gatherers.

Coming soon: Covid passports

It has been more than a year since members of the human race, threatened by a microorganism, have been covering the most distinguishable part of their bodies, the face, with a mask and getting along with life. The new normal, forced by the Covid-19 pandemic, has several other elements that range from an unprecedented part of the workforce opting to "work from home" to a strict "no" to unbridled social dos to avoiding physical contact, even in the form of shaking hands with others.

"Quarantine", a word which rarely appeared in the media, has become as common as "weather". Application of a chemical on the hands immediately after touching an unfamiliar surface has almost become a part of human behaviour. Millions have experienced life in the confines of the four walls of a room for months on end. Travel has been reduced to a necessary evil. It's against this background that British PM Boris Johnson has added "Covid passports" for mass events and a "traffic lights system" for foreign travel to the new normal's defining elements. These are parts of the measures he has suggested to stem the spiralling number of daily Covid-19 cases in his country.

Covid passports, or rather a Covid-status certification system, would record if a person has natural immunity after having the infection, has been vaccinated, or tested negative for Covid-19 recently. It would be a deciding factor if one were to be allowed entry into sports events, nightclubs and theatres when they reopen. The "traffic light" system will rate overseas destinations based on a range of parameters such as proportion of a country's population which has been vaccinated, rates of infection, emerging new variants and access to reliable scientific data and genomic sequencing. Travellers from "green" countries won't be required to isolate while those from "amber" or "red" will have to self-isolate. It looks like humankind will have started living a different life before the virus departs.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Hydro, rail projects in Tibet a threat to India



Claude Arpi

Recent developments not far from the India-China border in Arunachal Pradesh are worrying. On March 29, Dave Petley, pro vice-chancellor (research and innovation) at the University of Sheffield in Britain noted on his blog: "I received an email from Göran Ekstrom of Columbia University making a small group of us aware that he had detected, using seismic instruments, a probable large-scale landslide in the vicinity of the Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet... an idea of the mass (in this case about 100 million tonnes — a very large one indeed)."

Whether it was triggered by an earthquake in this highly seismic area, is still not clear; it could also be due to torrential rain. Mr Petley further explained: "Either way, at Yarlung Tsangpo it is clear that a large amount of rock and ice have detached from the east side of the tributary valley, moving westwards and then to the south. Once again this has formed a catastrophic channelised flow that has travelled down the channel to deposit a large volume in the main channel."

The Yarlung Tsangpo, which becomes the Siang on entering Arunachal Pradesh and later the Brahmaputra in Assam and the Meghna in Bangladesh) is one of the most eco-sensitive regions of the planet.

In a communiqué released during the sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) in early March in Beijing, the Communist Party of China reiterated that according to the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035, adopted by China's top legislature: "The construction of key projects, such as the Sichuan-Tibet Railway

and hydropower development on the Yarlung Tsangpo River, will be promoted."

It practically means that a giga hydropower plant (HPP) will be constructed at India's gates, on the Yarlung Tsangpo river. The Chinese media also reported that Che Dalha, chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region, urged the authorities to accelerate the project and to immediately undertake all the comprehensive planning and necessary environmental impact assessments. Will the Chinese "scientists" take into account the presence of tens of thousands of trucks and GCBs moving earth around and changing the shape of the mountains and the rivers north of the Indian borders? Probably not.

It appears to be a matter of the Emperor wanting to show the world that he can construct a HPP of thrice the capacity of the Three Gorges Dam, with little consideration for the environment.

The new plan, submitted to the NPC for approval, provided "the green light for the dams to be built on the lower reaches of Yarlung Tsangpo river".

Later adopted by the Chinese legislature, it called for "a hydropower base on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo river, along with clean energy bases in the upper and lower reaches of Jinsha river", known as the Upper Yangtze in Sichuan province.

On the occasion of the Chinese New Year, President Xi Jinping called the Communist Party "a gigantic vessel that navigates China's stable and long-term development" and stated: "Upholding the principle of putting people first and remaining true to our founding mission, we can break the waves to reach the destination of realising the

great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."

Like any Emperor, Xi Jinping needs to think big. The Seventh Tibet Work Forum (TWF), a large meeting which decides the fate of Tibet for the years to come (to which Tibetans are rarely invited), was held in Beijing on August 28-29, 2020. It was a crucial event not only as it concerns the fate of the Roof of the World, but for the Indian border too.

Some massive projects were announced soon after; first, the Pai-Metok (Pai-Mo) Highway linking Nyingchi to Metok, north of Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, which should open in July 2021. After the completion of the highway, the length of the road from Nyingchi City to Metok County will be shortened from 346 km to 180 km and the driving time will be shortened from 11 hours to 4.5 hours. Though only 67 km long, in strategic terms the highway will be a game changer and greatly accelerate the developments of new model villages, and therefore relocation of populations on the border. But, more important, it will pave the way for a mega HPP.

In December 2020, *Global Times* had announced Beijing's plan to build a cascade of mega dams on the Yarlung Tsangpo.

The Metok County government confirmed that the project would be built north of the Indian border, while *Global Times* added: "The head of Power Construction Corp of China (POWERCHINA) suggested the planned hydropower station — which is expected to have three times as much generating capacity as the world-leading Three Gorges power station — aims to maintain water resources and domestic

Nine hydropower plants in cascade will definitely threaten life across India's Northeast region. The area soon became "restricted" by the Chinese authorities.

security." A series of nine hydropower plants in cascade will definitely threaten life across the whole of India's Northeast region. The area soon became "restricted" by the Chinese authorities. A notice from the Metok Border Management Brigade announced that from March 1, the Chinese authorities began "to check border pass, ID cards and other documents of people entering and exiting Metok".

Metok is the last small, but strategic town located near the Great Bend of the Yarlung Tsangpo, north of the McMahon Line.

Though there is no proof that the mudslides on March 22 were directly linked to the dam project, the fact remains that the entire area is environmentally extremely fragile. And that's not all; already in 2016, *China Daily* reported the construction of a 1,629-km Sichuan-Tibet railway. It has now entered a crucial phase. The railway will be connecting Chengdu in Sichuan to Lhasa; the new rail line will shorten the travel time to less than 15 hours.

The Lhasa-Nyingchi section is scheduled to be opened in July.

All this will have incalculable strategic implications for India as the train will pass near the Indian border where the hydropower plant is located.

These two projects (HPP on the Yarlung Tsangpo and the Sichuan Railway) are directly affecting India's security.

For India's frontiers, China's "dual-use" (civil and military) infrastructure development will take place on a much larger and faster scale than today; a great tragedy in the making.

How will the mandarins of South Block react?

They will probably try to keep the information under the carpet for as long as possible. But if they wait too long, it may be too late. Remember the Aksai Chin road in the 1950s.

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

LETTERS

BSY'S CAVE-IN

The Karnataka government's volte-face relaxing the 50 per cent capacity rule for cinema halls shows it in poor light. Chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa, known for his spate of U-turns, appears to have buckled under pressure from the film exhibitors' lobby and consented to relax the norms. The order citing advance ticket bookings as the reason for the decision does not wash. The hospitality industry, forced to toe the government's line and reduce the occupancy rate by half, also criticised the move.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

SUBSIDY POLITICS

THIS REFERS to news reports indicating that public sector banks may have to bear a burden of Rs 1,800-2,000 crores on account of the Supreme Court's recent waiver of compound interest on all loan accounts which opted for a moratorium during March-August 2020. Though this waiver is reasonable, what of the promises of loan waiver by our political parties during the ongoing election campaigns? If such a trend continues, no bank will be able to show any positive result in their balance sheets for decades to come. The ultimate sufferers will be the middle classes. It is time that the government introduced a higher tax rate for legislators.

N. Mahadevan
Chennai

MISSING SHASHIKALA

THE MONSTER-IN-LAW of Hindi cinema has passed on to the other realm. Shashikala Saigal, 88, died at home on Sunday. She is best remembered for her negative roles in *Aarti* (1962) and *Chhote Sarkar* (1974). She won the Filmfare Best Supporting Actress Award twice and was also a Padma Shri recipient. But she was equally good in playing comedy roles (*Anupama*, 1967). Her death leaves her fans saddened and Bollywood a lonelier place.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Anthony Henriques (April 2). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

A.G. Noorani



America sinking to a new low in crass diplomacy

The United States struck a poor low in the conduct of diplomatic relations recently. One had thought that President Joe Biden would break with his predecessor Donald Trump's crudeness. Its senior officials met senior officials of China last month in Alaska, on American soil. The talks were supposed to break the ice in their relations. Tradition requires extra civility for such openings. The US delegates began with uncalled for uncivility to China's top diplomats. The latter gave back as good as they got.

Since George H.W. Bush, America's Presidents have revelled in calling the heads of other states names; from Iraq's Saddam Hussein to the leaders of North Korea, Iran and others.

If this exercise was designed to promote America's interests, the gains were not visible.

Diplomacy is a blend of words and actions. When Anthony Eden, otherwise a highly cultured man, called Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser names, the astute ones predicted he had forsaken diplomacy

and was sold on war. But the boorish language of recent American vintage doesn't presage war. It is intended to browbeat in the game of negotiation.

Sparta's leaders' response to the verbosity of a mission from the island of Samoa is a classic of its kind: "We have forgotten the beginning of your harangue; we paid no heed to the middle of it; and nothing has given us pleasure in it except the end."

Romans housed ambassadors in rat-infested buildings. China was barely civil to foreigners. In modern times, Nikita Krushchev flouted all the norms of civility. While on a visit to Beijing in 1959, he shouted at Marshal Chen Yi: "Don't try and spit at me. There isn't enough spit in your mouth for that." As the Sino-Soviet Cold War became fierce, the Soviet foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, lamented that even in the worst days of the Cold War, Western spokesmen never used the language that the erstwhile friends (China) did. Gromyko himself could be very rude. He told Pakistan's diplomats during the crisis in East Pakistan in

1971: "Note I did not use the word 'please'."

There was a time when the British set high standards of civility and wit in diplomacy. Prime Minister George Canning once told the House of Commons on April 30, 1829: "But be the language of good sense or good taste in this House what it may, clear I am that, in diplomatic correspondence, no minister would be justified in risking the friendship of foreign countries, and the peace of his own, by coarse reproach and galling invective; and that even while we are pleading for the independence of nations, it is expedient to respect the independence of those with whom we plead."

"We differ widely from our continental allies on one great principle, it is true: nor do we, nor ought we to disguise that difference; nor to omit any occasion of practically upholding our own opinion. But every consideration, whether of policy or of justice, combines with the recollection of the counsels which we have shared, and of the deeds which we have achieved in concert and companionship, to induce us to argue

our differences of opinion, however freely, with temper; and to enforce them, however firmly, without insult."

British diplomats were noted for understatement. But as Harold Wilson noted in his classic *Diplomacy*: "In extreme cases, moreover, the habit of diplomatic ambiguity, or of diplomatic understatement, leads to actual misunderstanding. I remember before the war reading a dispatch from some consul general in which he informed the Foreign Office that one of the vice consuls under his charge 'does not, I much regret to report, take the care of his health which his medical advisers would recommend'. The poor man was, in fact, in the last stages of delirium tremens."

Dr Paul Schmidt, Hitler's interpreter, mentions Neville Henderson's final interview with Ribbentrop before the war. "I can tell you, Herr Henderson," Ribbentrop remarked, "that the position is damned serious." Henderson shouted, "You have just said 'damned'."

"Ribbentrop's breath was taken away. One of the 'cowardly' diplomats, an ambassador, and an arrogant Englishman at that, had dared to reprimand him as he might a schoolboy. Ribbentrop jumped up from his chair. 'What did you say?' he roared. 'Henderson too had risen to his feet. Both men glared at each other. According to diplomatic convention, I too should have risen; but to be frank I did not quite know how an interpreter should behave when speakers passed from words to deeds — and I really feared they might do so now. I therefore remained quietly seated and pretended to be writing in my notebook."

Wit is one of the diplomat's prized possessions. The Spanish ambassador told Britain's foreign secretary: "Even Spanish liberals in exile support Spain's case on Gibraltar." Michael Walker, an Oxford don retorted, "I regret to say that Her Majesty's Government cannot boast of any British liberals in exile who support its case on Gibraltar."

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

INMATES STAGE UPRISING AT ST. LOUIS JAIL

St. Louis (US), April 5: Inmates broke windows, set a fire and threw debris to the ground late Sunday at a St. Louis jail that has been plagued by uprisings in recent months.

The riot broke out Sunday night around 9 p.m. at the City Justice Center, news outlets reported. Inmates were seen tossing objects out of broken windows and setting a fire. Firefighters used a hose to douse the flames. Law enforcement responded to bring the jail under control.

IRAN SAYS IT HAS HELD SPIES FOR ISRAEL

Tehran, April 5: Iranian authorities arrested several people on charges of spying for Israel and other nations, state TV announced Monday.

An unnamed Intelligence Ministry official in the country's eastern Azerbaijan province was quoted by state TV as saying that security forces had detained a group of people suspected of spying for Israel and other unspecified countries. The brief report did not provide further details on the nationalities of the suspects.

27 DEAD IN B'DESH RIVER COLLISION

Dhaka, April 5: At least 27 people died after a small launch carrying over 100 passengers capsized after colliding with a cargo vessel in Bangladesh's Shitalakhya river, officials said on Monday.

The incident took place on Sunday evening at Narayanganj district, about 16 km south-east of Dhaka.

While five bodies were recovered on Sunday, rescuers retrieved 22 bodies on Monday as a salvage vessel pulled out the launch with the help of a huge crane around midday, rescue officials said.

MALAYSIA EX-PM APPEALS JAIL SENTENCE

Putrajaya (Malaysia), April 5: A Malaysian court Monday began hearing an appeal by ex-Prime Minister Najib Razak to overturn his conviction and 12-year jail sentence linked to the massive looting of the 1MDB state investment fund that brought down his government in 2018.

The appeal came more than eight months after a high court found the former PM guilty of abuse of power, criminal breach of trust and money laundering, making him the first Malaysian leader to be convicted.

US SHUTS GUANTANAMO PRISON UNIT

Washington, April 5: A once-secret unit within the Guantanamo Bay detention centre that had fallen into disrepair has been closed and the prisoners moved to another facility on the American base in Cuba, the US military said Sunday.

The prisoners at Camp 7 were transferred to a facility adjacent to where the other detainees on the base are held as part of what US Southern Command said in a statement was an effort to "increase operational efficiency and effectiveness."

Miami-based Southern Command did not say how many prisoners were moved. Officials have previously said about 14 men were held in Camp 7.

INDONESIA. EAST TIMOR FLOODS: 113 KILLED

Lembata, Indonesia, April 5: Tropical cyclone Seroja pounded Indonesia and East Timor Monday after torrential rains triggered floods and landslides that have killed at least 113 people and left dozens more missing.

Packing heavy winds and rain, the storm heaped more misery on the Southeast Asian nations after Sunday's disaster turned small communities into wastelands of mud, uprooted trees and forced thousands of people into shelters.

Downpours are expected over the next day as the storm triggers offshore waves as high as six metres.

The cyclone hampered efforts to reach trapped survivors.

Jordan prince remains defiant

Beirut, April 5: Jordan's Prince Hamzah says he has been threatened by the country's security agencies but does not plan to follow their unacceptable orders that he remain confined at home and cut off from public communication, according to a new voice recording released Monday.

The recording, which circulated online, indicates that tensions are running high between Jordan's King Abdullah II and his half-brother Hamzah, a former crown prince. The United States quickly sided with Abdullah, a close Western ally in a volatile region.

Jordanian authorities said on Sunday they had foiled a malicious plot by Hamzah to destabilise the kingdom with foreign support. Hamzah has denied being part of any plot and says he is being targeted for speaking out against corruption and poor governance.

The army chief of staff came to me and issued threats in the name of heads of security agencies, Hamzah says in the recording. I recorded his comments and distributed them to my acquaintances abroad as well as my family in case something happens. "I don't want to escalate now, but of course I will not abide when he tells me you are not allowed to go out, tweet or connect with people and you are only allowed to

see family members,' he said. "When an army chief of staff says that, this is something that I think is unacceptable.

An individual close to the prince confirmed the authenticity of the recording, speaking on condition of anonymity because of security concerns. The individual said the recording is a few days old and was made after the army chief threatened the prince.

Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said Sunday that the prince had recorded conversations and passed them to foreign sources.

Safadi did not provide specifics on the alleged plot or say what other countries were purported to have been involved.

But he said that some 14 to 16 associates of Hamzah had been arrested, in addition to Bassem Awadallah, a former Cabinet minister and one-time head of the royal court, and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, a member of the royal family.

The US and Arab governments' quick siding with Abdullah reflected the country's strategic importance. Domestically, Prince Hamzah's unprecedented criticism of the ruling class without naming the king could lend support to growing complaints about poor governance and human rights abuses in Jordan.

— AP

Graft trial: Bibi lashes out at prosecutors

Jerusalem, April 5: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has lashed out at prosecutors in his corruption trial, accusing them of trying to oust him.

In a nationally televised statement, Netanyahu said the case against him is threatening to undermine the will of the country's voters. "This is what a coup attempt looks like," he said. Netanyahu spoke shortly after his corruption trial resumed and with the country's president holding post-election consultations on choosing the next prime minister designate.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's corruption trial resumed Monday, with a key witness painting a picture of an image-obsessed Israeli leader forcing a prominent news site to flatter his family and smear his opponents. The testimony came as Netanyahu's chances of securing another term in office following last month's parliamentary elections appeared to be dwindling in high-stakes political talks hosted by the country's figurehead president just a few miles (kilometres) away.

Taken together, the court testimony and political consultations pointed to an increasingly uphill struggle for Netanyahu as he fights for his political life. In a post-election ritual, President Reuven Rivlin was consulting with the various parties elected to parliament before choosing a candidate to form a new government. With a majority of lawmakers opposed to giving Netanyahu another term, Rivlin could give the task to a

FORMER ALLY NOMINATES SELF TO BE NEXT PM

Jerusalem, April 5: A former right-wing ally of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has recommended himself as the next prime minister, deepening Israel's political deadlock. Naftali Bennett's Yamina party nominated him to form the next government in consultations with Israel's president on Monday.

Yamina had been in a position to serve as a kingmaker between the two major blocs of supporters and opponents of Netanyahu. But instead, it declined to take sides. Yamina has just seven seats in parliament, making it a long shot to be able to form a governing coalition. Bennett is hoping he can become a consensus candidate who can bridge the deep divides between the rival factions.

— AP

different candidate, possibly as soon as Monday night. The consultations "make it more difficult for the president to give the mandate to Netanyahu," said Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute.

He said it was "very clear that Netanyahu is not close" to assembling a majority in the 120-seat Knesset. Netanyahu has been charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases.

— AP

7-day lockdown in B'desh to combat surge in Covid cases

Small business owners stage demonstrations to oppose the govt move

Dhaka, April 5: Bangladesh on Monday clamped a week-long nationwide lockdown, suspending public transport and shutting markets to combat the surge in Coronavirus cases in the country, amidst demonstrations by small business owners against the move.

According to a government circular issued on Sunday, the directives will remain in effect from 6am of April 5 till 12 midnight of April 11, the *Dhaka Tribune* reported.

People have been asked not to move out from their homes from 6 pm to 6 am, the report said.

The decision was taken in light of the current situation in the country where the rate of infections and deaths have increased in recent weeks. The government has said that they are increasing the number of Covid-19-designated hospitals and ICU beds to deal with the rising number of patients, it said. Bangladesh has registered 7,087 fresh Covid-19 cases, taking the tally to 637,364, in the last 24 hours until Sunday which is the highest number of infections since the start of the pandemic, the *United News of Bangladesh* reported. Besides, the deaths due to Coronavirus rose to 9,266 with 53 news fatalities during this period. The mortality rate fell to 1.45 on Sunday from Saturday's 1.46 per cent.

All public transport services (roads, river, railway and domestic flights) were suspended and only emergency services remained operational.

However, all government/non-government/autonomous offices, courts and private offices will be able to facilitate the commute of their employees to work using their own transport on a limited scale. Thousands of people left Dhaka on Sunday fearing getting trapped during the lockdown. Most of the people who left were unemployed or in poverty.

Many shop owners and employees have, however, taken to the streets protesting the government's decision to shut down all shopping malls and markets during the weeklong lockdown, the *Dhaka Tribune* reported.

Several hundred traders staged their demonstrations in Dhaka's New Market area blocking the road. This the second time lockdown has been imposed in Bangladesh.

The country earlier imposed a 66-day lockdown from March 26 to



Berlin's famed tourist magnet Checkpoint Charlie memorial site is pictured in Berlin on Monday in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

— AFP

Only immunised pilgrims can go to Mecca: Saudi

Riyadh, April 5: Saudi authorities said Monday only people immunised against Covid-19 will be allowed to perform the year-round umrah pilgrimage from the start of Ramadan, the holy fasting month for Muslims.

The hajj and umrah ministry said in a statement that three categories of people would be considered "immunised" — those who have received two doses of the vaccine, those administered a single dose at least 14 days prior, and people who have recovered from the infection. Only those people will be eligible for permits to perform umrah, as well as to attend prayers in the

Grand Mosque in the holy city of Mecca.

It added that the condition also applies for entry into the Prophet's Mosque in the holy city of Medina.

The ministry said the policy starts with Ramadan, which is due to begin later this month, but it was unclear how long it would last.

It was also not clear whether the policy, which comes amid an uptick in coronavirus infections in the kingdom, would be extended to the annual hajj pilgrimage later this year.

Saudi Arabia has reported more than 393,000 Coronavirus infections and 6,700 deaths from

Covid-19.

The kingdom's health ministry said it has administered more than five million Coronavirus vaccines, in a country with a population of over 34 million.

Last month, King Salman replaced the hajj minister, months after the kingdom hosted the smallest hajj in modern history due to the pandemic.

Mohammad Benteen was relieved from his post and replaced by Essam bin Saeed, according to a royal decree published by official Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

The kingdom hosted the hajj in late July last year.

— AFP

Iran infections at 4-month high

Tehran, April 5: Iran's daily new Covid-19 infections reached a four-month high on Monday as the capital Tehran was put on the highest virus risk level, with authorities blaming increased travelling. The Islamic republic is battling the Middle East's deadliest Coronavirus outbreak, and case numbers have risen following a surge in trips during the Iranian new year holidays that started on March 18.

In the past 24 hours, 13,890 new Coronavirus cases were recorded, health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said in televised remarks.

It is the highest number of daily infections since December 4, and close to the peak of 14,051 positive cases recorded on Nov. 28.

The new reported cases brought the total number of infections to over 1.94 million, according to Lari.

Health Minister Saeed Namaki said Iran is facing "one of the most severe

waves" of Coronavirus.

"Sadly, no one listened to me about managing travel, and today we're facing a great difficulty," he said, according to the ministry's website.

"We've now lost the reins (of the virus), and it's not clear when we can go below triple digit deaths." Some officials, including Namaki, have admitted in the past that the virus numbers are likely higher than official figures.

Tehran, with a population of over eight million, is now classified as "red" on the country's Coronavirus risk scale.

Only essential services, such as food providers and health centres, remain open.

Most major cities in the western half of Iran such as Isfahan, Shiraz and Karaj are listed as red as well.

Lari called the spread "very concerning", and warned the rest of the country may soon follow.

— AFP

Virtual visitors can have look, physical display at some point

9/11 Museum acquires prayer bench

New York, April 5: A prayer bench used by the Rev. Mychal Judge, a Fire Department chaplain killed in the collapse of the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001, was driven to the New York area on Sunday to join the collection of the September 11 Memorial and Museum, museum officials said.

The bench formerly belonged to Judge's twin sister, Dymnina Jessich, and spent the last five years at an Episcopal monastery in

Rising Sun, Maryland, according to Sister Teresa Irene, a Carmelite nun there. Its path to the Sept. 11 museum has been circuitous. Judge, a Franciscan who was praying in the lobby of the trade center's north tower when he was crushed by debris from the falling south tower, used to visit Jessich at her home in Berlin, Maryland, Sister Teresa Irene said.

The prayer bench was kept in a bedroom Judge used, and its leather is worn from the imprint of

his knees, she said. "It's worn where his knees would have been," the nun said. "It's his life of prayer." A new home for the bench became necessary as Jessich prepared to move to Texas several years ago, and friends suggested bringing it to the Episcopal Carmel of Saint Teresa monastery, some 130 miles north of Jessich's home in Berlin. Jessich, who was raised with Judge and their elder sister, Erin, in Brooklyn, died earlier this year.

A new home for the devotional furniture item became necessary once more with the nuns' impending move, so Sister Teresa Irene called Sept. 11 museum officials to see if they were interested. "We've been stewards of this for five years," Sister Teresa Irene said on Sunday. "I think it's important that it be in a place where it will be appreciated." Amy Weinstein, senior curator of the museum, said the bench is a natural fit for the collection of the museum, which

seeks to tell the stories of the victims of the terrorist attacks. "It resonated with me immediately," said Weinstein, who travelled with collections manager David Burnhauser to pick the bench up on Sunday. "When you look at it you can see how well used it was," Weinstein said.

Weinstein said the bench will be cataloged and added to the museum's online database, where virtual visitors will be able to see it, and will be on physical display at some point. — AP

Murder of Pak judge: 5 nabbed

Peshawar, April 5: Five suspects were arrested on Monday in connection with the murder of an anti-terrorism court judge and his family members in northwest Pakistan, police said.

Anti-terrorism court judge Aftab Afridi and three members of his family, including wife, daughter-in-law and a two-year-old grandson, were shot dead after unidentified gunmen attacked their vehicle while they were travel-

ling from the Swat Valley to Islamabad on Sunday.

Two security guards who were part of the judge's convoy were also injured in the shootout.

A joint operation team carried out an operation in Peshawar and Khyber and apprehended five suspects and impounded two vehicles, District Police Officer (DPO) Swabi Muhammad Shuaib told the media here on Monday.

— PTI

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49159.32	-1.74
Nifty 50	14637.80	-1.54
S&P 500*	4,077.02	1.42
Dollar (₹)	73.33	-0.28
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.55	-0.09
Euro (₹)	86.06	0.36
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,949.15	0.03
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	61.40	-5.33
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.123	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.727	0.007

* As of 8:30 PM IST

NHAI files for InvIT; plans to raise ₹5,100 cr

The National Highways Authority of India filed draft papers with the Sebi for floating an Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) through which it seeks to raise Rs 5,100 crore. The NHAI plans to mop up total of Rs 5,100 crore through fresh issue, as per the draft papers. In December 2019, the Cabinet had given nod to the NHAI to set up an InvIT and monetise national highway projects.

SBI hikes home loan rate by 25 bps to 6.95%



State Bank of India has revised its home loan rate to 6.95 per cent from April 1. With this, the rate of 6.70 per cent, offered for a limited period, ended on March 31. During this period, the bank offered home loans at 6.70 per cent for loans up to Rs 75 lakh and 6.75 per cent for loans up to Rs 5 crore. As per information posted on its website, compared to teaser rate, the new rate is 25 basis points higher at 6.95 per cent.

Manufacturing PMI at 55.4 pts in March

India's manufacturing sector activities fell to a seven-month low in March as demand was constrained by the escalation of the Covid-19 pandemic. The seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 57.5 in February to 55.4 in March. "Production, new orders and input buying expanded at softer rates," said Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at IHS Markit.

Cadila seeks nod to use hepatitis drug for Covid

Zydus Cadila said it has sought the DCGI approval for additional indication of its hepatitis drug Pegylated Interferon Alpha-2b for treating Covid-19. Phase-III clinical trials with the drug, which the company sells under the brand name 'Pegi-Hep', has shown promising results in treating Covid-19. The interim results indicate the drug, when administered early on, could help patients recover faster and avoid complications.

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■ Sensex dips 870 pts as sentiments sour Covid second wave, lockdown hit stocks

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 5

The equity market plunged on Monday, as stricter lockdowns were imposed in Maharashtra even as the all-India daily Covid cases crossed one lakh.

The Sensex fell around 1450 points in early morning trade to the day's low of 48580.80 while all sectoral indices, barring IT and metals, witnessed profit taking. However, there was a partial recovery after 11 am and the Sensex finally closed 870 points, or 1.74 per cent, down at 49159.32.

The broader Nifty-50 Index fared better as it fell 1.54 per cent, or 229.55 points, to 14637.80.

Foreign portfolio investors sold equities worth Rs 931.66 crore while domestic institutional investors stayed cautious with net buying of Rs 75.48 crore.

Among the sectoral indices Banks, Financials, Realty, Media, Auto and FMCG fell the most.

"Severely adverse advance-decline ratio suggests broad nervousness in the markets. RBI's credit policy and Q4 earnings numbers create some added uncertainty for traders when Covid cases are on the rise. Indian markets have underperformed severely," said Deepak Jasani, head of retail research, HDFC Securities.

India's manufacturing activity has been hit in March after being on the slow road to improvement



SEBI'S FRAMEWORK TO CURB STOCK MARKET SPOOFING KICKS OFF

New Delhi, April 5: The new framework to curb instances of stock market spoofing kicked off on Monday, whereby serial offenders could face trading disablement of 15 minutes to two hours.

In spoofing, traders place a large number of buy or sell orders, with an intent to cancel before those orders can be executed. Market experts say excessive cancellations of large orders lead to manipulative increases or decrease in prices, which impacts retail

investors. The exchanges have noted three activities—high order to trade ratio, high instances of order modifications and persistent deferred or lower order execution priority due to frequent modifications—that will be monitored to curb such practices.

The surveillance measure will be effective from April 5 and the first action on such traders will be on May 5 based on 20 trading days window. —PTI

over the previous few months due to the renewed escalation of the pandemic and subsequent restrictions played spoilsports for factory activity. "Initially concentrated in Maharashtra, new

cases are slowly dispersing to other states, which have seen some dip in mobility towards end-March. So far, though, economic impact remains minimal, said rating agency Crisil.

MACROTECH SEEKS TO RAISE ₹2,500 CRORE; IPO PRICED AT ₹483 TO ₹486

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 5

Mumbai-based realty firm Macrotech Developers, formerly known as Lodha Developers, announced a Rs 2,500-crore initial public offering (IPO) of shares in a price band of Rs 483 to Rs 486 per share of face value of Rs 10 each.

The long-expected IPO was postponed twice in the past, as the realty sector was facing several headwinds, and is now aiming to cash on the revival in the sector owing to lower home loan interest rates and fall in real estate prices.

The IPO opens on Wednesday and closes on Friday, April 9.

The IPO aims to raise money for payment of outstanding borrowings of the company, to acquire land or land development rights and to meet general corporate purposes.

Macrotech has 91 completed projects as of December 31, 2020, comprising affordable, mid-income, premium, luxury housing and retail space. It was incorporated on September 25, 1995.

Macrotech Developers is amongst largest real estate developers in India by residential sales during the period FY14-20, the company claims. It is developing some of the biggest real estate projects in Mumbai and Pune in terms of geographic area.

Byju's acquires Aakash for \$1 bn in cash-stock deal

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 5

Ed-tech startup Byju's has acquired Aakash Educational Services in a cash and stock deal valued close to \$1 billion.

The founders of Aakash—which provides test preparatory services—and investor Blackstone Group will hold a minority stake in Byju's and the promoter Aakash Chaudhry will continue to head the business.

"Our complementary strengths will enable us to build capabilities, create engaging and personalised learning programmes. The future of learning is hybrid and this union will bring together the best of offline and online learning, as we combine our expertise to create impactful experiences for students," said Byju Raveendran, founder, and CEO of Byju's.

The deal values Byju's around \$13 billion, the same as during the recently closed funding round. Byju's had recently raised \$460 million from a Series F funding round led by MC Global Edtech Investment Holdings. This is the second large acquisition by Byju's in recent times, the other one being the acquisition of WhiteHat Jr for \$300 million last year. Before that Byju's had acquired TutorVista and Edurite, from Pearson in 2017, and Osmo in 2019.

Aakash has over 33 years of operational experience in the test preparatory industry and a student count of more than



MEESHO VALUED AT \$2.1 BILLION

SARITHA RAI
APRIL 5

Bengaluru-based social commerce startup Meesho Inc has raised \$300 million in new funding led by SoftBank Group Corp's Vision Fund 2, valuing the startup at \$2.1 billion.

Existing investors like Prosus Ventures and Facebook also participated in the investment round, which adds a new member to a growing coterie of Indian unicorns. Meesho, which

operates an online sales platform for micro, small and medium businesses across India, will use the funds to "strengthen its talent pool."

Meesho serves over 13 million individual entrepreneurs in helping them start online businesses. The software developer has delivered orders from more than 100,000 registered suppliers to over 4,800 cities, pursuing a strategy of taking e-commerce to smaller cities and towns. —Bloomberg

250,000. It has 215 centres across the country and had started online operations a few years back.

In 2019, Blackstone had picked up a 37.5 per cent stake in Aakash for Rs 1,350 crore. Aakash maintained its revenues at Rs 1,200 crore in FY21 despite the pandemic impact.

Further, Byju's is in the final stages of acquiring Toppr, which operates in the K-12 space.

Byju's cited industry reports and said the test

preparation and after-school tutoring (high school) segment is estimated to be a \$7-8 billion opportunity in India and is expected to witness 55-60 per cent growth over the next four-five years.

Byju's said the company will look at opportunities that bring in new products and formats, market expansion and/or distribution opportunities.

Launched in 2015, Byju's has over 80 million students cumulatively learning from the app.

RBI redistributes portfolios of deputy governors

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 5

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday reshuffled the portfolios of the deputy governors following the retirement of deputy governor B.P. Kanungo on April 2.

Kanungo used to handle the most number of portfolios, including currency management, external investments and operations, department of government and bank accounts, information technology, payments and settlements, forex, internal debt management and right to information.

These portfolios have been reassigned to the remaining three deputy governors—Mahesh Kumar Jain, Michael Patra and Rajeshwar Rao, who has been recently appointed.

According to the RBI statement, Jain will handle co-ordination, Central Security Cell, Consumer Education and Protection Department, Department of Information Technology, Department of

MPC STARTS DELIBERATIONS

Mumbai, April 5: RBI governor Shaktikanta Das-headed rate-setting panel, Monetary Policy Committee, has started its three-day deliberation on the next monetary policy on Monday amid sudden surge in Covid-19 cases and the government's recent mandate asking the central bank to keep retail inflation around 4 per cent. The RBI will announce the resolution of the MPC on Wednesday. —PTI

Supervision, Financial Inclusion and Development Department, HR Management Department, Premises Department, Rajbhasha Department, Right to Information Division and Secretary's Department. Deputy governor Patra will handle Corporate Strategy and Budget Department, Department

of Economic and Policy Research, Department of External Investments & Operations, Department of Government and Bank Accounts, Department of Statistics and Information Management, Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation, Financial Markets Operations Department, Financial Markets Regulation Department, Financial Stability Unit, International Department and Monetary Policy Department.

Rao has been assigned Corporate Strategy and Budget Department, Department of Economic and Policy Research, Department of External Investments & Operations, Department of Government and Bank Accounts, Department of Statistics and Information Management, DICGC, Financial Markets Operations Department, Financial Markets Regulation Department, Financial Stability Unit, International Department and Monetary Policy Department.

Pre-packaged insolvency resolution plan for MSMEs

SANGEETHA G
with agency inputs
CHENNAI, APRIL 5

The government has promulgated an ordinance amending the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code to provide pre-packaged insolvency resolution process for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in distress.

In view of the pandemic, the government had increased the minimum amount of default for initiation of corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) to Rs 1 crore. It had also suspended filing of applications for initiation of CIRP over defaults arising for one year beginning March 25, 2020.

Since this relaxation had ended on March 24, 2021, the government has promulgated the ordinance to provide for a pre-packaged insolvency resolution process.

According to the ordinance, the pre-packaged insolvency resolution process shall be completed within a period of 120 days. Government may specify the minimum amount of default of high-



er value, which shall not be more than Rs 1 crore, for matters relating to the pre-packaged insolvency resolution process. Not less than 66 per cent vote of the committee of creditors is needed to approve the resolution.

The ordinance said, "It is considered necessary to urgently address the specific requirements of micro, small and medium enterprises relating to the resolution of their insolvency, due to the unique nature of their businesses and simpler corporate structures."

It said the pre-packaged insolvency resolution process will be an expedient to provide an efficient alternative insolvency res-

olution process for corporate persons classified as micro, small and medium enterprises under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, ensuring quicker, cost-effective and value maximising outcomes for all the stakeholders, in a manner which is least disruptive to the continuity of their businesses and which preserves jobs.

Soumitra Majumdar, partner at J Sagar Associates, said the IBC Amendment Ordinance 2021, makes available the pre-packaged route to genuine and viable cases, to ensure least business disruption.

"While modelled on debtor-in-possession approach, it vests significant consent rights to the financial creditors, such that the mechanism cannot be misused by errant promoters."

"Further, adopting the plan evaluation process akin to Swiss Challenge, it retains competitive tension such that promoters propose plans with least impairment to rights and claims of creditors," Majumdar said.

FADING | GLITTER

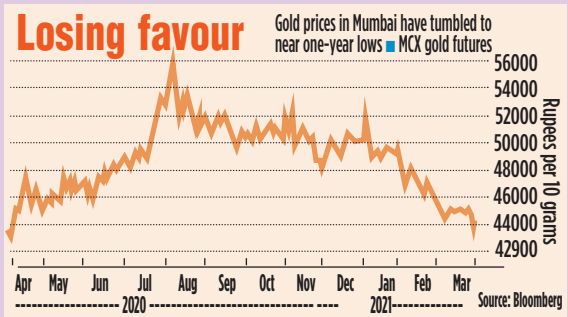
Muthoot holds 146 tonne gold, more than Singapore's reserves

Gold lenders cut tenure, watch collateral

SUVASHREE GHOSH & SWANSY AFONSO
APRIL 5

Indian firms that lend against gold are cutting tenures and seeking more collateral to protect against the plunge in prices of the precious metal.

Market leader Muthoot Finance Ltd has been offering discounts on interest rates and other incentives to borrowers who chose to repay monthly or more frequently. Rival Muthoot Mini Financiers Ltd is mostly lending for 90 days now versus 270 previously, and most large firms are disbursing amounts well below regulatory limits, which was 75 per cent of



the metal's value for shadow lenders and 90 per cent for traditional banks through March 31.

Gold loans had boomed over the past year as small businesses tried to revive themselves from lockdowns by pledging family jewellery that's a staple of almost all Indian house-

holds. Muthoot Finance, for instance, saw such lending increase 25 per cent over the period and the company holds 146 tonnes of gold, higher than the official reserves of Singapore and Sweden. "People are sentimental about their jewellery," said George Muthoot Alexan-

der, managing director at Muthoot Finance. "They will never want to default despite a fall in gold prices as they intend to get back their pledged ornaments."

Gold posted its first quarterly drop in more than two years amid improving expectations for the global economy and fading demand from exchange-traded funds. The metal has fallen about 10 per cent in 2021 as investors trade their havens for assets that will benefit from the economic recovery.

The biggest concern though is a fresh wave of infections in India could scuttle business plans and force even the most diligent repayers to default. "We are reviewing our

portfolio and mark-to-market levels daily to see if further steps are needed," said Mathew Muthoot, MD of Muthoot Mini Financiers.

India's market for gold lending will expand by at least 34 per cent to Rs 4.6 lakh crore (\$61 billion) in the two years to March 2022, according to KPMG. The segment's bad-loan ratio is about 1 per cent compared with 7.5 per cent for the banking sector.

World Gold Council India MD P. R. Somasundaram said, "People are keen to take loans because every business is coming back and small businesses do depend on gold loans for quick access to capital."

—Bloomberg

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 5

The United States has raised concerns at the WTO about India making GM-free certificates mandatory for agricultural products and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) specifications for compounded feeds for cattle. It has also asked for the scientific justification for India's decisions.

Last week, the US raised serious concerns about India mandating "non-GM (genetically modified) origin and GM free certificates" for certain agricultural imports into India. This was notified on September 2, 2020 and was proposed to be effective from March 1, 2021.

The United States had requested India to withdraw the order. If India is unwilling to withdraw the order, the United States had further requested to delay implementation till January 2022 to allow for further technical engagement between the FSSAI and trade partners to develop less burdensome alternatives that could meet the order's stated food safety goals.

In February 2021, the FSSAI had clarified that it will have 1 per cent tolerance for presence of GE in imported food consignments. The US has asked India to provide the scientific justification for establishing the tolerance at this level and provide relevant risk assessments or international standards on which this tolerance is based.

Further, the US is also concerned about India's directive on implementing the BIS specifications for compounded feeds for cattle.

SHORT TAKES

Indonesia Masters, Russian Open off

New Delhi: Two Super 100 badminton tournaments - the Russian Open 2021 and Indonesia Masters - have been cancelled due to Covid-19 related restrictions, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) said on Monday.

"The ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and complications left local organisers no choice but to cancel the tournaments," a BWF statement read. "The respective decisions of the National Badminton Federation of Russia and Badminton Indonesia were made in consultation and agreement with the BWF," it added. The Russian Open was scheduled in Vladivostok from July 20-25 and Indonesia Masters from October 5-10. The Canada Open, supposed to be held in June, has also been cancelled. Another Super 100 event, the Hyderabad Open, is scheduled from August 24-29 but with the fluid Covid-19 situation in India, it remains to be seen if it will take place or not. — PTI

Marseille maul Dijon 2-0

Paris: Marseille condemned bottom side Dijon to an 11th defeat in a row but coach Jorge Sampaoli said there was lots of room for improvement following Sunday's 2-0 victory in Ligue 1. Leonardo Balerdi powered in a header at a corner in first-half stoppage time and Alvaro Gonzalez nodded in a second from another Dimitri Payet cross on 79 minutes. Marseille climbed to within a point of fifth-placed Lens, who drew 1-1 with title hopefuls Lyon on Saturday. Dijon have just 15 points after two wins in 31 games and are destined for the second division, lying 14 points adrift of the relegation play-off spot. Lille moved three points clear of Paris Saint-Germain at the top following a 1-0 win at the Parc des Princes on Saturday, in which Neymar was sent off just before the end. Monaco are a point back of PSG after routing Metz 4-0. — AFP

Honda's Pol lands a spot in top 15

Doha: There were flashes of what's set to come from a strong and consistent Pol Espargaro, matching the pace of the leaders throughout the race as Bradl recovered from a difficult start with an aggressive ride through the field. For the second time in two weeks, the MotoGP World Championship lined up on the grid in Qatar. What followed was the closest top 15 in MotoGP history, just 8.928 seconds splitting the leading 15 as fans around the world were treated to a spectacular race. Fighting with those around him, Espargaro worked to hold his position but dropped back on the sixth lap after a mistake. Rallying, Espargaro moved back past Morbidelli midway through the race as he matched the pace of the podium contenders. Crossing the line in 13th, Espargaro was looking for more this Sunday but once again showed there is huge potential inside himself and the RC213V. After multiple weeks riding in Qatar, Espargaro is looking forward to trying the Honda on a new circuit.

Morris heroics lay Lakers low

Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Clippers didn't have to lean heavily on their superstar duo against the defending NBA champions on Sunday, getting help from their supporting cast in a 104-86 rout of the short-handed Los Angeles Lakers. The Clippers got a game-high 22 points from Marcus Morris while all-stars Kawhi Leonard and Paul George finished with 19 and 16 points respectively at Staples Centre arena. Luke Kennard tallied 15 points and guard Rajon Rondo made his Clippers' debut. — AFP

Live on TV

FOOTBALL
Champions League Quarterfinals (first legs): Real Madrid vs Liverpool from 12.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2; Manchester City vs Dortmund from 12.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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Kings battle ready

Rechristened Punjab look to make a case in coming IPL

New Delhi, April 5: With a new name and a stronger squad, Punjab Kings will be hoping for a change of fortunes this season after spending big money on addressing their death bowling concerns and beefing up a not-so-inspiring middle-order.

Here is a look at the team that will open its campaign on April 12 against RR in Mumbai.

STRENGTHS

Punjab Kings have one of the strongest batting line-ups this season. They have a dangerous opening pairing in skipper K. L. Rahul and the ever-reliable Mayank Agarwal.

Universe Boss Chris Gayle is expected to start from game one this time. Include flamboyant Nicholas Pooran to the mix and the top four seems sorted.

They have also roped in the world's number one T20 batsman Dawid Malan, seen as Gayle's back-up. Jhye Richardson and Riley Meredith alongside Mohammad Shami and England's Chris Jordan, the quartet makes for a formidable fast bowling unit.

WEAKNESSES

Punjab Kings' biggest weakness is the lack of quality spinners. They released off-spinner K. Gowtham, who ended up becoming the most expensive buy ever at the latest auction.

The likes of Murugan Ashwin and young Ravi Bishnoi will be expected to deliver.

But with no internationally successful players in the spin department, it remains the weakest link.

OPPORTUNITIES

Punjab Kings are yet to win an IPL title. With most of their bases covered on paper, they seem like strong contenders this year. This season is the perfect opportunity for Rahul and his men to get their hands on their maiden title, having charted out a three-year plan under his leadership and coach Anil Kumble's guidance.

THREATS

Shami, who fractured his wrist in Australia last year, has not played cricket in four months. With the national team's workload management to be kept in mind in a busy year, it remains to be seen if he plays all league games. He had a memorable run last year with 20 wickets and the team's success will depend a lot on him. — PTI

DEBATE OVER FAKHAR ZAMAN WEIRD RUN-OUT

London, April 5: Pakistan's Fakhar Zaman's contentious run-out in the second ODI against South Africa has sparked a debate on spirit of the game with Marylebone Cricket Club saying it was "up to the umpires to decide" if Quinton de Kock had attempted to mislead the batsman.

In a stiff chase of 342, Zaman smashed a spectacular 193 in a losing cause as the batsman was run out in a controversial fashion involving South Africa wicketkeeper de Kock. Replays showed that de Kock had seemed to convince Zaman into believing that the throw was going to the non-striker's end.

"Law 41.5.1 states: It is unfair for any fielder wilfully to attempt, by word or action, to distract, deceive or obstruct either batsman after the striker has received the ball," the MCC tweeted. In another, the MCC wrote, "The Law is clear; with the offence being an ATTEMPT to deceive, rather than the batsman actually being deceived. It's up to the umpires to decide if there was such an attempt. If so, then it's Not out, 5 Penalty runs + the 2 they ran, and batsmen choose who faces next ball." — PTI



Mayank Agarwal of Punjab Kings plays a shot during a practice session ahead of the upcoming edition of Indian Premier League. — Pujab Kings

RCB's Devdutt catches Covid

New Delhi, April 5: Royal Challengers Bangalore's young batsman Devdutt Padikkal is quarantining at his home since returning positive for Covid-19 during a test conducted on March 22, his IPL franchise said on Sunday.

The 14th edition of the lucrative league starts in Mumbai on April 9 with RCB taking on defending champions Mumbai Indians.

"Devdutt Padikkal tested positive for Covid-19 on 22nd March 2021. He has been in mandatory quarantine at his residence in Bengaluru since then. Devdutt will be fit to join the RCB bio-bubble once



RCB Medical team is in touch with Devdutt ensuring his safety and well-being. He is feeling well and we can't wait to have him join the squad for IPL2021.

— ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE after Devdutt Padikkal tested Covid-19 positive

his RT-PCR tests are negative, as per IPL protocol," RCB said in a statement. The franchise, which has never won the tournament, posted the statement on its Twitter handle.

"RCB Medical team is in touch with Devdutt ensuring his safety and well-being. He is feeling well and we can't wait to have him join the squad for IPL2021," the franchise

DON'T LEGALISE BETTING, SAYS BCCI ACU CHIEF

New Delhi, April 5: The BCCI's new Anti-Corruption Unit chief Shabir Hussein Shekadam Khandawala doesn't want betting to be legalised in India as it "encourages" match-fixing and feels his biggest challenge will be stamping out "shady activities" from smaller leagues.

There is a school of thought that legalising betting will bring in massive revenues for the government. But Khandawala looks at it differently.

"Whether the government legalises betting or not that is a different matter but deep inside, I feel as a police officer that betting can lead to match fixing. The government, so far, has rightly not legalised betting," the 70-year-old said.

"Betting encourages match fixing. So there should not be any change on this, we can make the rules more strict. We will work on that. It is a matter of great prestige that cricket is largely free of corruption. Credit should go to BCCI for that," he added.

"Betting might be legal in some countries but the people who go into stadiums to watch the game and watch it on television they believe in this game and don't go to grounds thinking this game could be fixed. We need to protect their belief that game is free of all corruption," he further added. — PTI

Polish Hubert is Miami champion

Miami, April 5: Poland's Hubert Hurkacz defeated Italian teenager Jannik Sinner in straight sets to win the Miami Open and claim the first ATP Masters title of his career on Sunday.

The 26th-seeded Hurkacz, who had eliminated four higher-ranked players en route to the final, held his nerve at Miami's Hard Rock Stadium to win 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 in 1hr 43min.

It was a deserved victory for the 24-year-old from Wroclaw, who claimed his second title of the season as Sinner's challenge unravelled with a series of unforced errors.

"It feels unreal, so happy that I was able to play a good match today," Hurkacz said.

"Jannik is an amazing competitor. I'm so proud of myself that I was able to beat him," he added.

Hurkacz, whose win earned him a message of congratulations from Polish President Andrzej Duda, said he hoped the tournament win would be a launchpad for more victories.

"It gives me extra motivation and extra belief in

myself, that I've won a really big title," he said.

Sinner had started slowly, being broken with his first service game to quickly find himself trailing 3-0 in the opening set.

However the talented 19-year-old grew in confidence as the set progressed, working Hurkacz around the court with some pinpoint forehands into the corners.

The Italian broke back in the fifth game and then held to make it 3-3, before another break of Hurkacz's serve gave him a 6-5 lead and the chance to serve for the set.

Sinner appeared to tighten on serve, though, and another unforced error, sending a backhand long, allowed Hurkacz to break back at 6-6 and force the tie break.

Hurkacz quickly raced into a 6/2 lead in the decider and although Sinner clawed it back to 6/4, another missed forehand handed Hurkacz the first set.

Hurkacz carried that momentum into the second set, sprinting into a 4-0 lead with a double break.

— AFP



Hubert Hurkacz of Poland poses with the winner's trophy after defeating Yannik Sinner of Italy in the final of the Miami Open in Miami Gardens, Florida, on Sunday. — AP

Man Utd bounce back; Spurs held

London, April 5: Manchester United came from behind to beat Brighton 2-1 on Sunday to cut Manchester City's lead at the top of the Premier League to 14 points, while Tottenham's top-four challenge suffered a setback as Joe Willock's late strike rescued a 2-2 draw for lowly Newcastle.

Not for the first time this season, United needed a second-half fightback after a dismal first 45 minutes to take all three points thanks to goals from Marcus Rashford and Mason Greenwood.

Danny Welbeck deservedly opened the scoring for the Seagulls against his old club before Lewis Dunk hit the crossbar for the visitors.

However, Brighton also repeated the story of their season as they failed to make the most of their dominance before the break.

Rashford slotted home an equaliser on 62 minutes from Bruno Fernandes's pass to reward United's marked improvement.

Fernandes was involved again for the winner as his cross was volleyed back

THE RESULTS

Manchester United (Rashford 62, Greenwood 83)	2
Brighton (Welbeck 13)	1
Tottenham Hotspur (Kane 30, 34)	2
Newcastle (Joellinton 28, Willock 85)	2
Southampton (Armstrong 31, Ings 42, Redmond 66)	3
Burnley (Wood 12-pen, Vydra 28)	2

across goal by Paul Pogba and into the path of Greenwood to head home just his second league goal of the season.

Meanwhile, Spurs were left to rue letting another lead slip away at St. James' Park. Jose Mourinho's side were just five minutes away from moving into fourth place thanks to Harry Kane's first-half double. Joellinton had put Newcastle ahead and Steve Bruce's men were rewarded for a much-improved performance when on-loan Arsenal midfielder Willock smashed in off the underside of the bar five minutes from time. — AFP

SEVILLA RIDE ON ACUNA GOAL TO JOLT ATLETICO

Madrid, April 5: Atletico Madrid stumbled again in La Liga on Sunday as they were beaten 1-0 by Sevilla, giving Barcelona the chance to move to within a point of the top of the table on Monday.

Marcos Acuna headed in the winner for Sevilla at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan, with Atletico's grip on first place loosening even further and their in-form rivals primed to take advantage.

Real Madrid are only three points behind after they beat Eibar on Saturday and Barcelona will reduce their deficit from four points to one if they can win on Monday at home to Real Valladolid.

Meanwhile, Valencia stopped playing at Cdiz on Sunday and walked off the field before halftime after defender Mouctar Diakhaby said he was insulted by Cdiz defender Juan Cala. — Agencies

