





## SHORT TAKES

## 13 'non-compliant' effluent treatment plants get notice

**New Delhi:** The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has issued show-cause notice to all 13 common effluent treatment plants (CETPs) in the national capital after officials found them non-operational or not adhering to the prescribed effluent standards. An environmental compensation of ₹12.05 crore will be imposed on these CETPs if they fail to submit a reply within 15 days, according to a DPCC order. The CETPs are meant to treat industrial effluent before it can be discharged into the Yamuna or reused. These CETPs have been found non-functional or not complying with the prescribed effluent standards even after repeated directions by the DPCC, as a result of which the Yamuna is getting massively polluted, a statement from the office of environment minister Gopal Rai said. Under the leadership of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Delhi government is committed to making the Yamuna pollution free by 2023, it said. The Commissioner of Industries is the regulatory authority for the CETPs in Delhi. The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), on Wednesday, said the environment ministry's decision to "extend" the deadlines for the thermal power plants (TPPs) to comply with the new emission norms "will give them a license to pollute indefinitely." The norms to limit pollutants for TPPs were announced in 2015 and were expected to be adopted by 2017. — PTI

## 1st wildlife census in Asola Bhatti sanctuary in July

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

The Delhi forest department will conduct the first-ever wildlife census in the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in the national capital this year, and one of its focal points will be leopards, according to officials. The census is scheduled to start in July and will take at least three months to complete, they said. It is one of the priorities for the department this year. We will try and make it a regular affair. Yearly censuses will help ascertain changes in wildlife in the area, deputy conservator of forests (south division) Amit Anand told a news agency. The wildlife sanctuary covers 32.71 sq km area on the southern Delhi Ridge of Aravalli hills range on the Delhi-Haryana border. It lies in southern Delhi and northern parts of Faridabad and Gurgaon districts of Haryana and is part of the Northern Aravalli leopard wildlife corridor, which extends from the Sariska National Park in Rajasthan to Delhi Ridge. The objective is to ascertain how many species are present in the sanctuary, how are they distributed and what problems do they face in a particular area, Anand said.

## 4 Bangladeshi nationals held for burglaries

**New Delhi:** Four members of a gang allegedly involved in more than 100 burglaries across the country have been arrested, police said on Wednesday. Rafiq Laskar (33), Mohammad Salim (26), Ajizul Rehman (25) and Mohammad Razzak (36), who were arrested by the Delhi Police's Crime Branch, are Bangladeshi nationals who illegally settled in India a few years ago and took to crime for easy money, they said. The accused have confessed to have committed more than 100 burglaries across the country, including in Faridabad, Jodhpur, Aurangabad, Gulbarga, Vapi, Bengaluru, Pune and Mumbai, the police said. They carried weapons and house-breaking tools with them and had even held people hostage when someone woke up when they were committing burglaries, a police official said. "A tip-off was received on Monday that burglars would gather at the Arun Jaitley Park on Siri Fort Road and might commit a burglary in the posh Hauz Khas area. Our team conducted a raid and apprehended four accused from the spot," police said. — PTI

## HC: Wearing mask must even when driving alone

**New Delhi, April 7:** Wearing a mask while driving alone in a private vehicle is compulsory as it is a public place in the context of Covid-19, the Delhi high court held on Wednesday and described face covering as a 'suraksha kavach' or protective shield against the spread of the infection.

Justice Prathiba M. Singh refused to interfere with the Delhi government's decision to impose challans for not wearing mask while driving a private car alone, saying a vehicle, even if occupied by one person, would constitute a public place.

"There are several possibilities in which while sitting alone in the car one could be exposed to the outside world. Thus, it cannot be said that merely because the person is travelling alone in a car, the car would not be a public place.

"Wearing mask therein would be compulsory in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic," the court said. Masks are necessary irrespective of whether a person is vaccinated or not, it added.

Justice Singh's ruling and observations came while dismissing four petitions by lawyers who challenged the imposition of challans for not wearing mask while driving alone in a private vehicle.

"The wearing of a mask is like a 'suraksha kavach' for preventing the spread of Covid-19," the court said, noting that a mask protects the person wearing it and also those exposed to him or her.

The wearing of face masks was "one measure which saved millions of lives" during the pandemic, it pointed out.

The court further noted in its verdict that upon the outbreak of the pandemic—globally as well as nationally—scientists, researchers, international organisations, and governments emphasised the importance of wearing facial masks to control the spread of the disease.

The lawyers, in their pleas, had contended that the district magistrates who were vested with the powers to impose fines could not have sub-delegated the powers to others. — PTI



A crowded Sadar Bazar amid surge in coronavirus cases across the country in New Delhi on Wednesday.

## Jain: Night curfew in Delhi as people were holding parties

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain on Wednesday said night curfew was imposed in the national capital following reports that parties and social gatherings were being organised in various parts of the city at a time when Covid-19 cases have surged.

Interacting with reporters, he also feared that if the positivity rate escalated and safety norms were not followed by people, the new cases could breach the last single-day spike record registered in November last year. However, he added that it will be too early to speculate on that as of now, and government efforts are to contain the incidences as effectively as possible.

Jain's remarks on the pandemic situation came a day after the Delhi government imposed a night curfew in the national capital from 10 pm to 5 am till April 30 in view of rising Covid-19 cases. "We took the decision to impose a night curfew in the city, as reports were coming about parties and gatherings being held in various parts of the city. Given the situation right now, one person can spread to everyone else in a gathering and to more people, so we took the step," Jain said.



Satyendar Jain

However, it is "not a harsh step" and there are various categories of exemption, he said, adding that restaurants in the city usually operate till 11 pm, so in view of public safety, they have to close only one hour early.

Asked about the efficacy of night curfew in curbing cases, he said: "Let's wait and watch". On e-passes procurement issues faced by people, the minister said, it is a "teething problem" and should be sorted soon.

Amid a surge in Covid-19 cases in the national capital, Jain on Tuesday said the city government was alert on the pandemic situation and keeping a "close watch" on it.

He reiterated his demand that vaccination should be made open to all adults, except those who are not medically compliant with the norms for inoculation against Covid-19.

Asked about an IPL match due to be held in Delhi on April 29, he said: "The matter has been taken into cognisance".

## 5,506 fresh Covid cases, 20 deaths in Delhi in 24 hours

**New Delhi, April 7:** Delhi on Wednesday recorded 5,506 fresh Covid-19 cases, the sharpest daily spike this year, that pushed the infection tally to 6,90,568 while 20 more people succumbed to the disease, taking the death toll to 11,133, according to the health department.

This is the second consecutive day when Delhi has seen a rise of over 5,000 cases. The city had reported 5,100 fresh cases on Tuesday. The positivity rate jumped to 6.1 per cent on Wednesday from 4.93 per cent the day before.

on Wednesday from 4.93 per cent the day before, according to the bulletin. A total of 90,202 tests, including 52,477 RT-PCR tests and 37,724 rapid antigen tests, were conducted

the previous day, the bulletin said.

So far, over 6.59 lakh patients have recovered from the virus. Twenty more people died due to Covid-19, taking the toll to 11,133, the bulletin stated.

The number of active cases in Delhi stands at 19,455. The number of people under home isolation increased to 10,048 on Wednesday from 8,871 on Tuesday, while the number of containment zones surged to 3,708 from 3,291 the day before. — PTI

## Do not fear exams, value free time: PM Modi to students

**New Delhi, April 7:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi told students on Wednesday not to fear exams but to see them as a test to improve themselves, and said social and family environment at times create pressure around students that is not desirable.

He also advised students to value free time as without it life will be like a "robot" and should leave tension outside the examination hall. He noted that the students may have lost a year of their lives during Covid-19 pandemic but they have learnt lots of lessons and true value of essential

things. Interacting with students virtually in his annual 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' programme, he said they sometime become over conscious regarding exams and asked them to take them as a small destination in their long lives.

"The fear is mainly due to the atmosphere that has made examination be all and end all of life, which makes students over conscious. Life is very long and these are just a stage of life. Parents, teachers and peers should not put pressure on students. Exams should be treated as

merely a good occasion to test oneself and not be turned into a question of life and death.

"Parents who are involved with their children know their strength and weaknesses. But they at times make children 'instruments' of fulfilling their dreams and goals. If external pressure is not created, then students will not feel pressure of exams and their confidence will also grow," he said.

The interaction, which lasted for more than ninety minutes, saw students, teachers and parents seeking guidance on various issues of importance

## Over 73K applications for e-passes received

**New Delhi, April 7:** Soon after the night curfew was enforced in Delhi on Tuesday, authorities across districts received over 73,000 applications for e-passes, of which only 1,271 were approved, officials said.

More than 34,000 applications were rejected as the applicants did not fall in the exempted categories according to the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) order, the officials said on Wednesday.

The Delhi government on Tuesday imposed seven hours of night curfew, from 10 PM to 5 AM, with immediate effect for this entire month as an emergency measure for the "wellbeing and safety" of people in view of rising Covid-19 cases in the city.

People will require a soft or hard copy of the e-pass to travel during curfew hours. The e-pass can be obtained from the Delhi government website — [www.delhi.gov.in](http://www.delhi.gov.in).

After the imposition of the night curfew on Tuesday, a total of 73,154 applications were received for e-passes. — PTI

## 200 booked for violating night curfew: Police

**New Delhi, April 7:** Over 200 people were booked for allegedly violating the night curfew imposed by the Delhi government in view of the rising number of Covid-19 cases, police said on Wednesday.

According to data shared by the police, 220 cases for such violations were registered.

"A total of 534 people were booked under sections 65 (persons bound to comply with the reasonable directions of a police officer) and 107 (security for keeping the peace in other cases) of the Delhi Police Act and section 151 (arrest to prevent the commission of cognizable offences) of the CrPC," a police officer said. — PTI

■ 'I have done more genres than any other film director'

## RGV: OTT has heralded a post-censorship era

SRIRAM KARRI HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

On April 7, Ram Gopal Varma turned 59. He might as well be 18 or 24 or 36.

He couldn't care less. His energy, perpetual insistence on living in the present and enjoying every moment, seeking no gratification from the public by way of approvals or peer adulation, all these qualify him to be a teenager, in mind, and forever.

His intrepid courting of controversies with zeal, one after another, is his passe-partout into every slice of life. "I have done more genres than any other film director," he gasconades. "Maybe every single genre out there."

"You have not done mythologies. Or a historical," me retorts, wondering if he would be offended.

He, for sure, can't be offended. He has a more open mind than anyone else our society is familiar with. He does not judge and wishes rather to understand.

In a Dostoevsky-ish fervour, he focuses his emulous passion towards the truest subalterns of society—the rejects and the outcasts, the rebels against morality and the enemies of the state—criminals, underworld dons, hired assassins, and their ilk.

"I don't believe in God, so I can't be interested in mythology," he says. "I don't have the patience for history—the research it would take... like, I don't want to lose my time getting the costumes details correct."

I wish to ask him how for a man who does not believe in God he loves ghosts, but I let that pass.

RGV decides to invite me inside of an editing studio where he shares with me a promo of *Dangerous*, a movie he stresses is India's first truly lesbian love story on screen. Flashes of Shabana Aazmi and Nandita Das in Fire, an avant-garde polemic movie which opened Deepa Mehta's brilliant and epic trilogy; but I am not wont to mention *Fire*, lest a reference to Ram Gopal Varma's *Aag* being funny. Has he seen *Four More Shots Please*, I wonder.

Almost reading my mind, he expands the qualifier, "In *Dangerous*, India will see its first lesbian duet." He is set to launch *Spark OTT* along with a partner, very shortly, which will also fuse RGV World.

"I am at the peak of my career and life.



Ram Gopal Varma

Filmmakers can pitch their ideas," he says, and he would find the funding, professionals, team and wherewithal to take it to fruition. He has launched more newcomers than most other Telugu film directors put together.

Does he believe in providing opportunities to talent or prefer being a mentor? No, he says, reverting to the familiar safe zone to fustigate social mores. "I don't believe in helping anyone. I just want to do what gives me pleasure in the same moment. At this point, I want to see not tens but hundreds of films being made."

Is this the most-amazing era of filmmaking, the most democratised context, where digital technology has broken barriers in production, editing, and then, when YouTube of the world have broken distribution too, and the OTT has ended even the tyranny of the film theatre screens.

"Yes. Filmmakers can boldly speak out their thoughts today. Many barriers have been broken. I made a film recently with my mobile phone, spending ₹3,000 to ₹3,500 but earned a lot from it. Today, you can make a movie in five or 20 minutes, or in one hour," he beams with youthful exuberance.

*Spark* will not only be about bringing to the cloud everything RGV wishes himself to create in future, but will be an entry and launch platform for talented filmmakers. All what one has to do is send him a two-odd minute trailer of an idea. If RGV likes it, it could become the next *Shiva* or *Satya*, or *Sarkar* or *Company*.

We speak about censorship and morality, discuss pornography and the dangers of children getting access to things they are not ready yet for. "With an internet-connected mobile phone, what can people today not see or know of? If we cannot censor the internet, we should stay away from censorship of OTT also. They used to take 20 days to give a censor clearance

► **SPARK** WILL not only be about bringing to the cloud everything RGV wishes himself to create in future, but will be an entry and launch platform for talented filmmakers. All what one has to do is send him a two-odd minute trailer of an idea. If RGV likes it, it could become the next *Shiva* or *Satya*, or *Sarkar* or *Company*.

for a movie. The sheer number of films, short films and documentaries on OTT and Internet makes this impossible. Besides, as a society we have surely moved past the idea that five people can dictate to a billion what they can see, or cannot."

We look at another trailer, a movie called *Ladki*. "India's first martial arts movie with a lady protagonist," he reveals. "It is an Indo-Chinese production."

I reflect within the silence and soothing calm of martial arts movies I have personally loved—*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* or Zhang Yimou's *Hero*. RGV's take is loud, very loud. But he's clearly in love with making changes as he focuses his attention on even the minute details.

RGV is a good litmus test for society. In an age where we are easily offended, or hurt, when the authority refuses to be questioned and tries to silence those who dare ask, he does it all.

"Were you ever threatened or under pressure from the underworld," I ask. He is making a movie called the D-Company, on Dawood Ibrahim, and tries to recreate the Bombay of the '80s. "I tried to understand criminals. What motivates them? What fears they have and how they face them? I did not try to humanise them but I did present their points of view too. Why would they want to hurt me?"

Have you lost your genius? I ask him. "Maybe I never had it. It is insane to think I can make another *Shiva* or *Kshana* *Kshanam* but am not making it. I or anyone else can only make a film. It is the viewers who make it a hit or a phenomenon. I can only enjoy the process of the next shot, and that's all there is to it."

Why do you like to shock people and create controversies, I feel like asking. I don't. That is the whole point of being RGV. And I had quite clearly not come to talk to Rajamouli.

## 'Live' coverage of encounters banned in Kashmir Valley

■ **Continued from Page 1**

coerce journalists into not reporting the facts on the ground. It also seems a part of the string of measures by the authorities to suppress freedom of the press in the region. Summoning journalists to police stations, filing FIRs and seeking informal explanations for their work has intensified in the past two years," the statement said.

News agencies GNS and KNO reported that Mr Kumar advised media persons not to come close to encounter sites or "law and order" situations. "The media persons should not carry any live coverage of any encounter or law and order situation. Freedom of speech and expression is subject to reasonable restrictions that should not violate other persons' right to life guaranteed under Article 21 or put national security in jeopardy. Do not interfere in the professional and bona fide duty of the police and security forces at encounter sites."

He was also quoted as saying that no operational content should be carried that was "likely to incite violence or contains anything against the maintenance of law and order or which pro-

motes anti-national sentiments."

The statement of the KPC and media organisations said: "Journalists in Kashmir have worked under tremendous pressure for the past several decades and despite facing threats to life, liberty and property, they upheld the principles of journalism and reporting."

The statement also adds: "The media in Kashmir is aware of journalistic guidelines and ethics for situations like encounters, law and order situations, and have always upheld these principles. Covering and reporting law and order situations in the region is one of the basic requirements for most news organisations, and hence an essential part of the professional role of the media. Barring them from covering such events would mean stopping them from delivering their professional duties."

The statement further stated: "Press freedom is the cornerstone of a democracy and any attack on it undermines the democratic setup, of which the media is the fourth pillar. Any such attack on press freedom and journalism is highly distressful. In this back-

drop, journalist bodies in Kashmir urge Mr Kumar to put the record straight and clarify the statement attributed to him."

It is pertinent to note that images of the security forces targeting private houses and other buildings in which militants were holed up during counter-insurgency operations went viral recently. It was alleged that the security forces used flame-inducing gunpowder, mortar shells and IEDs in such actions and the resultant devastation has been seen by critics as a step to punish the alleged abettors and supporters of militants.

The security forces' officials reject this criticism as unwarranted, and say it is unavoidable collateral damage, which they claim they try to keep under check. They also claim that the media's presence, particularly that of photographers and videographers, further provokes protesters near the encounter sites and leaders to more stone-pelting for the benefit of the cameras. Last week, a video showing a policeman kicking a press photographer near an encounter site in southern Pulwama district also went viral and evoked much criticism of the police.



## SHORT TAKES

## 11,00 Sikhs get Pak visas for Baisakhi

**New Delhi:** Pakistan on Wednesday said its High Commission in India "has issued over 1,100 visas to Sikh pilgrims from India to participate in the annual Baisakhi celebrations from 12-22 April 2021", adding that "these visas have been issued as a 'special gesture' by the Government of Pakistan in view of the importance of Baisakhi for Punjabis and Sikhs marking the start of their new year". Under the framework of the Pakistan-India protocol on visits to religious shrines of 1974, a large number of Sikh pilgrims from India visit Pakistan to observe various religious festivals every year, the high commission said. The issuance of visas came amid some signs of eagerness by both countries to move forward in their ties. Late last month, Army Chief Gen. M.M. Naravane said the LOC has been silent for the first time in around five to six years as not a single shot was fired on it in March barring an odd incident.

## Bengal BJP chief alleges TMC attack

**Sitalkuchi/Kolkata:** The BJP's West Bengal president Dilip Ghosh on Wednesday alleged that he suffered injuries after Trinamool Congress activists attacked his car with bombs and bricks in Cooch Behar district of North Bengal, a charge denied by the ruling party. Saffron party workers sat on a dharna outside the Chief Electoral Officer's (CEO) office in Kolkata demanding action against the culprits. Ghosh said that the car's window glasses including the one on his side were smashed in the attack which took place at Sitalkuchi after a public meeting of his party. After breaking the glass, a brick hit him and he received injuries in the left hand, the BJP leader said. Cooch Behar district will go to polls in the fourth phase of assembly elections on April 10. — PTI

## Tikait: Farmers must get crop indemnity

**Shimla:** BKU leader Rakesh Tikait said on Wednesday that the government should compensate farmers of hilly areas for the damage to crops caused by wild animals. Mr Tikait said that the government should also make arrangements for transporting the produce of farmers from their farms to the wholesale markets. Addressing a farmer "mahapanchayat" at Haripur Tohana village near Paonta Sahib in Himachal Pradesh's Sirmaur district, the BKU leader said an arrangement should be made for farmers on the lines of subsidy provided to sugar factories for transporting sugar to the ports. He underscored that they would continue with the agitation and not end it at any cost even if a curfew or lockdown is imposed. — PTI

## U.S. BACKS INDIA PLANS TO TACKLE CLIMATE: KERRY

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

Visiting US Special Presidential Envoy on Climate Change (SPEC) John Kerry on Wednesday called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi who said "India is committed to meeting its nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement and that it was among the few countries on track to meet these commitments", New Delhi said on Wednesday. Mr Kerry told PM Modi that the "United States would support India's climate plans by facilitating affordable access to green technologies and requisite finance". PM Modi agreed that "cooperation between India and the United States particularly on financing innovation and faster deployment of green technologies would have a positive demonstration effect on other countries", New Delhi added. Mr Kerry is on a four-day visit to India ending Thursday. In a statement, the MEA also said, "Mr Kerry conveyed greetings of President Biden to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister fondly recalled his recent interactions with President Biden including during the Quad Leaders' Summit and requested Mr Kerry to convey his best wishes to President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Mr Kerry briefed the Prime Minister on his fruitful and productive discussions over the last two days in India."

## TMC swindled all Central aid: UP CM

**Kolkata, April 7:** Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday flayed the ruling TMC in West Bengal, alleging that its leaders swindled whatever central aid was extended to the state, from "funds to ration supplies".

Addressing two election rallies at Mal assembly constituency in Jalpaiguri district and Kurseong in Darjeeling, the senior BJP leader also said his Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee has deprived the state of the Centre's development schemes.

"She has neglected West Bengal for the last 10 years and by not being a part of several central welfare schemes, Mamata has denied the state of its share of benefits.

"Whatever assistance the Centre provided to Bengal, from funds to ration supplies, was swindled by TMC leaders. After the BJP comes to



Yogi Adityanath

power in the state, each paisa will be recovered and spent on development works," he asserted.

Mr Adityanath accused the Mamata Banerjee government of neglecting tea garden workers.

"In other tea growing states, the workers get a daily wage of ₹350 and have land rights, while it is not even ₹200 in West Bengal. The BJP is committed towards the welfare of the workers and the Gorkha community that resides in the area," he said.

What is required for West Bengal is a 'double engine government' which will work in tandem with the Centre where the BJP-led NDA is in power, Mr Adityanath said. — PTI



Mehbooba Mufti

## Why didn't PDP deserters flee when they were mantris?: Mufti

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 7

As more people have quit People's Democratic Party (PDP) over the past couple of weeks, its president and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti on Wednesday took a jibe at them asking "They didn't leave when we made them ministers".

She said everything was good with the PDP and its leadership and, in fact, these people preferred it for they were ministers, MLAs and even Parliament members while being in it. She was during an interaction with media persons responding to the query as to why people are leaving the PDP. She said, "How can I answer this question. Ask those who left. I think it is for them to answer as they would explain it in a better way whether they left out of somebody's pressure or due to something else".

She then said, "They didn't leave when we made them ministers, MLAs and even Rajya Sabha members. I don't know whether they are leaving out of somebody's pressure or something else. She added that the PDP is "facing challenging times as does Jammu and Kashmir".

Pertinently, a number of leaders including seniors have quit PDP since the political activities resumed in J&K post abrogation of Article 370. Among them include ex-minister Syed Mohammad Altaf Bukhari, Mohammad Ashraf Mir, according to a report in the *Greater Kashmir*.



Firefighters try to douse a fire which broke out at a scrap godown at Kurla in Mumbai on Wednesday. No casualty was reported till late evening, a Mumbai civic official said. — PTI

## ■ 'FCAT discontinuation arbitrary, restrictive'

## Filmmakers livid at govt's decision to abolish FCAT

**Mumbai, April 7:** The government's decision to do away with the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT) is facing criticism from filmmakers who believe it will lead to restrictions and delays in the release of their films.

The FCAT, a statutory body constituted to hear appeals of filmmakers aggrieved by the cuts suggested by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), was helpful for directors seeking a time-bound solution if they were not happy with the censor board's decision.

The Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021, issued by the ministry of law and justice on Sunday abolished certain appellate tribunals and transferred their functions to other existing judicial bodies.

With the amendment in the Cinematograph Act 1952, filmmakers unhappy with the censor board's decision will now have to approach the high courts.

Questioning the government's decision to abolish FCAT, director Vishal Bhardwaj, who has often spoken out against censorship, on Tuesday called it a "such

## Shah, Mamata race to claim victory

Both claim big win in polling held so far

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI**  
KOLKATA, APRIL 7

Union home minister Amit Shah and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday competed with each other in putting their parties ahead of their opponents in the last three phases of the Assembly Election in the state.

While Mr Shah predicted that the BJP would win anything in between 63 and 68 seats out of the 91 constituencies, Ms Banerjee made a forecast that the Trinamul Congress would bag majority of the seats.

Mr Shah, who led multiple roadshows including one at a key seat, Singur in Hooghly for BJP candidate Rabin Dranath Bhattacharya, also a TMC turncoat, said, "Three phases of polls have been held in West Bengal so far. BJP has already taken a lead by winning 63-68 seats out of the 91 ahead of the TMC, Communists and



Union home minister Amit Shah during a road show in support of BJP candidates Babul Supriyo, Payel Sarkar and Sravanti Chatterjee for Assembly polls in Kolkata on Wednesday. — PTI

Congress. On May 2 the BJP will emerge as the winner with more than 200 seats to form its government in the state. Ms Banerjee's frustration is getting reflected in her speech and behaviour. This confirms the BJP's victory."

Teasing CM nephew Abhishek Banerjee, the star campaigner of the

BJP later asked the crowd during a roadshow at Mullickfatak in Howrah, "Do you want a government of Tolabaj (extortion), syndicate raj and Bhatija Kalyan (nephew welfare)? The Goondalism in Bengal is run by Bhaipo." He attacked Mr Banerjee since he was also then leading a roadshow at Shibpur in the city.

## MP: Accused in honey trap case arrested after 2 years

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY**  
BHOPAL, APRIL 7

One of the accused in the infamous honey trapping and blackmailing racket that surfaced in September, 2019 was on Wednesday arrested in a village in Madhya Pradesh. Rupa Ahirwar was arrested by the special investigation team (SIT) constituted to probe the sensational case in her village of Panautia in Chhatarpur district, police said. Rupa had been absconding for the last two years.

She was suspected to be an accomplice of Arti Dayal, one of the key accused in the scandal.

The racket came to light when an engineer of Indore Municipal Corporation Harbhajan Singh lodged a complaint with the local police station on September 19, 2019 alleging that a woman member of the racket was blackmailing him for money. Police conducted a series of raids in the houses of the accused in the case and seized laptop, mobile phones, pen drives and other electronic gadgets containing objectionable materials.

The veteran actor, who chaired the board from 2004-2011, said FCAT was a "relevant body" which she tried to empower during her tenure.

She had proposed to the I&B Ministry to strengthen the FCAT, which was chaired by a retired judge, so that it could look at various public interest litigations (PIL) filed against filmmakers.

Ms Tagore said though the board often disagreed with FCAT's decision, the body remained a constant source of "hope" for aggrieved filmmakers.

"In my time also many films went to the FCAT as there were some films which we really felt we couldn't release. But the FCAT cleared it with some cuts. So there was hope for filmmakers. — PTI

## Adhir: Didi may need Cong, allies after polls

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
KOLKATA, APRIL 7

In a masterstroke to stop the BJP from coming to power in West Bengal, state Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, a key face of his party's alliance with the Left Front and influential Muslim cleric of Furfura Sharif Peerzada Abbas Siddiqui's new outfit: Indian Secular Front under the banner of Sanjukta Morcha, on Wednesday apparently kept the door ajar for a post-poll alliance with the Trinamul Congress in the government formation after the Assembly Election.

Asked about the chance of a future alliance with chief minister Mamata Banerjee's party, Mr Chowdhury said at "Meet The Press" in Kolkata Press Club, "Who will sup-



Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury

port the Sanjukta Morcha is upto others. Under the banner of Sanjukta Morcha, we are fighting the polls to reach Nabanna, the state secretariat. There can be no talk on 'if' because we do not know where Ms Banerjee will head to after her defeat in the polls. It may happen that she will need the support of Sangjukta Morcha for her survival. Politics is an art of possibilities."

The Berhampore Congress MP's cryptic message came close on the heels of his offer to the TMC chief to withdraw 22 candidates in Murshidabad in the polls to get the support of the Congress.

## SEARCH FOR MISSING



PRITI KUMARI

General Public is hereby informed that one girl **Namely:** Priti Kumari, D/o: Naresh Yadav, R/o: H.No. 3, G-Block, Sector B2, Narela, Delhi, **Age:** 16 Years, **Height:** 5', **Complexion:** Shallow, **Build:** Medium, **Face:** Round, **Mental Condition:** Normal, **Wearing:** Blue Colour Shirt, Blue Colour Jeans and Hawai Chappal in feet has been missing since 12.03.2021 from her house. In this regard FIR No. 110/21, U/s 363 IPC, Dated 13.03.2021 has been lodged at PS. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing girl but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone have any information about this missing girl please inform the undersigned.

Web-site : <http://cbi.nic.in>  
E-Mail ID: [cic@cbi.gov.in](mailto:cic@cbi.gov.in)  
Fax: 011-24368639  
DP/924/OW/2021

SHO  
PS. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi  
Ph.: 011-27787592, 27787593 & 7065036324

## SEARCH FOR MISSING PERSON



Amit Goel

General public is hereby informed that this person namely **Amit Goel S/o Din Dayal Goel R/o A-126, Surajmal Vihar, Delhi-92 Age : 43 years, Height : 5'5", Complexion : Fair, Build : Medium, Face : Round, wearing dark green colour T-shirt, black colour pant and blue colour slipper in feet,** has been missing from his residence of Anand Vihar, Delhi. In this regard a DD No. 54-A Dated 12.03.2021 P.S. Anand Vihar, Delhi has been lodged.

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

E-mail: [cic@cbi.gov.in](mailto:cic@cbi.gov.in)  
Website: <http://cbi.nic.in>  
Fax: 24368639,  
Tel.: 24368638/24368641

SHO - P.S. Anand Vihar, Delhi,  
Tel. No. 011-21210294,  
21210296

## TEMPORARY DIVERSION / REGULATION OF TRAINS DUE TO MAINTENANCE WORK

In order to further enhance the safety standards, Railway shall undertake construction work of Limited Height Subway (LHS) in lieu of L-Xing No. 255 & 256 between Baruachak - Gonda and L-Xing No. 235 between Swami Narayan Chhapi - Maskanwa in Lucknow Division. For these works, a Traffic Block of 06.00 hrs. shall be taken on 08.04.2021 in Baruachak - Gonda Section, and two Traffic Blocks of 08.00 hrs. and 06.00 hrs. on 15.04.2021 in Baruachak - Gonda and Swami Narayan Chhapi - Maskanwa Sections respectively. Consequently, the following trains will be Diverted/ Regulated as under:

DIVERSION OF TRAINS		
Train No. & Name	Diverted Route	Date(s) (From originating stn.)
02512 Kochuveli - Gorakhpur Raptisagar Express Special	Via Gonda - Barhni - Gorakhpur instead of Gonda - Basti - Gorakhpur	06.04.2021 & 13.04.2021
02542 Lokmanya Tilak (T) - Gorakhpur Special	Via Gonda - Barhni - Gorakhpur instead of Gonda - Basti - Gorakhpur	07.04.2021 & 14.04.2021
05118 Mathura Jn. - Chhapra Express Special	Via Gonda - Barhni - Gorakhpur instead of Gonda - Basti - Gorakhpur	07.04.2021 & 14.04.2021
05212 Amritsar Jn. - Darbhanga Jn. Special	Via Gorakhpur - Barhni - Gonda instead of Gorakhpur - Basti - Gonda	14.04.2021
02569 Darbhanga Jn. - New Delhi Clone Special	Via Gorakhpur - Barhni - Gonda instead of Gorakhpur - Basti - Gonda	15.04.2021

REGULATION OF TRAINS		
Train No. & Name	Regulated	Dates (From originating stn.)
05212 Amritsar Jn. - Darbhanga Jn. Special	150 Minutes en route	08.04.2021
02598 C Shivaji Maharaj (T)-Gorakhpur Antodaya Ex.	130 Minutes en route	15.04.2021
00969 Laxmibai Nagar - New Guwahati Parcel Spl.	25 Minutes en route	15.04.2021
02563 Saharsa Jn. - New Delhi Clone Special	75 Minutes en route	15.04.2021

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

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

RailMadad Helpline No. 139

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SHORT TAKES

Militants give slip to security forces

**Srinagar:** The security forces lifted the siege and called off the operations about 18 hours after it was launched in Gulab Bagh area on the outskirts of Srinagar to flush out militants hiding in a building midst a farm. Before winding up, the forces fired a rocket-propelled-grenade towards the structure to gauge the presence of militants or their mood. As it evoked no response and no militant was found during the subsequent search operation, the operation was called off on Wednesday afternoon. Police sources said that a few teargas canisters were also fired into the huge building but again there was no response from supposedly hiding militants. Sources said that the search operation in Shah Hamadan Colony in Gulab Bagh-Zakura area was launched late Tuesday night after “specific information” about presence of two militants.

Army hands PoK boy back to Pak

**Srinagar:** A resident of Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) who had inadvertently crossed LoC into J&K’s Kupwara district two days ago was repatriated by the Indian Army through Teetwal crossing point on Wednesday. The police and Army sources said that PoK resident Mausoom Manzoor from Lipa valley facing the Karnah-Tangdhar belt of J&K was seen roaming in an area on the Indian side of the de facto border on April 5. During questioning, it was established that he had crossed the LoC inadvertently. The Army officials soon established contact with their Pakistani counterparts on the hotline. “He was kept by the Indian troops deployed along the LoC with due care and soon the Pakistani authorities were informed of the whereabouts of the child,” said the officials.

10-day complete lockdown in Raipur

**Raipur:** The Chhattisgarh government on Wednesday announced to impose 10-day complete lockdown in Raipur district from April nine amid record surge in coronavirus cases in the state. The total shutdown will be in force from six in the evening of April nine, an order issued by the Raipur district administration on Wednesday said. Essential services and shops will however remain open during the lockdown period, the order said. The order comes in the wake of Raipur recording the biggest one-day spike (2,281) in Covid cases since the pandemic broke out in March last year, on April 6. Raipur has recorded 26 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Maoists release picture of cop

■ Continued from Page 1  
A senior police officer posted in Bastar told this newspaper the police was verifying the authenticity of the photograph and trying to identify the location of the missing jawan.

Sources meanwhile said the missing jawan’s location has been identified. But they refused to elaborate further in the interest of his security. The issue figured in the state Cabinet meeting chaired by Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel on Wednesday. Mr Baghel indicated efforts were on to secure the missing jawan’s safe release. In another development, local AAP leader Soni Sori has volunteered to negotiate the release of the missing jawan with his captors. The “self-appointed” interlocutor told the media before venturing into the forest: “My main objective is to identify the location where the jawan is held hostage and what is his condition”. Ms Sori said she would put forth the demand for the jawan’s release with the Naxals.

Didi says CRPF harassing WB voters at BJP’s behest

■ Continued from Page 1  
the apostles of the BJP, a comrade. The comrades of CPI-M and BJP are roaming around with the money given by the BJP to divide the minority votes. Please don’t allow them to do so. Keep in mind that if the BJP comes into the government then you will be in severe danger. I also will tell my Hindu brothers and sister not to make division amongst yourselves

Waze posted in CIU on Param Bir’s orders: Top cop

Mumbai police’s report says Waze reported directly to ex-top cop

SONU SHRIVASTAVA  
MUMBAI, APRIL 7

The Mumbai police on Wednesday submitted a five-page report to Maharashtra home department in connection with the reinstatement of Sachin Waze and his nine months tenure in Mumbai CIU (crime intelligence unit), crime branch. In his report, Mumbai police chief Hemant Nagrale noted that the decision of reinstatement of Waze was taken in a review meeting at the level of commissioner of police. Mr Waze was posted at CIU on the insistence of then commissioner of police Param Bir Singh, the report says.

Further pinning the blame on Mr Singh, the report underlines that the then joint commissioner of police (crime) had opposed the posting of Mr Waze.

“But at the insistence of the then commissioner of police, Mumbai, the then

SC to hear Maha govt, minister’s plea against CBI probe

PARMOD KUMAR  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

The Supreme Court will hear on Thursday Maharashtra government and former state home minister Anil Deshmukh plea against Bombay high court order allowing CBI to conduct a preliminary inquiry into the allegations of corruption levelled against the minister by the former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh.

As an interim relief, Mr Deshmukh has sought a

joint CP (crime) issued the office order for posting of Sachin Waze at CIU,” the report noted. The report also said that Mr Waze had bypassed his immediate superiors and reported directly to Mr Singh. Interestingly, the state government had initially

stay of the high court order permitting CBI to hold a preliminary probe into the allegations of corruption levelled by Mr Singh.

Both the petitions — by Anil Deshmukh and the Maharashtra government — are listed for hearing before a bench comprising Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Justice Hemant Gupta.

Earlier in the day, a petition by Mr Deshmukh and the state government were mentioned before a bench headed by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde for an

urgent hearing.

Mr Deshmukh had to resign on April 5, 2021, after the HC ordered a CBI probe against him and registration of an FIR if anythe cognisable offence is found.

Challenging the high court order, Maharashtra government and Mr Deshmukh in separate petitions have contended that the high court had passed the final orders while the matter was listed for hearing on the maintainability of the petition before the court.

defended Waze as well as Mr Singh as good police officers, till the later’s bitter fallout with former home minister Anil Deshmukh, who resigned earlier this week after the Bombay high court ordered the CBI to investigate charges of extortion

against him. The charges have been levelled by Mr Singh.

Sources said the home department had sought police chief Hemant Nagrale’s report on Mr Waze’s style of functioning when Anil Deshmukh was the home minister.

■ Kin of CRPF jawan abducted by Naxals stage protest in J&K

‘Old photo of jawan could be a ploy’

YUSUF JAMEEL  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 7

The family of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawan who went missing during a deadly encounter with the Naxals in Chhattisgarh at the weekend has said that his photograph doing the rounds in an instant messaging platform is almost 12 months old.

It rejected the claims that it was snapped and released by Maoists after taking CRPF’s Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, a resident of Jammu, “captive”. Manhas went missing after a joint team of the

CRPF and two other security forces clashed with Maoists at the borders between Chhattisgarh’s Sukma and Bijapur districts on Saturday. As many as 22 security personnel were killed and many more injured during the encounter. However, the CRPF’s director-general, Kuldip Singh, had claimed to inflict huge losses on the Maoists. He also said there is no confirmation yet that Manhas has been held captive by Maoists.

The missing constable’s family members, friends and neighbours held a protest demonstration

along the Jammu-Poonch National Highway on Wednesday, demanding his safe release and strong action against Maoists. His cousin Praveen Singh Manhad said that the photograph of the missing jawan that has surfaced on social media with the message that he is safe in captivity is almost a year old. “I had seen it on his phone during his last visit to the home,” he told reporters. He added that releasing the photograph through a social networking platform could be a “ploy” by Maoists.

He echoed the sentiment of Manhas’s family and

friends and said, “Our anxiety is increasing with every passing hour. We’re concerned about his safety and security and urge the government to take swift and stern action to secure his return and against the Maoists.”

A report said that several journalists in Chhattisgarh received the photo on their WhatsApp on Wednesday. The sender claimed that Minhas was not hurt in the captivity of Maoists.

On Monday, Manhas’s five-year-old daughter Shragvi had appealed to the Maoists “Please, release my father.”

Farooq tests Covid +ve second time, discharged from hospital

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 7

Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and leader of National Conference (NC) Farooq Abdullah was on Wednesday discharged from a Srinagar hospital where he had been administered five days ago after testing positive for Covid-19.

His son and party’s vice-president Omar Abdullah tweeted “5 days after being admitted to SKIMS, Srinagar, with Covid my father was discharged this evening. He will continue the rest of his recovery & recuperation at home.” He also said, “My father & the entire family are indebted & deeply grateful to the doctors, nursing staff & others at the institute.”

According to Omar, the SeniorAbdullah, a sitting member of LoK Sabha, has been instructed by doctors to focus on his recovery and “for the time being will not be allowed visitors....He looks forward to completing his

MAHA HEALTH MINISTER CLAIMS SHORTAGE OF COVID VACCINES

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI, APRIL 7

Mahashtra, the worst coronavirus-affected state in the country, is facing acute shortage of Covid vaccines. Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope has expressed fear that Covid vaccination drive in the state might come to a halt due to lack of supply from the Centre.

According to Mr Tope, the state is left with only three days of vaccine stock. Due to the shortage, several vaccination centres across the state have

been shut down and people had to be sent back.

“We are now left with only 14 lakh doses, which would last for only three days. We have requested the Centre to send more vaccines to Maharashtra,” said Mr Tope on Wednesday.

The demand to the Centre was made in a video conference meeting chaired by Union minister of health and family welfare Dr Harsh Vardhan. Mr Tope attended the meeting along with health ministers from six other states on Tuesday.

recovery so he can resume a full schedule of work.”

Earlier during the day, a report had said that Farooq Abdullah has again tested positive for the virus. However, Omar had said that his father was “responding well” to treatment and does not require any supplement-

tary oxygen support. He further said, “This is nothing unusual. Covid patients often test positive for quite a few days as the viral load reduces. The important thing is he is responding well to treatment and does not require any supplementary oxygen support.”

No jabs at 397 Odisha centres due to shortage

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 7

Covid-19 caccination could not be carried out at little less than 400 centres in different districts across Odisha due to shortage of vaccines, health and family welfare director Bijay Panigrahi said.

“Vaccination centres were set up at 1,500 points across the state, but vaccination was held at 1,103 centres Tuesday due to shortage of vaccine,” Panigrahi said.

Mr Panigrahi’s statement came at a time when several letters were written by the health department to the Centre highlighting shortage. The health director said the state was running out of vaccine stock and the vaccination drive will be hampered if adequate stock of Covishield vaccine was not supplied to the state within the next two days.

Italian marine case

■ Continued from Page 1  
the top court for closing the case, said, “The fact is there is a criminal charge being tried here in India where the victims’ families are also appearing. Without applying for withdrawal of prosecution before the trial court, how can you come before the top court? Why don’t you apply for withdrawal there?” However, the court today agreed to hear the Centre’s plea on Friday.

While asking the court to deal with the matter, Mr Mehta informed the bench that the families of the victims have been paid compensation.

Two Italian marines — Chief Master Sergeant Massimiliano Latorre and Sergeant Major Salvatore Girone — are facing prosecution for killing two Indian fishermen from Kerala in 2012 mistaking them as pirates. The two marines were on board Italian ship Enrica Lexie when they shot the two fishermen off Kochi port.

In the August 6 hearing of the matter, the court had asked the Centre to implead the families of the victim fishermen and pay them adequate compensation before the curtains could be brought on the case. Chief Justice Bobde had said, “You have to ensure adequate compensation. You bring the cheque here and we will hand it over to the victims’ families.”

The issue of whether the Italian marines will be tried in India or in Italy was adjudicated by the Hague based International Tribunal on Law of the Sea (ITLOS). On May 21, 2020, it ruled that two marines will face trial in Italy. India has already conveyed to the top court that it has accepted the ITLOS ruling.

Odisha cop suspended for dancing in police station

AKSHAYA KUMAR  
SAHOO  
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 7

An assistant sub-inspector of police has been suspended after a video showing five cops, including a woman home guard, in uniform dancing to the tune of a popular Odia song inside a police station in Odisha’s Jaipur district has gone viral on social media, an officer said.

In the video, the faces and uniforms of the dancing police personnel are seen smeared in colours while other employees of the Panikoiili police station are seen clapping and cheering the five while performing Nagin dance.

The incident which violated rules may have taken place on the occasion of the Holi festival, Jaipur superintendent of police (SP) Rahul PR

said. Assistant sub-inspector (ASI) Sanjay Dash was placed under suspension after preliminary inquiry, he said.

“We have launched a probe and action will be taken against the other police personnel involved in the incident on the basis of the inquiry report,” the SP said.

An unidentified person captured the video and posted it on social media.

Govt to allow vaccinations at workplaces

■ Continued from Page 1  
approach of the Maharashtra government in battling the virus. The lackadaisical attitude of the state government has singularly bogged down the entire country’s efforts to fight the virus. We, in the Central government, have regularly counselled the Maharashtra government, made them available all resources and sent Central teams for help. However, the lack of effort by the state government is now clearly visible and comes to haunt us all. Today, Maharashtra not only has the highest cases and deaths in the country but also has one of the highest test posi-

tivity rates in the world! Their testing is not up to the mark and their contact tracing leaves a lot to be desired. The performance of the Maharashtra government in terms of vaccinating healthcare workers and frontline workers is also not great. It is shocking to see how the state government is putting Maharashtra in danger by letting people escape institutional quarantine mandates. As the state lurched from one crisis to another, it seems the state leadership is happily sleeping at the wheel.”

He said the Maharashtra government must do a lot more to control the pandem-

ic, adding that the Centre will help in all possible ways. The minister also referred to Chhattisgarh, saying the comments by state leaders were intended to spread misinformation and panic about the vaccinations.

The minister said many other states also need to bring their healthcare systems up to the mark, mentioning Karnataka, Rajasthan and Gujarat, saying they need to improve the quality of testing. In Punjab, he said, the high case fatality rate must be improved by early identification of those needing hospitalisation. Mask-wearing and social distancing compliance are slack

in several states.

The minister also defended the government’s stand of vaccinating only 45-plus people as of now.

India on Wednesday had about 1.16 lakh fresh Covid-19 cases, while 630 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours. Due to rising cases, the Punjab government ordered a night curfew in the state from 9 pm till 5 am and a ban on all political, social, cultural and sports gatherings. A cap was also put on the numbers permitted at weddings, funerals and cremations. Only 50 people can attend indoor functions, and 100 outdoors. In Chhattisgarh, a lockdown

has been imposed in Raipur from April 9 to 19.

The Serum Institute of India, that is making the Covishield vaccine in India, has got a legal notice from its partner AstraZeneca over delays in vaccine supplies. India has halted the export of vaccines to other nations in order to first cover its own population.

Serum Institute CEO Adar Poonawala said: “The globe needs this vaccine... We are prioritising the needs of India (but) we are still short of being able to supply every Indian.” He added more companies need to manufacture vaccines in India to meet the demand.

a case against her and cancellation of her party’s registration.

In her speech, Ms Banerjee also slammed the home minister for the deaths of CRPF jawans in an encounter with Naxals. “So many jawans were killed in Sukma. What has the government done? As a home minister you could not protect the lives of police either at Sukma or Pulwama,” Ms Banerjee said.

obstruct them from entering the voting centres. The CRPF is doing a nuisance. I respect the CRPF which have real jawans. But I do not respect the CRPF which is doing nuisance by beating women and killing and harassing the people. I do not support them.”

“If the Central forces, say CRPF or even the Bengal force ask you to not to cast your votes, tell them I will not

listen to you. Lodge an FIR or diary against them. If the CRPF creates trouble, you, the women, gherao them totally. While one group will keep the forces gheraoed, another will go to cast your votes. Do not waste your votes anyway,” she said at a TMC rally.

Condemning the statement as “anti-national”, the BJP complained to the Election Commission and demanded



# THE ASIAN AGE

8 APRIL 2021

## Nurture is the best policy, but watch out for inflation

In the wake of heightened uncertainty caused by the second wave of coronavirus cases across the world, especially in India, the Reserve Bank of India has left key lending rates unchanged once again and committed to continue an accommodative stance for the monetary policy. This open-ended policy gives comfort to participants in equity and bond markets, in particular, and borrowers, in general.

The central bank claimed that rural demand remains buoyant and record agriculture production in 2020-21 bodes well for its resilience. Urban demand, which it said has gained traction, is expected to get a boost with the vaccination drive. Though high-frequency lead and coincident indicators, including the Goods and Service Tax receipts, reveal that economic activity is normalising, the six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) preferred to remain

**The RBI's announcement to purchase bonds worth ₹1 lakh crore from the secondary market to keep long-term rates in check has attracted most praise**

cautious about interest rate to support the growth in the economy in view of a surge in coronavirus infections.

A low-interest rate regime is considered a key weapon to revive consumer demand and induce normalcy in the economy. It would affect sectors like construction, automobiles and consumer durable goods, which will have a trickle-down effect on the economy.

Despite a worsening Covid situation in the country, the RBI predicted a 10.5 per cent growth in the Indian economy — the elusive double-digit growth figure that Indian governments have been running after. In support of its favourable assessment of the economy, the RBI listed three factors — the vaccination programme being speeded up and increasingly extended to the wider segments of the population; the gradual release of pent-up demand; and the investment-enhancing and growth-supportive reform measures taken by the government.

While the policy was broadly appreciated by all economists, the RBI's announcement to purchase bonds worth ₹1 lakh crore from the secondary market to keep long-term rates in check has attracted most of their praise. The move, analysts claimed, would anchor bond yields in the secondary bond market. Indian bond yields have risen sharply after finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed to borrow ₹12 lakh crore in the previous fiscal. After the Tuesday announcement, the bond yields declined by 0.12 percentage points.

The RBI, however, is concerned about the recurrence of global financial market volatility like the bout experienced in late February, which could accentuate the downside risks for India. Though the country has enough firepower in terms of foreign exchange reserves to handle any global volatility, the central bank must remain vigilant to prevent the repeat of the “2013 US taper tantrums”.

An elevated inflation rate is also a cause of concern for the RBI, though it has decided to accord priority to economic growth in the near future. It projected retail inflation to be around five per cent in the current fiscal, which is one percentage point higher than the RBI's mandated four per cent inflation rate. It, however, hinted at a coordinated action by the Centre and states to bring down tax on petrol and diesel. If the tax on fuel was brought down, it would be happy news for the common man.

## Clear the air on Rafale

The new series of reports that has come in the French media about the alleged kickbacks in the ₹59,000 crore deal between the governments of India and France to buy 36 Rafale medium multi-role combat aircraft is disquieting. As per the report in Mediapart, a Paris-based investigative website, France's anti-corruption agency National Financial Prosecutor's Office, or Parquet National Financier (PNF), had in 2017 reported about the suspicious payment of half a million euros to an Indian middleman for making models of the fighter jets. The same middleman is under investigation by Indian agencies for his role in the Augusta Westland helicopter deal, which is also mired in controversy and corruption. The French agency did not pursue the case and closed the complaint filed by a well-known anti-corruption NGO “Sherpa”, the reports said.

The government of India had in 2015 cancelled the negotiations between public sector Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Dassault Aviation, the makers of Rafale, for the purchase of 126 aircraft. The protracted discussions, started in 2012, were about to close, according to the then CEO of Dassault, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a new deal to buy 36 aircraft. The government blunted criticism against the deal that it violated the defence procurement procedure by stating that it was a government-to-government deal. The Supreme Court also did not find merit in the plea that there were political intervention and corruption in the deal that required to be investigated. It is clear that there need be no middleman in a government-to-government deal but the latest revelation raises questions about the very claim the government had advanced. There had already been suspicions about the government's ignorance about Dassault's choice of Reliance Defence as its Indian partner to meet its commitment as per the offset clause in the deal. The government will have to consider instituting an investigation by a credible agency or even a judicial commission to clear the air instead of allowing every fresh controversy to become a stick to beat it with.

### THE ASIAN AGE

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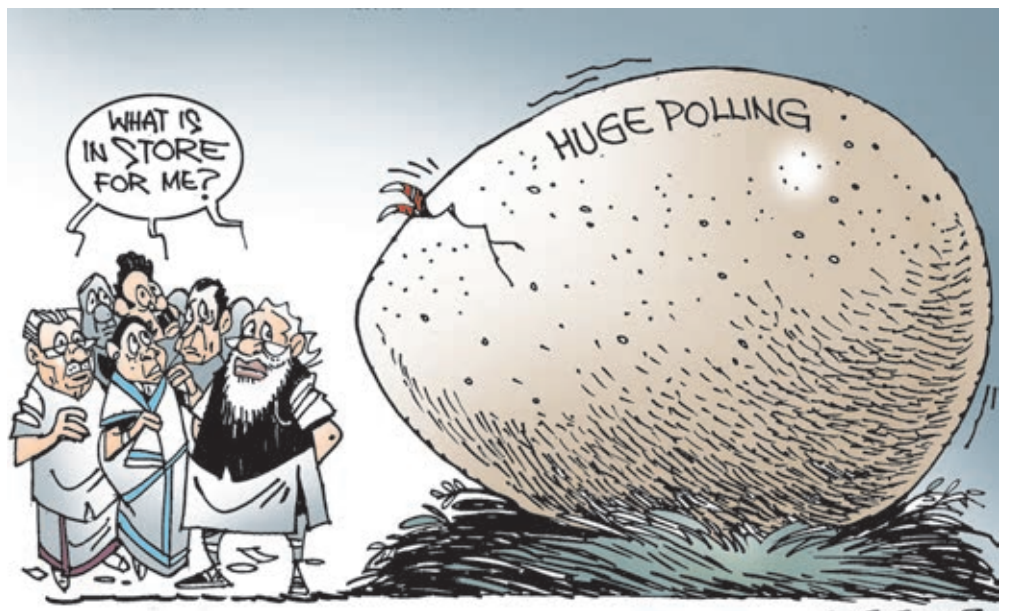
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Subhani



## As Covid-19 spikes, the season of fear is back...



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

Loss comes in many forms in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. There is the loss of lives and livelihoods; and then there is the loss of words as we understood them once. The “normal” of yesteryear may never return.

And yet, there were flickers of hope as the new year began.

Newspapers were full of stories about the consistent fall in India's active Covid-19 caseload. Antibody surveys showed that a significant part of the population in major cities — including New Delhi — had already been exposed to the virus, raising hopes of a slowing spread. On January 16 this year, India rolled out the world's largest vaccination drive against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes the Covid-19 pandemic. In the first phase, the priority was inoculating healthcare and frontline workers. Then it expanded to the public, taking age and co-morbidities into consideration. More than 8.31 crore jabs have been given so far.

But the season of fear is back.

Infections started to shoot up several few weeks ago, particularly in Maharashtra. Now, the daily rise in Covid-19 cases in the country has crossed 100,000, from 20,000 infections in less than a month. Mumbai, India's financial capital, is among the 10 districts in the country with the highest number of new Covid-19 cases. Delhi, the national capital, is not as badly hit as Mumbai as of now, but from this week, night curfew has been imposed on the city. Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, along with peri-urban areas, have recorded a sharp spike in Covid cases recently; the fear is that the infection may spread from these small towns to rural areas.

Even the Union health ministry is compelled to admit that the recent spike in coronavirus cases in India is spreading faster in the country compared to last year.

How did we get here? The short answer: We got here because of complacency, by ignoring early alerts by health experts. Part of the problem has also been mixed messaging, and the government's reluctance to accept and communicate unpalatable truths.

Even as government health advisories tell ordinary people to observe social distancing, avoid big crowds and wear masks at all times, there is ample evidence of many politicians on the campaign trail doing just the opposite.

One telling example: Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who recently said there was no need to wear masks in the state as there was no coronavirus there anymore.

Even as one writes, huge crowds continue to gather at election rallies in many states as well as at religious gatherings.

How did we slip up?

Prof. Bhramar Mukherjee, a biostatistician at the University of Michigan in the United States, who has been tracking India's coronavirus outbreak, told me she had tweeted about the uptick on February 18. But when she mentioned this to her close family and friends at that time, they thought “I was crying wolf”, she says.

“The public sentiment that Covid is no longer an issue, with even the more cautious people letting their guard down, has certainly contributed to this aftermath,” says Prof. Mukherjee. She also points out that the serosurvey results gave a false complacency and a false sense of security, thinking that we are nearing infection-induced herd immunity.

**We need to accept that even in the post-inoculated world, our public health systems have to remain on high alert for the foreseeable future**

“Taking advantage of the valley of the virus curve, we needed to accelerate the vaccination drive while case counts were low instead of relying on ephemeral infection immunity.”

Prof. Mukherjee is not the only one who was warning against complacency. In February, many of India's leading epidemiologists, like Dr Giridhara R. Babu, were flagging the need to keep the focus on detection of Covid cases and clusters in the community. Dr Babu also listed some of the imperatives at primary health centres — testing needed to be available, ditto for notification within 24 hours, quick contact tracing, genomic sequencing of clusters and vulnerability assessment. “The number of deaths occurring in hospitals should be reported daily. The number of Covid-19 deaths occurring in the community should also be reported daily and reviewed regularly at different levels,” Dr Babu tweeted on February 23.

Although it is late, identifying excess deaths earlier can save more lives. Instead of addressing these important but active containment efforts, the tendency is to push often passive mitigation measures such as lockdowns, seal-downs and curfews, he had pointed out.

Now, we are hearing a lot about new variants of the virus, but how closely are we tracking them?

Arguably, the biggest challenge of this pandemic is negotiating the sea of unknowns. But even so, many things could have been done, say experts.

“We could have started intensified vaccination and ring vaccination in high transmission areas as an exception to the general 45+ or 65+ rule followed for the rest of the country,” says Prof.

Mukherjee. Ring vaccination is where you vaccinate the surrounding “ring”, or circle of interaction of anyone who is infected or tests positive. This includes people who are not eligible by the age-based criterion.

What is the road ahead?

“Vaccination is one of the strategies, but it is not the only strategy. We should have three-four strategies working in parallel. After we give the vaccine, the adequate antibody response will take a few weeks. Second, along with vaccination, we need an aggressive testing, tracking and isolation policy. Six months ago, it was being done very aggressively by states, but we have now become lax. If a person tests positive, no one really goes and checks who they have come in contact with, and we fail to break the chain of transmission.” Dr Randeep Guleria, director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, recently told a national newspaper.

There is an obvious need to identify areas where surges are taking place, develop them into containment zones, test everyone in that area, isolate those who are positive, quarantine those who have come in close contact with patients and test them after five to seven days, and not allow people from that area to go to another area, as Dr Guleria suggests.

See-sawing between laxity and lockdown is not a solution. It will destroy both lives and livelihoods. We need to accept that even in the post-inoculated world, our public health systems have to remain on high alert for the foreseeable future. “The history of infectious diseases tells us that outbreaks can happen even after a high degree of vaccination. You have to track each case and contact trace,” as Prof. Mukherjee points out.

*The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.*

### LETTERS

#### WHAT WOMEN WANT

It is gratifying that, except for sporadic violence in West Bengal, the Assembly elections have gone off peacefully in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and Assam. Polling was conducted at 1,53,538 polling stations across 475 Assembly constituencies in the four states and the Union territory of Puducherry. Tamil Nadu recorded the lowest turnout among the four states, while Assam topped the charts. The high turnout of women voters in many constituencies was a common thread in the Assembly polls and an encouraging sign.

N.J. Ravi Chander  
Bengaluru

#### POLL PUNISHMENT

**EVEN AS THE** coronavirus rages across the country, the people of West Bengal are preparing to risk their lives to cast their votes in five more phases of the polls. But the state has been singled out from amongst others for this punishment on the ostensible ground that more phases will reduce chance of violence. However, Tuesday's violence claiming nine lives, five of whom belonged to Trinamul supporters, gives the lie to this logic. One wonders, how with the EC's organisational machinery and massive central security, this could not be prevented. There was rigging in Siddhartha Shankar Ray's era and electoral violence in Left Front rule but few can match the BJP's unprincipled ruthlessness.

Parthasarathy Sen  
New Delhi

#### NO LOCKDOWNS

**THIS REFERS TO** the editorial, “Ban all large gatherings, give everyone vaccines” (April 7). India has witnessed a massive surge in the number of daily infections with eight states bearing the brunt of the caseload. Faced with the task of rejuvenating the economy, emphasis should be laid on vaccination, removing the age limit, besides banning public gatherings in West Bengal during the remaining five phases of Assembly elections. However, lockdowns are not a solution as they will bring the economy to a crashing halt. The Board exams, too, should not be postponed.

Sankar Paul  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

Maleeha Lodhi



## Uncivil society: Is regulation alone enough to curb fake news?

THE danger that misleading or false information poses to society has been grimly demonstrated during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the deadly threat from the virus, many people's response across the world has often been shaped by misinformation fed through digital platforms. This has either made them trivialise the disease or resort to “cures” without any basis in science and only because they were circulated in social messaging as a ‘remedy’. Vaccine hesitancy in many parts of the world has also largely been driven by rumour and conspiracy theories.

This prompted the World Health Organisation early in the pandemic to coin the term “infodemic” to refer to the flood of information and exponential spread of fabricated content. The head of WHO, Tedros Adhanom, declared: “We're not just battling the virus, we're also battling the trolls and conspiracy theorists that push misinformation and undermine the outbreak response.” Top UN officials repeatedly warned of the grave social and health ramifications of the proliferation of misinformation. While the global health crisis has seen a stream of false stories the reality is that fake news is all around us today. This presents new challenges to social stability in what has been called the post-truth era, a term that emerged a few years ago.

Fake news is of course not new. Disinformation has been used by countries against adversaries throughout history. What distinguishes fake news from propaganda is that individuals and non-state actors are now using it with abandon in the digital age. This makes it unprecedentedly pervasive.

What explains the omnipresence of fake news today? It is generally agreed that this has much to do with the proliferation of information channels and expansion of social media in the digital era. Communication technology now dominates our lives like never before. Online platforms are widely regarded as the main vehicles for the spread of misinformation. Fake news easily circulates due to the magnifying power of social media and becomes viral in this mostly unregulated environment. Anonymity on social media platforms

gives the purveyors of false stories and trolls the comfort that they will not be held accountable for the lies or hate messages they disseminate. Anyone can post fake news on social media without fear of retribution.

Facebook and Twitter have been the object of mounting global criticism for this reason. Despite the raging controversy over their role, social media giants who wield immense power have yet to undertake effective self-regulation. A Unesco report notes that steps taken are at best “patchy”. As Timothy Garton Ash once wrote in *The Guardian*, these digital platforms have become “unprecedentedly powerful amplifiers of lies” and “the profit motive pushes them towards the dark side, via algorithmic maximization of the currency of attention”. In fact, their business model prevents them from instituting real checks on divisive content and “digital wildfires”.

The spread of fake news has also been linked to the rise of populist leaders who feel no compunction in knowingly selling fact-free narratives. Trump perfected the politics of lies. He consciously

used ‘alternative facts’ and manipulated opinion by espousing conspiracy theories and fabricating threats to further his political career. But he wasn't alone. Demagogues and their followers across the world have employed similar means for political gain, playing on people's vulnerabilities by communicating falsehoods.

A plausible connection has also been made between the prevalence of fake news and political polarisation. This is because in polarised society and politics people choose to believe what their partisan side transmits or what accords with their own views. They only listen to news media or follow online sites which echo their own bias. Living in information or digital ‘bubbles’ makes them susceptible to anything disseminated by their chosen information channel, true or false.

The harmful repercussions of the fake news phenomenon are manifold. An environment where truth is blurred can have far-reaching consequences — misleading people, damaging social cohesion by eroding a sense of shared interest, debasing politics, undermining civic obligations, and

even sowing public disorder.

Also, as president Barack Obama once famously remarked “fake news is a threat to democracy”. When political debate is degraded by falsehoods and bereft of reason, democracy is jeopardised. By playing off and reinforcing polarisation, narratives based on untruths that demonise “the other” corrode a sense of community and are deeply divisive. Trust also declines in public institutions as misleading information often sows doubts and cynicism. The pernicious effects of hate speech, harassment, online extremism and lies spread against minorities need no elaboration.

How these dangers can be mitigated is an imposing challenge of our times. Solutions offered range from greater online regulation, increased monitoring and oversight by social media companies to removing toxic content and ending user anonymity. How effective they can be remains to be seen. Regulating technology is one thing but it is uncivil human behaviour that really needs to change.

By arrangement with Dawn



## SHORT TAKES

OUTRAGE AFTER  
IMRAN LINKS RAPE  
TO WOMEN'S DRESS

**Islamabad:** Pakistan rights campaigners have accused Prime Minister Imran Khan of “baffling ignorance” after the former playboy cricketer blamed how women dress for a rise in rape cases.

In a weekend interview on live television, Oxford-educated Khan said an increase in rapes indicated the “consequences in any society where vulgarity is on the rise”.

“The incidents of rape of women... (have) actually very rapidly increased in society,” he said. He advised women to cover up to prevent temptation. “This entire concept of purdah is to avoid temptation, not everyone has the willpower to avoid it,” he said, using a term that can refer to modest dress or the segregation of the sexes.

AUSTRIAN GROUP  
FILES PLAINT ON  
GOOGLE AD TRACK

**Vienna:** An Austrian online privacy campaign group said on Wednesday it has filed a complaint against Google over what it says is a tracking code “illegally” installed on Android phones.

The complaint from NOYB relates to Google's Android Advertising Identifier (AAID) and has been lodged with the CNIL, France's data protection authority.

According to NOYB, the AAID code is created “without the user's knowledge or consent” and “functions like a licence plate that uniquely identifies the phone of a user and can be shared among companies”. Furthermore, NOYB (none of your business) says users do not have the option of deleting the code, with only the possibility of generating a new tracking ID.

It says this violates the requirement under the EU's e-Privacy Directive for users to give informed consent for such tracking.

ACTOR ZACH  
AVERY HELD FOR  
PONZI SCHEME

**Los Angeles:** Actor Zach Avery has been arrested in connection with a massive Hollywood Ponzi scheme.

According to Los Angeles Times, Avery, whose real name is Zachary J. Horwitz, was taken into custody on Tuesday with the federal investigators alleging that he defrauded investors out of more than USD 227 million. Horwitz has appeared in minor roles in movies such as “*Fury*”, “*Curvature*”, “*Farming*” and “*The White Crow*”. He is accused of fabricating licensing deals with Netflix, HBO, as well as other platforms, in order to secure funding for his film distribution company, 1inMM Capital LLC, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

In a criminal complaint filed Monday in United States District Court, FBI agent John Verrastro alleged that Horwitz cheated investors of significant sums by persuading them to invest in 1inMM Capital.

ACTIVISTS GUILTY  
FOR DEMOCRACY  
RALLY IN HK

**Hong Kong:** Three veteran Hong Kong pro-democracy activists, including well-known publisher Jimmy Lai, have pleaded guilty to taking part in an unauthorised rally that resulted in violence between police and participants, media reported on Wednesday.

Lai is already being held in custody on other charges related to his outspoken opposition to China's crackdown on civil liberties in the former British colony.

Last Thursday, seven of Hong Kong's leading pro-democracy advocates, including Lai and an 82-year-old veteran of the movement, were convicted for organising and participating in a march during massive anti-government protests in 2019 that triggered Beijing's crackdown.

While Lai will be returned to jail, ex-legislator Lee Cheuk-yan and Yeng Sum, a former chairman of the Democratic Party, are believed to be negotiating bail terms. The charges carry prison terms of up to five years.

The court was shown footage of the three at the Aug. 31, 2019, event that led to clashes in various parts of the cramped city of more than 7 million that was hovering at the edge of chaos at the time.

## Sinking ship



The unmanned Dutch cargo ship *Eemslift Hendrika* rolls in heavy seas, carrying heavy oil and diesel on board in the Norwegian Sea about 130 kilometres off the coast of Alesund. The crew was evacuated following a distress call from the vessel, and the Norwegian Coastal Administration said on Tuesday they have dispatched a Coast Guard ship to inspect the situation.

— AP

US military warns China  
on fast track for Taiwan

Years of military buildup have given China added strength

**Washington, April 7:** The

American military is warning that China is probably accelerating its timetable for capturing control of Taiwan, the island democracy that has been the chief source of tension between Washington and Beijing for decades and is widely seen as the most likely trigger for a potentially catastrophic U.S.-China war.

The worry about Taiwan comes as China wields new strength from years of military buildup. It has become more aggressive with Taiwan and more assertive in sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea. Beijing also has become more confrontational with Washington; senior Chinese officials traded sharp and unusually public barbs with Secretary of State Antony Blinken in talks in Alaska last month.

A military move against Taiwan, however, would be a test of US support for the island that Beijing views as a breakaway province. For the Biden administration, it could present the choice of abandoning a friendly, democratic entity or risking what could become an all-out war over a cause that is not on the radar of most Americans. The United States has long pledged to help Taiwan

Taiwan blasts China's  
fighter jet incursions

**Taipei, April 7:** Taiwan blasted China's fighter jet incursions as “self-defeating” on Wednesday as 15 more of Beijing's planes crossed into the island's air defence zone.

Taipei's defence ministry said it scrambled aircraft to broadcast warning messages to the latest incursion, which included 12 Chinese fighters.

China has ramped up the use of such drills to record levels over the past year as a way to pile pressure on self-ruled Taiwan which it regards as its own territory.

Beijing has vowed to one

day seize the island, by force if needed.

The latest incursion comes as Taiwan mourns its worst train crash in decades, an event that killed 50 people and prompted a rare message of condolence from Chinese President Xi Jinping.

But Taiwanese foreign minister Joseph Wu accused Beijing on Wednesday of sending “very mixed signals” by offering sympathy for the train crash while buzzing the island with its fighters. “I would say that the policy is self-defeating,” Wu told reporters.

“It's not going to meet the purpose of the Chinese government whether they want to win hearts and minds of the Taiwanese people or they are going to intimidate the Taiwanese people,” he added. Democratic and self-ruled Taiwan lives under the constant threat of invasion by authoritarian China.

And the sabre-rattling has increased dramatically since Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen won election in 2016, as she rejects the idea that the island is part of “one China”.

— AFP

defend itself, but it has deliberately left unclear how far it would go in response to a Chinese attack.

This accumulation of concerns meshes with the administration's view that China is a frontline challenge for the United States and that more must be done soon — militarily, diplomatically and by other means — to deter Beijing as it seeks to sup-

plant the United States as the predominant power in Asia.

Some American military leaders see Taiwan as potentially the most immediate flashpoint.

“We have indications that the risks are actually going up,” Adm. Philip Davidson, the most senior U.S. military commander in the Asia-Pacific region, told a Senate panel last month, referring to a

Chinese military move on Taiwan.

“The threat is manifest during this decade — in fact, in the next six years,” Davidson said.

Days later, Davidson's expected successor, Adm. John Aquilino, declined to back up the six-year time-frame but told senators at his confirmation hearing: “My opinion is, this problem is much closer to us than most think.”

— AP

Myanmar junta attacks  
town that resisted arms

**Yangon, April 7:** Security forces on Wednesday stormed a town in north-western Myanmar where some residents had used homemade hunting rifles to resist the military's February seizure of power, killing at least 11 civilians and injuring many others, local news reports said.

If the 11 deaths are confirmed, it would be one of the highest single-day death tolls outside the country's two largest cities, Yangon and Mandalay.

The online news site Khonumthung Burmese said the attack on Kalay began before dawn.

Videos on the site included what appeared to be sounds of rifle fire, high-caliber weapons and grenade explosions.

Posts on social media said rocket-propelled grenades were used in the attack, but provided no evidence.

The news site said that in addition to the seven fatalities, many people were wounded and arrested in the town, also known as Kalemoyo or Kale. Over half the town's population are members of the Chin ethnic minority.

Most of the deaths occurred in the morning, but more were reported in the afternoon, bringing

the total to 11, according to the news sites *The Irrawaddy* and *Myanmar Now*.

Security forces have killed at least 581 protesters and bystanders through Tuesday in their crackdown on protests against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors casualties and arrests.

The protesters, who have organised themselves in a “Kalay Civil Army,” inflicted more casualties in the following days, it said.

— AP

EU drug regulator sees clot  
as ‘very rare’ vax side effect

**The Hague, April 7:** The EU's drug regulator said on Wednesday that blood clots should be listed as a “very rare” side effect of the AstraZeneca Coronavirus vaccine but that the jab's benefits continue to outweigh the risks.

No specific risk factors, including age, have been identified for thrombosis with the AstraZeneca shot, which could stem from an immune response, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) said.

The watchdog's findings came after several countries halted the use of the vaccine following dozens of cases of people with clots in blood vessels draining from the brain after receiving jabs, some of them fatal.

“EMA's safety committee has concluded today that unusual blood clots with low blood platelets should be listed as very rare side effects” of the AstraZeneca jab, the Amsterdam-based watchdog said in a statement.

But it stressed that it believed people should continue to take the vaccine as part of the battle against the disease.

“The safety committee has confirmed that the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine in preventing Covid-19 overall outweigh the risk of side effects,” EMA chief Emer Cooke told a news conference. “It is saving lives.” Despite the fact that many of the cases have been reported in women under 55, prompting a number of countries to restrict the vaccine's use to older people, the regulator said it had not been able to pinpoint those at risk.

“Specific risk factors such as age, gender or medical history have not been able to be confirmed, as the rare events are seen in all ages,” Cooke said.

ROUHANI: NUKE  
TALKS OPEN  
‘NEW CHAPTER’

**Tehran, April 7:** Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that talks in Vienna on rescuing a troubled 2015 nuclear deal had opened a “new chapter”.

An Iranian delegation met on Tuesday with representatives of the remaining parties to the agreement to discuss how to bring Washington back into it and end crippling US sanctions and Iranian countermeasures.

US President Joe Biden has said he is ready to reverse the decision of his predecessor Donald Trump to withdraw from the agreement and reimpose unilateral sanctions.

But differences remain over the mechanics of the move as Tehran has since responded by suspending compliance with some of its own obligations under the deal.

— AFP

Biden makes jab  
open to all adults

**Washington, April 7:** President Joe Biden has announced that he's bumping up his deadline by two weeks for states to make all adults in the US eligible for Coronavirus vaccines.

But even as he expressed optimism about the pace of vaccinations, he warned Americans that the nation is not yet out of the woods when it comes to the pandemic. “Let me be deadly earnest with you: We aren't at the finish line. We still have a lot of work to do. We're still in a life and death race against this virus,” Biden said in remarks at the White House.

The president warned that “new variants of the virus are spreading and they're moving quickly. Cases are going back up, hospitalisations are no longer declining.” He added that “the pandemic remains dangerous,” and encouraged Americans to continue to wash their hands, socially distance and wear masks.

Biden added that while his administration is on schedule to meet his new goal of distributing 200 million doses of the vaccine during his first 100 days, it will still take time for enough Americans to get vaccinated to slow the spread of the virus. — AP

MERKEL BACKS  
‘LOCKDOWN’ TO  
TAME COVID-19

**Berlin, April 7:** Chancellor Angela Merkel is in favour of tightening virus restrictions in Germany for a short period to stem rising case numbers, her spokeswoman said on Wednesday.

Merkel backs calls for a “short national lockdown”, Ulrike Demmer said, noting that the country's health system was under growing pressure.

Germany has been in some form of shutdown since November, but has struggled to bring case numbers under control in recent weeks with a surge in the British variant of the virus. — AFP

Landslide toll rises  
to 140 in Indonesia

**Lembata (Indonesia), April 7:** The death toll from mudslides in eastern Indonesia has risen to 140 with dozens still missing, officials said Wednesday, as rain continued to pound the region and hamper the search.

East Flores district on Adonara island suffered the highest losses with 67 bodies recovered so far and six missing. Mud tumbled down from surrounding hills early on Sunday, catching people at sleep. Some were swept away by flash floods after overnight rains caused rivers to burst their banks.

On nearby Lembata island, the downturn triggered by Tropical Cyclone Seroja sent solidified lava from a volcanic eruption in November to crash down on more than a dozen villages, killing at least 32 and leaving 35 unaccounted for, according to the National

Disaster Mitigation Agency.

Hundreds of police, soldiers and residents dug through the debris with their bare hands, shovels and hoes searching for those buried.

Relatives wailed Wednesday as they watched rescuers pull out a mud-caked body, place it on a bamboo stretcher and take it away for burial.

Please find my father and mother who are still buried ... whatever their condition, Suzanna Tasoin cried to rescuers struggling to dig up tons of volcanic materials and rocks with farm tools at Waimatan village on Lembata island. We want to bury them with the respect they deserve.

In all, landslides and flooding have killed at least 126 across several islands in Indonesia as well as 27 people in neighbouring East Timor.

— AP

## EU slams Ursula ‘sofagate’ at summit

**Brussels, April 7:** The European Commission hit out on Wednesday at a diplomatic snub that left its head Ursula von der Leyen without a chair as male counterparts sat down at a meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Video from Tuesday's encounter in Ankara showed von der Leyen flummoxed as the Turkish leader and European Council president Charles Michel took the only two chairs in front of their flags.

“Ehm,” muttered the former German defence minister, appearing unsure where to go.

Eventually she was seated on a sofa a little further away from her counterparts, opposite Turkey's foreign minister — someone below her in the protocol pecking order.

“The president of the commission was clearly surprised,” European Commission spokesman Eric Mamer said, insisting von der Leyen should have been treated “exactly in the same manner” as Michel.

— AFP

## APEX | PREDATORS

## Warming of Arctic twice as fast as planet is leading to dwindling sea ice

## Polar bears snack on eggs as Arctic shrinks

**Paris, April 7:** Hungry polar bears are increasingly foraging on seabird eggs as climate change shrinks their Arctic hunting grounds, but research published Wednesday on the phenomenon highlights the struggle these apex predators have to adapt to their rapidly changing environment.

The climate change threat to polar bears is well known, driven by the extraordinary pace of change in the Arctic,

which is warming twice as fast as the planet as a whole. This is already leading to dwindling sea ice, cutting short the time they have to hunt seals, their preferred prey.

With a growing imperative to find alternative sustenance, polar bears have been pushed further afield in search of food, including scavenging in areas populated by humans.

Some bears are also coming ashore at the same time seabirds are nesting

and are snacking on their eggs.

To measure how efficient these top-of-the-food-chain predators were at this foraging — and therefore how useful the eggs are to provide energy in their diets — researchers in Canada used drones to monitor them feeding from common eider duck nests on Mitivik Island, in Nunavut.

The study, published in the journal Royal Society Open Science, tracked how

the bears approached the nesting site over a period of 11 days, as the number of eggs were depleted.

“We found that later-arriving bears increasingly visited more empty nests and did not travel in an energy-minimizing way, but became less picky in the clutches they consumed,” said lead author Patrick Jagielski, of the Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research at the University of Windsor.

— AFP



Many polar bears are already facing a climate-driven threat as dwindling sea ice cuts short the time they have to hunt seals, their preferred prey. — AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49661.76	0.94
Nifty 50	14819.00	0.92
S&P 500*	4,073.50	-0.01
Dollar (₹)	74.55	1.52
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.03	1.44
Euro (₹)	88.58	2.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,768▲587	1.28
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	62.81	0.11
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.082	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.647	-0.009

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Drug firms asked to ramp up remdesivir output

The government said that all seven manufacturers of remdesivir have been asked to ramp up production to full capacity by next week. The direction comes against reports of shortages of the critical Covid-19 drug. "There are seven players who produce remdesivir. I have asked all players to ramp up production to full capacity by next week," Mansukh Mandaviya, minister of state for chemicals and fertilisers, said.

Wipro appoints Subha Tatavarti as CTO



Wipro said it has appointed former Walmart executive Subha Tatavarti as its chief technology officer. The company also appointed Suzanne Dann as senior vice president and sector head for capital markets and insurance, North America region. Tatavarti will lead Wipro's Service Transformation, Topcoder, Robotics, SVIC, Technovation Centre, Open Innovation and Applied Research teams, Wipro said.

Vedanta's sweetened offer gets 57.5% bids

Anil Agarwal-led Vedanta Resources Ltd's sweetened offer to buy back 17.5 per cent share in its Indian flagship firm was subscribed 57.5 per cent, helping it raise its stake to about 65 per cent. The voluntary open offer to buy 65.1 crore shares in Vedanta Ltd at Rs 235 apiece received offers for 37.42 crore shares, or 57.49 per cent of the offer size. The subscription was open till 15.30 hrs on Wednesday.

Practo online consultations in 15 languages

Integrated healthcare company Practo announced the launch of online consultations in 15 vernacular languages. This initiative will allow users to choose a doctor who can speak in their preferred language. Currently, this service covers 15 languages, with more to be added soon, it said in a release, adding that with this, Practo is one step closer to breaking down access barriers for 200 mn users in the future.

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Rates on hold; accommodative stance to remain RBI opts for status quo

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 7

Faced with renewed challenges to growth and inflationary pressures, the Reserve Bank of India-led monetary policy committee (MPC) in its first bi-monthly policy review for FY22 on Wednesday kept the policy repo rate unchanged and decided to continue with its accommodative stance "as long as necessary" to ensure a durable economic recovery, especially since the second pandemic wave threatens the country's growth prospects.

The central bank also chose to focus on supporting desired financial conditions through new instruments, the highlight being the 'G-sec acquisition programme' (GSAP) to ease yields on government bonds (G-secs).

While economic activity is normalising in spite of the surge in infections, the second wave of the pandemic is adding uncertainty to the economic outlook, said RBI governor

BACKING UP GROWTH

- ▶ MPC decides to retain repo rate at 4%, reverse repo at 3.35%, and marginal standing facility at 4.25%
- ▶ Stance to remain accommodative till recovery is ensured
- ▶ CPI inflation trajectory faces both upside and downside pressures. RBI's 5.2% forecast for the first half of this fiscal is slightly higher than the 5-5.2%

Shaktikanta Das.

"The recent surge in Covid-19 infections, however, adds uncertainty to the domestic growth outlook amidst tightening of restrictions by some state governments..Fiscal and monetary authorities stand ready to act in a coordinated manner to limit its spillovers to the economy at large and contain its fall-

estimated in February ▶ For FY22 CPI Inflation is expected at 5%, ▶ FY22 GDP forecast unchanged at 10.5%. ▶ While growth prospects have brightened with vaccination, the second pandemic wave has brought new uncertainties ▶ Under G-Sec acquisition programme 1.0, RBI will buy ₹1 lakh crore in Q1

out on the ongoing recovery. There is concern around rising cases of infections but as Martin Luther King Jr had said and I quote: "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope" said Das in his monetary policy statement.

The MPC believes the consumer price index-

linked (CPI) inflation trajectory faces both upside and downside pressures. RBI expects inflation to rise marginally in FY22 though it expects food inflation to soften. Its 5.2 per cent forecast for the first half of this fiscal was slightly higher than the 5-5.2 per cent estimated in February. For fiscal 2022 as a whole, it expects 5 per cent. On the other hand, the gross domestic product (GDP) forecast was unchanged at 10.5 per cent for this fiscal.

The RBI announced a slew of liquidity infusing measures; prime being government securities acquisition programme (GSAP), under which it will commit upfront a specific amount of open market purchases of G-secs. At the same time, it announced variable reverse repo operations to normalise liquidity at the shorter end of the yield curve. Another key regulatory measure was extension of on-tap TLTRO scheme by six months till end-September.

Fintech gets leg-up; wallet limit doubled to ₹2 L

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 7

The Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday announced a slew of measures to further boost the digital fintech ecosystem. In a major move, payment banks can now hold a maximum end of day balance of Rs 2 lakh per customer from Rs 1 lakh earlier. This will be a relief to shopkeepers who use payment bank wallets to receive payments.

Paytm, Airtel, India Post and Fino Payments Bank are some of the top players in the payments bank segment.

Welcoming the measure, Satish Gupta, MD & CEO of Paytm Payments Bank Ltd, said this will enable the bank to cater to the growing needs of its customers. "Similarly, the increase in the current limit on the outstanding balance in full KYC PPIs (prepaid payment instruments) from Rs 1 lakh to

Rs 2 lakh will incentivise migration to full KYC PPIs, which will further bring financial inclusion across the country."

In another move, now non-bank payment operators can also use RTGS and NEFT systems. The central bank proposed to enable payment system operators like PPIs, card networks, white label ATM operators and trade receivable discounting system (TReDS) platforms regulated by it to take

direct memberships in centralised payment systems (CPS)-RTGS (real-time gross settlement) and NEFT (national electronic fund transfer).

Furthermore, the RBI has also proposed to make interoperability mandatory for full-KYC PPIs and for all payment acceptance infrastructure. Guidelines for adoption of interoperability on a voluntary basis for full-KYC PPIs were issued back in October 2018.

Rupee sees steep fall but bond yields cool

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 7

The rupee plunged to a four-month-low on Wednesday, but the bond market cheered as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) pledged to buy Rs 1 lakh crore of government bonds this quarter to cap borrowing costs.

The rupee fell 1.6 per cent, the biggest fall since August 2019, to close at 74.5650 per dollar. While policy rates were kept unchanged, the RBI announced a G-Sec acquisition programme (GSAP) of Rs 1 lakh crore in Q1FY22, with as much as Rs 25,000 crore of open market operations (OMO) purchase lined up on April 15. According to analysts, this would help cool bond yields and support the government's market borrowing programme. Notably, RBI's net purchases in FY21 were Rs 3.13 lakh crore and this sets the tone for a similar of higher purchases in FY22.

The gesture was well-received by the bond mar-

ket, as the yield on the benchmark 10-year government bond fell by nearly 6 basis points to 6.078 per cent, as soon as the governor's speech ended.

The secondary market G-Sec acquisition programme (G-SAP 1.0) gives indicative calendar of purchase of government securities by the RBI and provides the market sufficient guidance to plan its liquidity management well. It is also expected to help smoothen the government borrowing programme.

"A defined primary liquidity infusion via the bond programme is de-facto a secondary QE of RBI," said Madhavi Arora, economist at Emkay Global Financial Services Ltd. "This will imply massive narrow money growth and primary liquidity which is clearly going to put depreciation pressure on INR."

In his statement, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das, said the central bank is keen to have an orderly movement in the finan-

cial markets and would not want excess volatility to take hold. Among the most important announcements were the extension of the targeted long-term repo operations (TLTRO) scheme till September, 30 from March 31—a big help for 26 sectors allowed to benefit under this scheme.

The RBI announced Rs 50,000 crore liquidity support to all-India financial institutions to lend to productive sectors. This money will go to Nabard (Rs 25,000 crore) which will be used for on-lending to support agriculture and allied activities, the rural non-farm sector and non-banking financial companies-micro finance institutions. Also, Rs 10,000 crore will be extended to National Housing Bank for one year to support the housing sector.

Further, to meet the funding requirements of micro, small and medium enterprises, Sidbi will be sanctioned Rs 15,000 crore for a period of up to one year.

MEIL'S FIRST MAKE IN INDIA OIL RIG BEGINS OPERATION

New Delhi, April 7: Megha Engineering & Infrastructures Ltd (MEIL) on Wednesday said its first indigenously-made oil drilling rig has started operation at the Kalol oil fields in Ahmedabad.

The rig, which became operational on Wednesday, is part of an order worth Rs 6,000 crore for 47 drilling rigs.

MEIL is the first company in the private sector to manufacture and use rigs used in oil and fuel extraction with advanced technology, a company statement said.

As part of the Centre's Make in India programme, MEIL has manufactured these rigs for the first time in the country, it added.

With a capacity of 1500 HP (horse power) these rigs can easily dig oil wells up to 4,000 metres (four kilometres) depth from the ground surface. These rigs have a life span of about 40 years.

In 2019, MEIL received a tender worth Rs 6,000 crore to manufacture 47 drilling rigs.

Dovish stance leads to broad-based buying

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 7

The market gained close to one per cent as banks, auto and tech stocks gained after the RBI announced status quo in interest rates and maintained an accommodative monetary policy stance in view of the challenging times.

The Sensex gained 460.37 points, or 0.94 per cent, closing at 49,661.76 while the Nifty-50 closed 135.55 points, or 0.92 per cent, up at 14,819.05.

The prospect of low interest rate remaining in the near future led to gains for mid-cap and small-cap stocks, with Nifty Mid-cap 50 and Mid-cap 100 indices gaining 1.35 per cent and 1.32 per cent, respectively, while the Nifty Small-cap 100 Index gained 1.71 per cent.

Among the sectoral indices interest rate sensitive Nifty Bank gained 1.51 per cent, as yield of government securities fell sharply. The Nifty Auto gained 1.59 per cent while the Nifty Realty gained 0.9 per cent.

The Nifty PSU Bank index gained 1.95 per cent. The 10-year government bond yield fell to 6.082 per cent and touching 6.059 intra-day.

Both foreign portfolio investors and domestic institutions turned net buyers of equities worth Rs 227.42 and Rs 381.08 crore, respectively.

PLI schemes for solar modules, AC, LED lights okayed



FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

The government on Wednesday approved a production linked incentive (PLI) schemes for boosting domestic manufacturing capacities of solar PV modules and white goods like air conditioners and LED lights, with a combined budgetary outlay of more than Rs 10,700 crore.

The PLI scheme for solar photovoltaic modules has an outlay of Rs 4,500 crore and is aimed at adding 10,000 MW manufacturing capacity of integrated solar PV modules entailing direct investment of Rs 17,200 crore.

This PLI scheme is likely to create direct employment of around 30,000 and indirect employment of 1.2 lakh, according to the government.

Solar energy capacity addition now depends largely upon imported solar PV cells and modules as the domestic manufacturing industry has limited operational capacities of solar PV cells and modules, a government statement said.

The PLI will be disbursed for five years post commissioning of solar PV manufacturing plants, on sales of high efficiency

solar PV modules. The PLI scheme for white goods, approved by the Union Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has an outlay of Rs 6,238 crore.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said the approval of the scheme for ACs and LEDs will give a boost to domestic manufacturing.

The prime objective of the scheme is to make manufacturing in India globally competitive by removing sectoral disabilities, creating economies of scale and ensuring efficiencies.

It is designed to create a complete component ecosystem in India and make India an integral part of the global supply chains. The scheme is expected to attract global investments, generate large-scale employment opportunities and enhance exports substantially.

"The PLI scheme for white goods shall extend an incentive of 4 per cent to 6 per cent on incremental sales of goods manufactured in India for a period of five years to companies engaged in manufacturing of air conditioners and LED lights," another official statement said.

New Intel chip launched



FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

Intel on Wednesday launched new 3rd Gen Intel Xeon Scalable processors, its most advanced, highest performance data centre platform optimised to power the industry's broadest range of workloads.

Code-named "Ice Lake", the 3rd Gen Intel Xeon Scalable processors deliver a significant performance increase compared with the prior generation, with an average 46 per cent improvement on popular data centre workloads.

The processors also add new and enhanced platform capabilities, including Intel SGX for built-in security, and Intel Crypto Acceleration and Intel DL Boost for AI acceleration.

"The future of technology is being shaped by several infections, including the proliferation of the cloud, AI, the rapid adoption of 5G and computing at the edge. As the pace of this digital disruption accelerates, Intel's technology and leadership products are more critical than ever," said Prakash Mallya, VP and MD, sales, marketing and communications Group, Intel India.

In India, early adopters of the new 3rd Gen Intel Xeon Scalable platform include CtrlS, ESDS, Pi Datacenters, Reliance Jio and Wipro Ltd. Additionally, key hardware and software ecosystem players have market-ready solutions to enable customers to efficiently deploy Intel's latest technologies and enhance performance across workloads.

Nurse squeezes extra doses of vaccine with air bubbles

ESSI LEHTO HELSINKI, APRIL 7

Finnish nurse Sari Roos is teaching her colleagues a vaccination technique that enables her to squeeze more doses out of Covid-19 vaccine vials, helping to stretch scarce supplies and ensure more people can be inoculated.

Her air-bubble trick makes it possible to extract an elusive seventh dose from vials of the vaccine from Pfizer—one more than the six approved by Europe's health regulator that can normally only be drawn with a special needle and syringe.

Such "low-dead-space"



shot utensils are in short supply, making Roos' trick all the more valuable as countries seek to protect people against new, more infectious coronavirus strains that are spreading a third wave of infection. Roos' technique, similar to one used in Denmark, begins by drawing some

vaccine liquid and then pushing it back into the bottle to get rid of air in the syringe. She then draws the exact dose and completes it with sterile air from the bottle.

The dose is then injected with minimal waste. "The purpose of the air is to push all the liquid into the patient from the needle and close the injection channel so it won't bleed," Roos told Reuters at Helsinki's Laakso hospital where she works as a training nurse.

Her success has drawn the attention of colleagues at home and abroad who are keen to get more shots from each vial. — Reuters



## SHORT TAKES

## Olympic torch is off Osaka streets

**Tokyo:** The Tokyo Olympic torch relay will not run through the streets of Osaka prefecture next week because of rising Covid-19 cases.

The move is a setback for Tokyo organisers, who began the relay two weeks ago from northeastern Fukushima prefecture with 10,000 runners planning to crisscross Japan over the course of four months. The Olympics open in just over 100 days on July 23. In a last-minute change of plans, organisers said in a statement Wednesday that runners and the torch will be involved in some event in an Osaka city park on the days when the relay was to cross the entire prefecture. That was to be April 13-14. "Given the circumstances, the Osaka prefectural authorities today requested Tokyo 2020 to hold the Osaka segment of the Olympic torch relay in Expo '70 Commemorative Park rather than on public roads," Tokyo organisers said. — *AP*

## Judo team pull out of Oly qualies

**New Delhi:** A 16-member Indian judo team has been forced to withdraw from the ongoing Asia-Oceania Olympic qualifiers in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan after a player tested positive for Coronavirus just before the start of the tournament. The judoka tested positive after landing in Kyrgyzstan. "Yes, one player of the team tested positive upon landing in Bishkek just a before the official weighing on April 5, forcing the entire squad to withdraw as per the guidelines of International Judo Federation," a source in the Judo Federation of India (JFI) said. "The team comprised 12 judokas and four coaches," it added. The Asia-Oceania Championships in Bishkek started on Tuesday and will end on Saturday. Prominent judokas in the team included Shushila Devi (women's 48kg), Jasleen Singh Saini (men's 66kg), Tulika Mann (women's 78kg) and Avtar Singh (men's 100kg). — *PTI*

## Indian archers fully vaccinated

**Pune:** The Olympic-bound Indian archers on Wednesday took their second shots of Covid-19 vaccine, becoming the first fully vaccinated lot of athletes from the country ahead of the Tokyo Games. In an initiative undertaken by the Army Sports Institute, where the national camp for the recurve archers is being held, all the eight senior archers, the coaches and support staff were administered the second shot at the Military Hospital here. The eight archers included Atanu Das, Tarundeep Rai, Pravin Jadhav and B Dhiraj (reserve) in men's and Deepika Kumari, Ankita Bhakat, Komolika Bari and Madhu Vedwan (reserve) in the women's section. "Second and final dose of the vaccine is done. Thank you so much Army Sports Institute for making everything smooth and convenient," Atanu Das captioned his vaccination photo on his Instagram handle. Former world number Deepika Kumari and India's most senior archer Tarundeep Rai also shared their vaccination photographs. — *PTI*

## Hockey team are off to flying start

**Buenos Aires:** The Indian men's hockey team made a positive start to its tour of Argentina, beating the reigning Olympic champions 4-3 in the first practice match here. Nilakanta Sharma (16th minute), Harmanpreet Singh (28th), Rupinder Pal Singh (33rd) and Varun Kumar (47th) were the goal scorers for India late on Tuesday night. Dragflicker Leandro Tolini (35th, 53rd) and Maico Casella (41st) scored for the home team. — *PTI*

## Live on TV

## FOOTBALL

**Europa League Quarterfinals (first legs):** Arsenal vs Slavia Praha from 12:30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1; Granada vs Manchester United from 12:30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2; Ajax vs Roma from 12:30 am (Friday) on Sony Six, HD

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## Royals look to rule

## Will Samson-Sangakkara partnership work for Rajasthan?

**New Delhi, April 7:** A restructured Rajasthan Royals will aim to build a new legacy but a weak Indian contingent and overdependence on foreign recruits could hurt the inaugural edition winners' chance for glory in the upcoming IPL.

RR have made some changes in management as well as the squad ahead of the new season. Sanju Samson replaced Steve Smith, who was released, as skipper while coach Andrew McDonald has also gone with Sri Lankan legend Kumar Sangakkara stepping in as director of cricket.

To strengthen their pace attack RR bought South African all-rounder Chris Morris for a whopping ₹16.25 crore, making him the most expensive buy in the IPL auction history.

However, an injury to Archer ruling him out of at least the first few games, is a massive blow. Here's a SWOT analysis of the side that will take on Punjab Kings in Mumbai on April 12.

## STRENGTH

RR boast of a number of destructive batsmen. Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes are two match-winning players who can trample any opposition while Samson is a minefield of talent.

David Miller and Morris are two other powerful strikers and Liam Livingstone can turn the match on its head. Last season's revelation, all-rounder Rahul Tewatia, has also showcased his ability to whack the ball outside the park.

## WEAKNESS

For Royals, the problem is their weak Indian core



World's fastest sprinter and the 11-time world champion Usain Bolt posted this pic of his in a Royal Challengers Bangalore jersey on Twitter and wrote 'Challengers, just letting you know, I am still the fastest cat around,' while tagging captain Virat Kohli, star batsman AB de Villiers, Puma cricket and the RCB team handle. — *Usain Bolt*

which hasn't been consistent. Samson has rarely performed in five straight games in any of the editions in the past few years. Pacer Jaydev Unadkat, bought for ₹11.5 crore in 2018, has been unable to deliver.

## OPPORTUNITY

Samson's form and consistency have always been a question mark. He has failed to capitalised on the

handful of chances provided to him in T20s. With Suryakumar Yadav and Ishan Kishan doing brilliantly on their T20 debuts, Sanju have the perfect opportunity for him to prove his leadership skills in order to make the Indian team for the World Cup.

## THREAT

With Samson at the helm, his lack of experience in

## NOW, SAMS OF RCB CONTRACTS CORONAVIRUS

**Chennai, April 7:** Royal Challengers Bangalore's Australian allrounder Daniel Sams on Wednesday tested positive for Covid-19 ahead of the IPL starting on April 9 here, but opener Devdutt Padikkal recovered from the dreaded infection to join the side.

According to a statement issued by RCB on its Twitter handle, the 28-year-old allrounder arrived in India on April 3 and had a negative Covid-19 test report at that time. RCB will take on defending champions Mumbai Indians in the tournament-opener on Friday. "His (Sams) report from the 2nd test on 7th April came positive. Sams is currently asymptomatic and he is currently in isolation at a designated medical facility," the RCB said.

"Royal Challengers Bangalore medical team is in constant touch with Daniel Sams and continue to monitor his health and abide by the BCCI protocols," RCB added.

Daniel became the second RCB player to test positive for the infection after left-handed opening batsman Padikkal.

"Devidutt Padikkal, has joined the team on 7th April 2021 with negative reports for Covid-19 as per BCCI protocols. RCB medical team was in constant touch with Devdutt to ensure his safety and well-being," RCB stated in a separate release. — *PTI*

## Hardik opens up on mental health



Hardik Pandya

**Chennai, April 7:** India and Mumbai Indians hard-hitting all-rounder Hardik Pandya on Wednesday said he realised the importance of mental health while playing international cricket and credited his family for keeping him in the "right space".

"When I play international cricket, mentally I realized, because the kind of pressure that came into your life. Obviously, life change for us, but as an individual, you need to cope with all the things," Hardik said in a video posted by Mumbai Indians on its official Twitter handle.

"So for me I realised that mental health is also important, where my family played a big role to make sure that I am in right space," he added.

The focus on mental health has grown in the last year with the Covid-19 pandemic forcing players to stay in bio-bubbles,

where their life is restricted to hotels and stadiums.

The 27-year-old will turn up for Mumbai Indians in the lung-opener of the IPL when the defending champions take on Royal Challengers Bangalore on Friday here.

"Just making sure that in the day, you are doing some activity which is adding to your fitness, that's very important. And if you look after small things, it's going to be grateful that it is going to look after your body," he said. — *PTI*



Mahendra Singh Dhoni (left) and T. Natarajan in this file photo.

## MS ADVICE HELPED: NATARAJAN

**New Delhi, April 7:** Left-arm yorker specialist T. Natarajan says former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni's advice to bowl slow bouncers and cutters during his break-out IPL season last year helped him get better at his craft.

The 30-year-old Natarajan, who bowled a maximum 71 yorkers among all pacers in the last IPL, dismissed big names such as Dhoni and AB de Villiers during the

season. "Speaking to somebody like Dhoni itself is a big thing. He spoke to me about fitness and encouraged me, saying that I will keep getting better with experience. He said, use slow bouncers, cutters, and variations like that. It has been useful for me," Natarajan was quoted as saying by *ESPNCricinfo*.

Before that, Dhoni was dismissed by the SRH pacer, who also shone during India's tour of

Australia following a surprise call-up to the national team.

Recalling that wicket, he said, "I pitched one in the slot and he hit me for a big six — 102 metres or something. The next ball I got his wicket (and didn't celebrate) — I was just thinking about that previous ball. After coming back to the dressing room, though, I was happy after finishing the match, I also had a chat with him." — *PTI*

## Vinicius double sinks Liverpool

**Madrid, April 7:** Vinicius Junior scored twice as Real Madrid made Liverpool pay for more defensive errors on Tuesday, a 3-1 victory putting them in sight of the Champions League semifinals.

Vinicius and Marco Asensio both profited in the first half after darting behind Liverpool's makeshift back-line before a throw-in gave Vinicius a simple finish in the second.

Mohamed Salah's strike shortly after the interval briefly made it a contest at Valdebebas, with an away goal certainly a significant consolation for Liverpool to take into the second leg at Anfield next week.

But without fans and with a miserable recent record at home, Jurgen Klopp will know his side have it all to do to avoid his team's season becoming solely about scraping into the Premier League's top four.

Except for two spells after half-time and at the finish, when their opponents were holding on to what they had, Liverpool were overpowered by Real Madrid, whose only disappointment might be missing out on a clearer margin ahead of the return in eight days' time.

Before then, they go up against Barcelona on Saturday and this result, their fifth consecutive victory, should be another huge boost to morale going into what will be a crucial fixture in La Liga's title race. Madrid were without Sergio Ramos, who

## THE RESULTS (QUARTERFINALS FIRST LEGS)

<b>Real Madrid</b> (Vinicius Junior 27, 65, Asensio 36)	<b>3</b>
<b>Liverpool</b> (Salah 51)	<b>1</b>
<b>Manchester City</b> (De Bruyne 19, Foden 90)	<b>2</b>
<b>Borussia Dortmund</b> (Reus 84)	<b>1</b>

throughout was bellowing at his team from the stands, while Raphael Varane testing positive for Covid-19 on Tuesday morning meant both sides were fielding patched-up back fours.

## FODEN DENTS DORTMUND

Pep Guardiola said Manchester City "felt the pressure" of expectancy in the Champions League as they needed Phil Foden's 90th minute winner to take a slender 2-1 lead from the first leg of their quarterfinal tie against Borussia Dortmund on Tuesday.

Haaland, who is being touted as a potential replacement for Sergio Aguero at City next season, didn't have the best of auditions to live up to a valuation far exceeding \$100 million. European football's hottest young talent struggled to make an impact, beyond setting up an equaliser on the turn for captain Marco Reus to cancel out Kevin De Bruyne's first-half strike.

Both the sides will meet again in Germany on April 14. — *AFP*



Liverpool's Nathaniel Phillips challenges Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior (right) during their UEFA Champions League first leg quarterfinal match at the Alfredo di Stefano stadium in Valdebebas in the outskirts of Madrid on Tuesday. Real Madrid won 3-1. — *AFP*

## EX-FOOTBALLER SHYAM TESTS +VE, IN HOSPITAL

**Kolkata, April 7:** Legendary Indian forward and chairman of the All India Football Federation's technical committee Shyam Thapa has tested positive for Covid-19 and has been hospitalised.

The 73-year-old got himself admitted to a private hospital here on Tuesday evening after his test report came positive on Monday.

"I was feeling tasteless and there was a loss of appetite. My test report came positive and as a precautionary measure I got myself admitted. Now, I'm feeling stable and much better," Thapa, who helped India bag a bronze medal in the Merdeka Tournament and the Bangkok Asian Games in 1970, said.

Thapa was administered the first shot of Covid-19 vaccine on March 20.

"The second shot was due yesterday but now it has been postponed," he added.

Famous for his bicycle kick and back volleys, Thapa made his name for East Bengal in the mid 1960s and early 70s before joining Mohun Bagan in 1977 during an illustrious career. — *PTI*

## 24 athletes Covid +ve in SAI Bhopal

**New Delhi, April 7:** As many as 24 sportspersons and 12 support staff members have tested positive for the Coronavirus at the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) Bhopal centre but none of the athletes are Olympics-bound.

According to SAI, the positive cases came to light during two rounds of precautionary tests on April 3 and 6. The SAI Bhopal Center doesn't house any Olympic probable.

"In the two rounds of testing, a total of 36 people have tested positive for Covid, out of whom 24 are athletes, and the other 12 who are staff of NCOE (National Centre of Excellence)," a SAI official said.

"None of the athletes who have tested positive are Olympic-bound. Some of the athletes who tested positive had returned from

wushu and judo competitions," the official added.

In order to contain the spread of the virus, the athletes, who have tested positive, have been shifted to a hospital as a precautionary measure.

"None of the athletes are critical."

The SAI had further instructed all the NCOEs to strictly follow its existing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with stress on conducting regular precautionary tests.

On March 31, 30 sportspersons and support staff across disciplines were found to be Covid-19 positive after 741 precautionary tests were conducted at the National Centres of Excellence in Patiala and Bengaluru. However, the positive results in both the centres did not include any Tokyo Olympic-bound athlete. — *PTI*