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OTHER STORIES

DMK MP Wilson is member of panel of privileges

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 27

DMK MP and senior advocate P.Wilson has been nominated as a member of the committee of privileges by the Rajya Sabha. According to a communication sent by Surendra Kumar Tripathi, Joint Secretary, Rajya Sabha Secretariat, to DMK MP P.Wilson. "under sub-rule (1) of rule 192 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Rajya Sabha, the Chairman, Rajya Sabha, has been pleased to nominate you (P.Wilson) to the Committee of Privileges, with effect from April 20, 2021".

The Committee of Privileges now consists of Harivansh (Chairman), and Dr.Anil Jain, Kumar Ketkar, Sujeet Kumar, Saroj Pandey, G.V.L.Narasimha Rao, Dr.Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Rakesh Sinha, Dr.Sudhanshu Trivedi and P.Wilson.

'1.2L tests done daily, 20K samples in Chennai alone'

FROM P1
Testing had not been reduced in the state, where 1,20,000 tests were done every day and in Chennai alone 20,000 samples were collected, he said.

On the wastage of vaccine, he said that it had stopped and at present the wastage was zero per cent. Initially the wastage happened because not many people turned up for vaccination and the last two or three doses in a vial were going waste as there were no takers.

In a bid to improve the vaccination process in the state, the Rotary Club of Madras handed over a Rs 1 crore worth end-to-end Covid cold chain maintenance equipment to Mr Radhakrishnan at a function at the Government multi-specialty hospital at the Omandurar Estate.

The donated equipment included two 14 feet long lorries capable of carrying 4500 litres of vaccine to the vaccination centres, two eight feet long lorries that can carry 2000 litres of vaccine and other refrigerating equipment that would help storing the vaccine.

Speaking on the reported scarcity of Covid-19 drugs, Mr Radhakrishnan said that the state had a stock of 51,000 Remdesivir injections and it was now being sold through the Kilpauk Medical College Hospital.

The Chief Minister had asked the Centre for supply of more drugs to the state and that they would be made available all over the state soon, he said.

The PWD, which has been entrusted with the job of setting up extra hospital beds, said 2,895 of the beds would be in Chennai - 550 in Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital, 500 in Stanley Medical College Hospital, 225 at the Egmore Women and Children's Hospital, 200 at the King's Institute and 1420 in 11 hospitals around Chennai. In a press release the PWD said that in the first wave of Coronavirus in 2020, the department was entrusted with the job of setting up 27,806 beds, including ICU beds, in 138 hospitals of various kinds like government medical college hospitals, general hospitals, district hospitals, taluk hospitals and Public Health Centres at a cost of ₹282.51 crore.



Health secretary Dr J. Radhakrishnan inspects and interacts with Covid patients at Communicable Diseases Hospital (CDH) in Tondiarpet on Tuesday. — DC

Implementing quarantine norms for family contacts a tough task

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 27

At a time when the authorities push for the home quarantine facility for asymptomatic cases to tide over the hospital bed shortage, implementing the quarantine norms in Covid-19-infected families remains a challenge as the family contacts move around violating the rules.

As part of the quarantine norms, the households should mandatorily keep themselves indoors wearing a mask and maintaining social distancing till the isolation period of the affected patient in the house ends. However, the authorities for the last few days have got many complaints from the residents about the household contacts of Covid-19 patients who flout quarantine norms.

Following this, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) on Monday issued a notice that says: "When a Covid-19 patient is advised home quarantine, all household contacts need to mandatorily quarantine themselves. Many people are now violating norms and moving around. In such an occurrence, the patient will be moved out of the house and sent to Covid

"Free movement of household contacts of Covid-19 patients can't be allowed till the quarantine period ends considering the present situation. The family members of home-isolation patients should compulsorily wear a mask and maintain social distancing inside the house

Care Centres and the norm-breaker will be put under institutional quarantine".

Health secretary J. Radhakrishnan, stressing the need of implementing norms strictly, said the GCC authorities were asked to keep a check on the movement of people in containment zones and members of Covid-19-infected residences with the help of Focus volunteers. "Free movement of household contacts of Covid-19 patients can't be allowed till the quarantine period ends considering the present situation. The family members of home-isolation patients should compulsorily wear a mask and maintain social distancing inside the house", he said.

Meanwhile, the GCC officials said that strict action would be taken against people who violate the quarantine norms

in the Covid19-infected families. The volunteers have been asked to keep a tight vigil on residents. "We have been pasting notices that describe quarantine norms at the doors of every Covid19-infected house. It could help neighbours as well as other visitors including sanitary workers, postman and food delivery people to identify the Covid19-affected houses. Local people can also help the volunteers if they find anybody in the infected house flout the rules," said officials.

Mahalakshmi, a city resident, said the authorities should inform all residents in the flat complex if somebody there is tested positive. No proper information is given to other flatmates. Proper information will help citizens to be cautious, she said.

B.S. Bhaskaran, a Nanganallur resident, said it is important to paste posters in front of Covid-19-infected houses. "Otherwise, outsiders like the postman, courier and sanitation workers who come regularly will come into contact with households. In our area despite being Covid19-infected, the house was left without any identification notice," he said.

Nilgiris district tops in number of vaccinations, says collector

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, APRIL 27

The collector of Nilgiris, J. Innocent Divya, said the district topped the state in administering the Covid-19 vaccine to those in the age group of 45 years and above.

Stating this, the Collector said that nearly 47 per cent of the population in the said age group here has been vaccinated till date, making the Nilgiris top the list in vaccination drive. She added that only very few

Stating this, the Collector said that nearly 47 per cent of the populace in the said age group here has been vaccinated till date, making the Nilgiris top the list in vaccination drive. She added that only very few persons who were vaccinated complained of mild Covid-19 symptoms.

Among those who had taken the first dose of the vaccine, so far only 10 persons are reported to have shown mild symptoms, while those who

have taken both the vaccine doses had no complaints so far, she said.

However, the district administration here is well prepared to handle the situation. Covid care centres are ready in the taluk-level to treat the patients.

Centre urged to allow NLC make medical oxygen

A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 27

In view of the acute oxygen shortage in the country due to the surging Covid-19 cases, the environmental activists of the Tamizhaga Vazhuvirimai Katchi (TVK) have demanded the central government to grant permission to the NLC India Ltd in Neyveli to start medical oxygen producing units.

Considering the calamity, the Supreme Court on Tuesday allowed Vedanta to operate the oxygen production unit at its Sterlite copper plant in Thoothukudi on a stand-alone basis.

There were also demands to tap the BHEL Trichy unit for oxygen

TVK leader T Velmurugan said the NLCIL had helped the central and state governments during crises in the past. It provided relief and rescue operations during natural disasters in the coastal district and other parts of the country

production. BHEL has three oxygen plants, with a combined capacity of 520 metric tonnes per day.

TVK leader T Velmurugan said the NLCIL had helped the central and state governments during crises in the past. It provided relief and rescue operations during natural disasters in the coastal district and other

parts of the country. When Chennai faced severe drinking water crisis in 2001, NLCIL sent water to the capital residents through railway wagons. Its officials were also involved in the tsunami rescue and rehabilitation activities in the state in 2004.

On the same line, the NLCIL must set up medical oxygen plants for the benefit of Covid-affected people. It has manpower, expertise and space for setting up oxygen plants. The central and state governments must give permission to the NLCIL to produce medical oxygen immediately, Velmurugan added.

Similarly, Sundarrajan

Poovulagin Nanbargal, an environmental organisation, has demanded the central government to grant permission to NLC India Ltd to start medical oxygen plants on a war-footing to meet the growing demands.

Most of the thermal plants produce hydrogen for cooling the generators and let out oxygen that comes out as a by-product. NLCIL has many power, mining and solar plants in various parts of the country. Hence, the government must grant permission to NLCIL to start oxygen plants at their sites in Neyveli in Cuddalore, Thoothukudi and other parts of the country enabling easy access of oxygen to the needy states.

VIT hostel block turns Covid care centre

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 27

The hostel block of Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT), Chennai, has been converted into a 875-bed Covid care centre.

A. John Louis, Chengalpattu district collector, Dr. Priya Raj, deputy director of health and Raveendran, revenue divisional officer, had visited the site on April 13 to examine the facilities. A subsequent meeting with Dr Subramani C, block medical officer; Dana-balan C, block health supervisor was also conducted on Monday.

Adequate facilities including uninterrupted power and water supply, lift service, PA system and other electrical maintenance will be provided round the clock.

Last year, during the first wave of Covid-19, VIT- Chennai had given the hostel block as a 'quarantine facility centre'. Nearly 375 rooms were allotted for accommodating more than 38,453 patients.

Remdesivir counter



Large number of people wait to buy Remdesivir (injection) at a sale counter in government Kilpauk medical college hospital put up by Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation for patients undergoing treatment for Covid-19 on Tuesday. — DC

No NREGA work for Covid vulnerable persons

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 27

District Collectors have been asked not to provide work for people above 55 years, those having ailments and those suffering from cold, cough, breathing problems and even mild fever under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

People having symptoms of Covid-19 should be referred to testing centres and appropriate action should be taken to provide them treatment if found to be positive, the Commissioner of Rural

Development and Panchayat Raj said in his instructions to the Collectors. Under the MGNREGA, ₹165 crore to ₹180 crore was being pumped in every week to keep the

rural economy stable by providing jobs to the people even in the times of lockdown due to the spread of Covid-19, the communication said.

However, the life, safety, security and well-being of the MGNREGA workers and their families was of paramount importance and hence they were barred from being engaged in big groups, taken in big groups to the work spots, sharing food, snacks and water.

Proper social distancing should be maintained at the work sites and all of them above the age of 45 should be vaccinated, the instructions said.

Pondy govt underscores need for vaccination of eligible persons

Puducherry, April 27:

The Puducherry government has stressed the need for vaccinating all eligible people in the union territory to protect them against Covid-19.

"Vaccination is the immediate necessity and focused attention should be paid on vaccination with the cooperation of the private enterprises in the Union Territory," a release from office of Lt Governor highlighting the decisions taken at a consultative meeting Monday night pointed out.

As many as 10 lakh people were eligible for the vaccination and once this is accomplished, Puducherry would emerge as a 'Covid free State' and would set an example for the country as a whole, it said.

The meeting chaired by Tamilisai Soundararajan also called upon private enterprises and institutions to contribute liberally for effective steps to control the spread of the scourge here under corporate social responsibility scheme.

It also appealed to managements of the industri-

"Vaccination is the immediate necessity and focused attention should be paid on vaccination with the cooperation of the private enterprises in the Union Territory," a release from office of Lt Governor highlighting the decisions taken at a consultative meeting Monday night pointed out

al establishments and undertakings to initiate immediate steps to inculcate the workers in their institutions.

Committees comprising representatives of resident welfare associations, voluntary organisations and social outfits should be formed to take care of those in home isolation and to supply vegetables and food to the pandemic-stricken people in home quarantines.

Privately managed medical colleges and their hospitals should be persuaded to strengthen the beds and each of the seven colleges should add 10 more beds in the wards to accommodate the Covid hit patients.

The meeting also decided that posting of doctors, nurses and technical personnel should be taken up

as expeditiously as possible.

Fishermen remaining jobless because of the ban on fishing in the Bay of Bengal now in force would be provided relief.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner of Excise T Sudhakar said an order was issued directing all liquor, arrack and toddy shops to shut business till midnight of April 30 in the Union Territory in view of the unprecedented rise in number of fresh cases of Covid 19.

The territorial government has brought into force a night curfew from Monday and it would be in place from 10 pm to 5 am the next day till April 30.

The government has tightened restrictions and has permitted only essential services to function. — PTI

Mason kin get ₹27 lakh as compensation

J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 27

Coming to the rescue of a five member family, who lost their sole breadwinner, a mason, who died due to collapse of a sunshade which was fixed on the top of the public toilet, while he was taking shelter under the shade due to heavy rain on May 12, 2018, at Palladam in Tiruppur district, the Madras high court has awarded a compensation of Rs 27 lakh to be paid by the Palladam municipality within eight weeks.

A division bench comprising Justices N.Kirubakaran and T.V.Thamilselvi awarded the compensation while disposing of a petition filed by A.Saraswathy, wife of the deceased.

The bench said without rain, there cannot be life in the world. However, rain is the cause for taking away a precious life in this case. On the fateful night on May 12, 2018, as there was heavy rain, the petitioner's husband, one Ashok Kumar, a mason, aged about 41 years,

Minor rape and death: HC commutes death sentence of convict to life

Chennai, April 27: The Madras high court has reduced the death sentence awarded by a lower court to life term in a sensational rape and murder of a nine-year-old girl in Coimbatore in 2019, which sent shock waves in Tamil Nadu. "We are satisfied that this case does not come within the category of rarest of rare cases by applying the principles laid down by the Supreme Court," the division bench, comprising Justices P N Prakash and V Sivagnanam said and commuted the death sentence of Santosh Kumar on Monday.

The bench was disposing of a referred trial by the Thudialur police, seeking to confirm the sentence and a criminal appeal from the

accused, challenging the December 27, 2019 order of the sessions court, Special Court for the exclusive trial of cases under the Pocco Act in Coimbatore.

The bench said "it has not been demonstrated to us that the appellant (Santhosh Kumar) was addicted to crime and that he is a menace to society, thereby ruling out any possibility of reformation."

"In the facts of this case, we are unable to persuade ourselves to hold that a sentence lesser than the death penalty is completely foreclosed.

As life imprisonment is the rule and death sentence is the exception, the sentence of death awarded by the trial Court is commuted

to imprisonment for life with the rider that the appellant will not be entitled to any statutory remission or commutation until he has completed 25 years of actual imprisonment," the bench ruled.

"We are entitled to say so in law in the light of the judgment of the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court...", the judges said.

The bench confirmed the conviction of the appellant under Section 302 IPC, but, modified the same to one of imprisonment for life with the rider.

The appellant is also liable to pay the fine of Rs 1 lakh, in default thereof, to undergo simple imprisonment for one more year, the judges added.

negligence on the part of the Palladam municipality in maintaining the toilet building, the building had collapsed, taking away the life of the petitioner's husband and therefore, the peti-

took cover under the sunshade of a toilet building in Palladam bus stand maintained by the Palladam municipality. Due to heavy downpour, the roof of the toilet collapsed crushing

the petitioner's husband to death and injuring another person. In this regard, an FIR was registered on May13, 2018. Petitioner's counsel M. Purushothaman contended that because of

SHORT TAKES

VAJAPYEE'S NIECE KARUNA DIES OF COVID-19

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
RAIPUR, APRIL 27

Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's niece Karuna Shukla who played a key role in dethroning Raman Singh government in the 2018 Assembly elections, died of Covid-19 in a private hospital here early on Tuesday morning. She was 70 and is survived by her husband, daughter and son. The senior Congress leader was admitted to the Ramakrishna Hospital in Raipur last week when she tested positive and succumbed to the virus early on Tuesday morning, her family members said. Her last rites were performed in Baloda Bazar in Chhattisgarh.

Late Shukla had begun her political career in BJP and was elected to the Madhya Pradesh Assembly 1993 and to the Lok Sabha from Janjgir in Chhattisgarh in 2004 as BJP candidate. She, however, had fallen out with former chief minister and BJP national vice-president Raman Singh and snapped her 32-year-long ties with BJP in 2014. She later joined Congress.

MAHA MIN: NOT ENOUGH SUPPLY TO GIVE SHOT TO ALL

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, APRIL 27

Citing shortage of Covid vaccines, Maharashtra has raised a question mark over the implementation of vaccination drive for people above 18 years of age. Maharashtra home minister Rajesh Tope has expressed inability to start the vaccination from May 1 if sufficient doses are not provided.

Amid a massive Covid surge in the country, the Centre has allowed vaccination for all 18-plus citizens from May 1. Earlier the inoculation was restricted only for people above 45 years and frontline workers.

According to Tope, Maharashtra has 5.71 crore people in the age group of 18-44 years and, for their two-dose vaccine and taking wastage into account, 12 crore doses will be needed.

"But if we don't get vaccines, how will we start vaccination from May 1? This is not just our situation, this is a situation every state in India is facing," he said on Tuesday.

Explain vax pricing, plan, SC tells Centre

FROM PG1

Modality to be put in place to ensure that shortage and deficit would be looked into. Centre to clarify basis and rationale for pricing of vaccine."

While asking the Centre to inform it about the requirement of oxygen, its availability, steps to augment its production and distribution, the Supreme Court reiterated that it did not intend to stop different high courts from taking up Covid-related matters and that it will only concentrate on eliminating systemic problems which require nationwide coordination.

The bench, headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, said it was not supplanting the high courts in dealing with the Covid crisis but would only play a complementary role and could not be a silent spectator at this time.

"There are certain national issues to be dealt with by the Supreme Court. At a time of national crisis, the Supreme Court cannot be a silent spectator. We are not preventing the high courts from hearing. The Supreme Court

intends to play a complementary role," the court said, setting to rest any misgivings that it intended to transfer to itself Covid-related matters being heard by the high courts.

The clarification came during the hearing on the "health emergency" arising from the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The court had taken suo motu cognisance of the worsening Covid-19 situation and gaps in its management, including the shortage of oxygen, supply of medicine and mode and manner of vaccination.

In the course of the first hearing on April 22, by a bench headed by then Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde (later retired), a "perception" was created that the Supreme Court was intending to transfer to itself Covid-related matters being dealt by the Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Allahabad, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Sikkim high courts.

Following a strong negative reaction by a section of senior lawyers, the court had on April 23 clarified it did not intend to

interfere with the Covid matters being dealt with by the high courts.

Leaving nothing to doubt that it was dealing with the larger issue of Covid management at the national level, the court reiterated: "It is necessary for us to clarify what is the purpose of issuing notice. The object of these proceedings is not to take over what the high courts are monitoring. The high courts have a valuable role. They are in a better position to monitor."

Having clarified the scope of the hearing, the Supreme Court directed the Centre to place before it by Thursday details about the supply of oxygen, the projected needs of states, the methodology adopted over the states' requirement, the enhancement of critical medical requirements such as beds, the steps to ensure availability of essential drugs like Remdesivir and Favipirivir, the projected vaccine requirements and vaccine prices. Directing the Centre to file the affidavit with the information sought by it, the court said it will hold a further hearing on the matter on Friday.



Bodies lined up for cremation at Subhash Nagar Crematorium for the last rites in New Delhi on Tuesday. Under the high tin roof, 50 funeral pyres burned fiercely on Tuesday, the hot air filled with smoke, fine ash and muted sobs of shell-shocked families.

— PTI

As toll spirals, corpses wait in 20-hr queues for last rites in Delhi

New Delhi, April 27: The high tin roof, 50 funeral pyres burned fiercely on Tuesday, the hot air filled with smoke, fine ash and muted sobs of shell-shocked families.

Nearby, lying unattended on the floor, and in scores of parked vehicles, more corpses awaited their turn, which relatives were told would come 16 to 20 hours later.

Shaking Delhi's spirit and soul, an unimaginable tragedy is unfolding at New Delhi's crematoriums struggling to cope with the deluge of the dead arriving at frightening pace.

"I have not seen such a

bad situation ever before in my life. People are moving with the dead bodies of their loved ones from pillar to post... almost all Delhi crematoriums are flooded with dead bodies," Vineeta Massey, the owner of Massey Funerals said.

By official count, 3,601 people have died this month, of them 2,267 in the last seven days alone in the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic which is terrorising and tormenting the city. In all of February, the death toll was 57, and in March 117.

As if the trauma of losing a loved one to the virus so suddenly is not enough, there is more

grief in store for relatives who are not even able to give them a proper send-off.

They arrive at crematoriums with bodies, only to be turned away. They drive to another facility, and yet another, traversing the city with the mortal remains in personal cars or ambulances, desperately seeking a graceful exit for their father, mother, son or daughter from the material world.

The trauma is no less for the relatives of those who died of non-Covid causes but are being swept up in the collective national tragedy driven by the pandemic.

Aman Arora, a young entrepreneur from West Delhi's Ashok Nagar, lost his father M.L. Arora to a heart attack on Monday afternoon. "We rushed him to many private hospitals when he started feeling discomfort in his chest but he was not even checked by the medical staff there. They demanded that we produce a Covid-negative report. He eventually passed away," said Aman.

On Monday afternoon, Aman was told by the staff in west Delhi's Subhash Nagar crematorium to wait until Tuesday morning to perform the last rites.

Bodies of 22 victims stuffed in one ambulance

Medical college's Dean cites lack of ambulances, managing transportation of patients as reason

Aurangabad, April 27: The bodies of 22 Covid-19 victims were stuffed in one ambulance while being taken to a crematorium at Beed in Maharashtra, with the district administration citing lack of medical transport vehicles as the reason for it.

The incident took place on Sunday when the bodies, kept in the mortuary of the Swami Ramanand Teerth Rural Government Medical College at Ambajogai in Beed, were being transported for the last rites.

"This happened because the hospital administration does not have enough ambulances," said the medical college's Dean, Dr Shivaji Sukre.

He said they had five ambulances during the first wave of Covid-19 last year. Out of them, three

were later withdrawn and the hospital was now managing the transportation of Covid-19 patients in two ambulances.

"Sometimes, it takes time to trace the relatives of a dead patient. The bodies from the Covid-19 centre at Lokhandi Sawargaon village are also sent to our facility as they don't have a cold storage," the official said. He said they wrote to the district administration on March 17 to provide them three more ambulances.

"To avoid the chaos, we have also written to the Ambajogai Municipal Council to conduct the last rites of the victims between 8 am and 10 pm and the bodies will be sent to the crematoriums from the hospital ward itself," he said.

Meanwhile, BJP MLC

Suresh Dhas alleged that the hospital and the local civic body were passing the blame on each other.

Talking to a TV channel, the legislator from Ashti in Beed said, "There is no control left and the government is not acting swiftly. The state administration has permitted ambulances to be provided from the MLA fund, but the technical sanction for it is given from Mumbai."

Ambajogai Municipal Council's chief officer Ashok Sabale said it was the responsibility of the medical college to transport the bodies to the crematorium on Mandwa road (designated for the last rites of Covid-19 victims).

"Our teams are there at the crematorium for conducting the last rites. A meeting was held on Mo-

nday over the issue during which the medical college dean said they do not have enough ambulances. If it is the case, didn't they have any review mechanism? Why didn't they act on it?" Sabale asked.

Municipal council president Rajkishor alias Papa Modi also expressed concern over the incident and said the same day, eight more bodies were transported in another ambulance for cremation.

"We are going to provide one ambulance to the medical college and another two will be made available from the district administration," he said.

The official said the local medical infrastructure is "stressed" as critical patients from nearby districts are also brought to Ambajogai.

— PTI

Indian strain of virus not more lethal: Experts

New Delhi, April 27: The 'Indian strain' of the coronavirus carries higher transmissibility similar to the UK variant, but there is little evidence so far of it being more lethal than the original virus, experts have said.

The B.1.617 variant of SARS-CoV2, also being called a "double mutant" or the "Indian strain", has been found prevalent largely in Maharashtra and Delhi that have been severely hit by a devastating second wave of the pandemic.

● **"Indian strain", has been found prevalent largely in Maharashtra and Delhi**

Agrawal, the Director of the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB), told PTI, "As far as we know, neither the UK variant nor this one (B.1.617) is associated with increased severity of illness or death. The UK strain is proven to have higher transmissibility

and B.1.617 may have increased transmissibility."

In many cities in Maharashtra -- the worst-hit state in the country -- the B.1.617 variant was found in more than 50 per cent of samples on which genome sequencing was conducted, while the proportion of the UK variant was 28 per cent in the second week of March, Sajeet Singh, the Director of the National Centre for Disease Control, had said in a webinar on genome sequencing last week.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES

TANKER SPILLS OIL OFF CHINESE PORT AFTER COLLISION

Beijing, April 27: A tanker spilled oil into the sea off one of China's busiest ports Tuesday after a collision with another vessel, the government and a ship tracking company reported.

The A Symphony collided early Tuesday with a cargo vessel, the Sea Justice, while approaching Qingdao, according to MarineTraffic.com. It was anchored outside Qingdao, southeast of Beijing, the Maritime Safety Administration said. Other ships were told to stay at least 10 nautical miles (18.5 kilometers) away, but the agency gave no details of damage or how

KABUL BUS CRASH KILLS 7, INJURES 70: OFFICIAL

Kabul, April 27: Two buses crashed head-on near Kabul, killing at least seven people and injuring more than 70, an Afghan official said Tuesday.

The traffic accident took place on Monday night, on a highway linking the Afghan capital and southern Kandahar province, according to Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian. The buses were going in opposite directions but the cause of the accident was not immediately known, Arian added. He said the injured were transferred to nearest hospitals for treatment.

40 US CEOs form global task force for India

Commit to transport 20,000 oxygen concentrators to India to help the nation fight against Covid-19

China: South Asian FMs meet on Covid-19 'open' for India

Beijing, April 27: China, which is hosting a meeting of Foreign Ministers of some South Asian countries to deal with the Covid-19 situation, said on Tuesday that the virtual conference is open to all countries in the region, including India.

Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are invited to the virtual Foreign Ministerial level meeting being hosted on Tuesday by Chinese

issue is around oxygen and its concentrators, Renjen said they have commitments to get 20,000 oxygen concentrators to India in the next few weeks.

The first 1,000 will arrive in the middle of this week, he said, adding that by May 5, they expect another 11,000 oxygen concentrators to reach the country.

"Our goal is to get 25,000, and maybe even a number higher than that," he added.

The second issue is to look at oxygen cylinders with 10-litre and 45-litre capacity and to get other supplies like monitoring kits, Renjen said.

— PTI

● **THE MEETING** is part of China's cooperation with South Asian countries to fight the Covid pandemic.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi. India, Maldives and Bhutan are conspicuously absent from the meeting. Asked why India has not been invited to the meeting, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing that "China follows the spirit of openness and inclusive-

ness". "This meeting is open to South Asian countries, including India. We welcome the participation of all countries," he said.

This meeting is part of China's cooperation with South Asian countries and regional and international cooperation to fight the Coronavirus pandemic, he said. "We follow an open attitude and we are open for the participation of other South Asian countries," Wang said.

— PTI

RUSSIA CLAIMS BRAZIL REFUSAL TO IMPORT SPUTNIK V JAB 'POLITICAL'

Moscow, April 27: The developers of Russia's Sputnik V Coronavirus vaccine on Tuesday criticised Brazil's refusal to import the jab as politically motivated.

Brazilian health regulator Anvisa on Monday denied requests from several states to receive batches of Sputnik V, saying it did not have the data needed to verify the jab's safety and efficacy.

"Anvisa's delays in approving Sputnik V are unfortunately of a political

nature and have nothing to do with access to information or science," the official Sputnik V Twitter account said.

It pointed to a recent US government report that said Washington had tried to persuade Brazil not to use Sputnik. "The US Department of Health, in its 2020 annual report several months ago, publicly stated that the US health attaché 'persuaded Brazil to reject the Russian vaccine against Covid-19,'" the account added.

AUSTRALIA

Oz suspends direct flights from India

Melbourne, April 27: Australia on Tuesday suspended all direct passenger flights from India with immediate effect until May 15 due to the "very significant" spike in Covid-19 cases, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced.

Morrison, announcing the temporary border closure with India, also launched an immediate support package for the country in its fight against the ongoing Coronavirus crisis. Addressing a press briefing after convening a Cabinet's national security committee meeting, he said that the ban on arrivals from India would be reviewed before May 15.

"Today we agreed, in addition to the measures that I announced after the last National Cabinet meeting, to pause direct passenger flights between India and Australia until the 15th of May," he said. "We recognise that this has been a very significant outbreak in India," Morrison said.

The latest move would affect direct flights into

Sydney and two repatriation flights scheduled to arrive in Darwin. The move could also affect thousands of people, including Australian cricketers currently playing in the Indian Premier League in India.

All indirect flights coming from India via Singapore, Doha, Dubai and Kuala Lumpur have also been paused by their respective governments. Giving details of the relief package, Prime Minister Morrison said that Australia will send a range of goods to India to help as it struggles with a critical shortage of medical supplies.

Australia will send 500 ventilators, as well as 1 million surgical masks, 500,000 protective and surgical masks, goggles and face shields. "We're standing with those Australians in India and recognising those serious difficulties they face. I stress this is an initial package, there'll be more to follow," Morrison said.

— PTI

BELGIUM

BELGIUM BANS ARRIVALS FROM INDIA, BRAZIL, SOUTH AFRICA

Brussels, April 27: Belgium on Tuesday became the latest territory to ban travel from India, Brazil and South Africa, major countries hit by fast-spreading Coronavirus variants.

"Passenger travel by air, train, boat, and bus, including transit traffic, from India, Brazil and South Africa to Belgium will be banned," Prime Minister Alexander de Croo announced in a statement.

"People with Belgian nationality and people who have their main residence in Belgium can return from India, Brazil, and South Africa to Belgium. They are strongly advised not to travel to these countries."

There will be some exceptions to the ban for essential travel by some transport workers and diplomats, but otherwise the ban will be strictly enforced.

— AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

28 APRIL 2021

EC failed in duty, sharp rebuke by HC welcome

The decision of the Election Commission of India to ban victory processions once the results in the elections to the legislative assemblies of four states and a Union territory are announced justifies the sharp criticism of the Madras high court on the role of the constitutional body in triggering a second wave of pandemic Covid-19 in India. The commission's decision to allow only two persons to accompany the winning candidate to receive the certificate of election from the returning officer also goes with the spirit of the observations and the order of the court which had asked the commission to draw up a programme without which it would be inclined to stop the counting scheduled for May 2.

A bench of the court, comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy, while hearing a petition seeking a direction for adherence to a strict protocol on the day of counting, singularly held the commission responsible for the second wave and went to the extent of suggesting that its officials be booked for murder. The court's rebuke of the panel, which stood as a mute spectator of the mammoth rallies which lakhs of people attended in utter disregard of Covid-appropriate protocols, will be welcomed by the people who in their lakhs fall sick every day. The court did not mince its words when it asked the commission whether its members were on a different planet when these rallies were taking place. It also reminded the poll panel of the fact that the fruits of democracy could be enjoyed by citizens only if they are alive. Or, in other words, elections are not for elections' sake, but for the people's sake. The Calcutta high court had also made similar remarks last week, after observing that the commission had failed to implement its own guidelines while conducting elections during the pandemic.

The judges were reflecting the minds of all right-thinking people in this country, or even in the world, who have been petrified by the dance of death the pandemic has let loose in India. It did not demand superior wisdom to understand that the convergence of lakhs of people at a place to listen to leaders would eventually end up as a superspreader event. The commission had the power to stop them but it looked the other way when leaders, including the country's Prime Minister, took pride in and announced that they have addressed the largest rallies of their lives during these elections. The explanation that it followed up on the procedure it had deployed in Bihar elections hardly wash. That a mishap did not happen is no reason why one should go easy on the rules especially while negotiating the fatal curves an extremely dangerous pandemic leaves behind.

The election process is not over yet but the commission has already entered the dock for failing the people on many occasions in recent times; the vaccinations on pandemic rules are just one instance. Its overenthusiasm while taking on the Opposition while going easy on the ruling party is another. It will do well not to invite non-complimentary comments from other constitutional bodies such as courts in future.

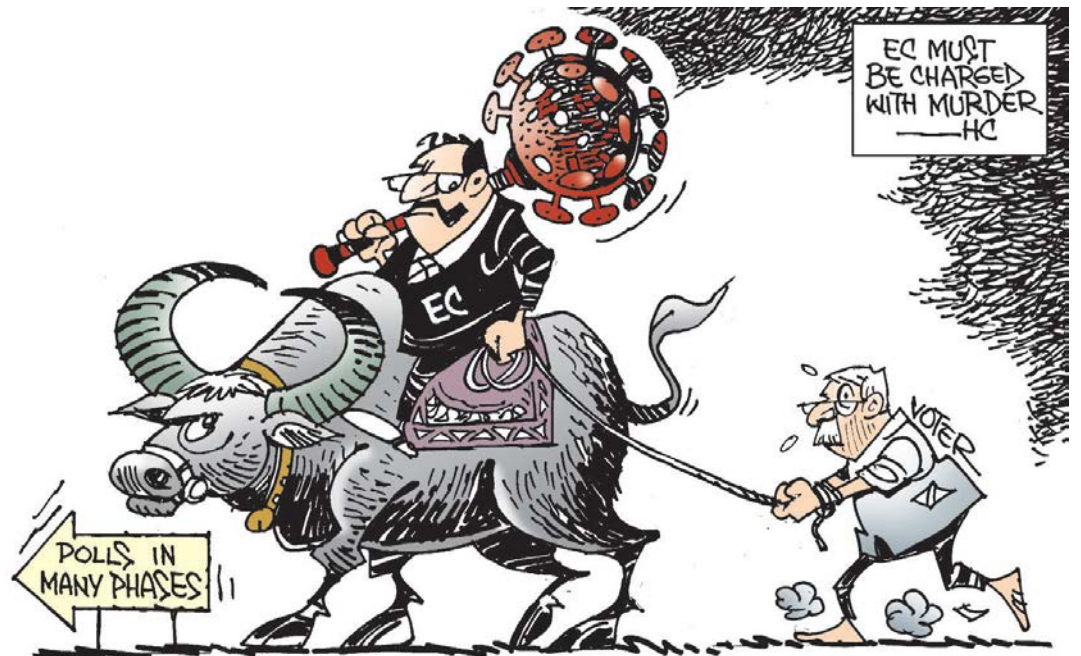
Opinions still matter

Newspapers are in the news these days, including a couple who have forsworn reporting of IPL cricket in the time of the pandemic. *New York Times*, a newspaper of record from the Big Apple, is in focus at the moment for deciding to do away with the term "Op-Ed", or "Opposite Editorial" page, because there seem to be more viewers of newspapers online in America than are consuming the old-fashioned printed version, which still come crackling paper form in the morning with a smell of fresh ink. But the definition of the spatial has changed in the digital age, the old geography skewed by there being no flipping of pages, only scrolling from one page to another.

The "Op-Ed" was much more than a defining physical term at the top of the page. It symbolises a space for the expression of opinions that were often at odds with those of the newspaper editors, who however are free to express themselves, even if anonymously, in editorials on the "Edit" page. A diversity of thought was always considered good for society, however opinionated the reader or viewer himself may be regarding the great societal issues of the day. The more blunt 'Opinion' will probably mark the section that carries a variety and range of opinion that newspapers still invite from thinkers, activists, intellectuals and politicians too, for who can have stronger opinions one way or the other than politicians.

It might appear that the day and age is somewhat perilous for those stating opinions in public space, be it in the Edit and Op-Ed sections of newspapers or in online news and opinion websites or in the more equitable space of social media. As the free and the fair cringe in the face of official India and trolls for opinions expressed without fear or favour, the stating of opinion is far too important to be sacrificed, however tilted the world may seem against honest opinions. The term "Op-Ed" may seem outdated but opinion still matters. But, as the Bard said, what is in a

Subhani



Caring governance vital to save lives & India's future



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

Reflections

When the newspapers recorded that over 20 Covid-19 patients had died in a leading New Delhi hospital for lack of oxygen, they also reported that India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, had paid \$57 million (\$52 crores) for the Stoke Park estate in England. Another tycoon, Adar Poonawalla, CEO of Serum Institute of India, had rented a mansion in London's Mayfair for \$50,000 a week.

India has always been a land of cruel contrasts. But seldom has the self-seeking cynicism of its ruling class been so grotesquely flaunted. Humanity cannot avert what lawyers call "acts of God", but the devastating second wave might not have struck so ferociously had it not been for the government's triumphalism.

"With made-in-India solutions, we controlled the spread of the virus and improved our health infrastructure", Prime Minister Narendra Modi had boasted. "Our vaccine research and production capacity have given a shield not just to India but to many other countries in the world." The complacency and vanity ignored India's decrepit medical infrastructure.

Monday's official figures of 16,960,172 infections and 192,311 deaths may be a gross understatement. Even without deliberate fudging, there are few means of accurate assessment in India's remote villages, for whose innocent inhabitants all illnesses are just "bemaari", or fever.

Reflecting official Indian priorities, the system virtually ignores both the countryside, where 70 per cent of 1.3 billion Indians live, and the poor who numbered 364 million (28 per cent of the population) in 2019, according to the

United Nations. As studies elsewhere have shown, hypertension, diabetes, respiratory disorders and nutritional deficiency are the highest in lower income groups.

Wallowing in India's cricket victory over England may have been counter-productive. Cricket crowds, religious jamborees like the Kumbh Mela, packed cinema halls and the BJP's resolve to extend its control through elections in five states/UTs contributed to today's crisis. The Covid-19 protocols were completely abandoned and the virus was able to mutate into new vaccine-resistant forms. West Bengal's tenfold rise in infections is being squarely blamed on political rallies.

The BJP's smug pundits should rue the February day when, swept away on the tide of servile sycophancy that is the hallmark of our political culture, they hailed Prime Minister Modi as a visionary who had "defeated" Covid-19. This has become routine adulation. Even in 2018 the party's national executive had passed a resolution applauding his his "visionary and disruptive leadership" (echoing Joseph Schumpeter's theory of "creative destruction") and claiming that his "new confident India" would reach "new heights in each and every field" by 2022. Another eight months to go before that Elysium dawn!

Meanwhile, pictures of the dead and dying, of coronavirus patients gasping for breath on pavements outside hospitals and of cremation fires smouldering night and day have gone viral on the world's television screens.

"I weep for your nation" — messaged Doug Jackson, a journalist from the North of England with whom I had worked 63 years ago and who is now

Their private jets may fly the Ambanis and the Poonawallas to Geneva or New York for a toothache, but the system by and large gives reasonably good service to the next rank of the wealthy and the politically influential. It neglects all the others.

an authority on Tiffany glass, the author of *Mosaic: The Story of Joseph Briggs, the English 'Tiffany'*.

"It sounds ghastly", commented Colin Smith, the author of *England's Last War Against France and Singapore Burning*, and once star writer for London's *Observer* newspaper. In that capacity he had trekked to Dhaka from what was then Calcutta during the 1971 Bangladesh war, encountering hordes of fleeing East Bengal refugees who thought him mad for walking in the opposite direction. "Wish London would at least make a gesture and send a squadron of RAF transports heavy with oxygen," Colin Smith added.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has responded since. But tiny Singapore made the unpublicised first gesture with four cryogenic oxygen containers. "We stand with India in its fight against Covid-19", said Singapore's high commission in New Delhi. But whatever Britain — or for that matter any other country — does, the answer lies in Indian hands. Neither another Marshall Plan or PL-480 wheat (or its equivalent) can resolve India's trauma now. India alone can save its own future through more responsible and caring governance.

As the virus shifts to smaller towns and villages or moves down the age scale in a land where 65 per cent of the population is under 35, as vast swathes of people are felled because only 1.3 per

cent of the population has been fully vaccinated, the BJP's religion-obsessed caste-ridden bigots must face up to the stark facts. Death and disease do not spare the rich because they are Hindu. Nor is there a quick fix to compensate for the neglect of decades. The situation might well deteriorate before it improves.

Everything in India now is geared for the rich. Their private jets may fly the Ambanis and the Poonawallas to Geneva or New York for a toothache, but the system by and large gives reasonably good service to the next rank of the wealthy and the politically influential. It neglects all the others.

Mandatory online registration for vaccinations is the latest instance of discrimination since it at once creates difficulties for large numbers of the underprivileged. The differential pricing for vaccines, with no cap, to which West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee rightly objects, is equally objectionable for potentially facilitating profiteering. In fact, in reviewing the system, the government cannot overlook the choice between hospitals that exist only to make a profit for the owner and institutions whose main purpose is to serve the public.

Private hospitals, including many old established nursing homes, have the resources and quality. But being now in the hands of businessmen with no vision, many have deteriorated into money-making operations. Government hospitals, on the other hand, are often ill-equipped with poorly trained staff, no public accountability and subject to bureaucratic and political controls.

Choosing between the devil and the deep blue sea cannot be easy. But the vast majority of Indians will remain bereft of adequate medical care without a caring version of John Kenneth Galbraith's "post office socialism".

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS

ADHERE TO RULES

The spread of coronavirus throughout the world in recent times is alarming. The ruling party in Tamil Nadu, after the election results are announced on May 2, 2021 must take every possible step to prevent the alarming spread of coronavirus in every possible way. The people of Tamil Nadu must strictly adhere to the rules and regulations like social distancing and wearing face-masks to curb the all-time rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus.

V. Murugan, Erode

PRODUCE O2, SHARE

Vedanta has been operating the Sterlite plant in Tamil Nadu for over 27 years. Sterlite can open to make O2. TN. Running a large modern factory is a complex task involving procurement, production, inspection and quality control and these can be handled only by trained personnel. When it is specifically agreed that the unit will produce only oxygen and no other item, it is unfair to treat the unit as a criminal on parole and bring its operations under the tight control of a committee appointed by the government. And when the entire country is gasping for oxygen Tamil Nadu should share the oxygen with neighbouring states rather than claim a near monopoly over the oxygen produced by Sterlite. It is strange, however, that the political class has turned a blind eye to industries in Erode, Coimbatore and Karur that grossly pollute key rivers in Tamil Nadu.

Kangayam R. Narasimhan, Chennai

KUDOS TO HC

Apropos the report, Madras HC slams ECI for allowing poll rallies and spreading Covid. The Election Commission of India rightly deserves such a brutal wallop by the Madras High Court for its callous and careless conduct of the Assembly elections in the four states and Puducherry in the midst of the second wave of the deadly Covid. That the judges went to the extent of mentioning that ECI officials could even be held on murder charges, apparently referring to the death of Covid patients in heaps due to their failure to apply strict protocol, shows their keen interest in protecting lives. The ECI had failed in enforcing Covid protocols at the time of campaigns and rallies. Actually, the ECI has been acting as the election agent of the central government.

Manoharan Muthuswamy, Chennai

Freddy Gray



Joe's rodeo: US President's first 100 days have been a wild ride

Joe Biden, 46th President of the United States, has never been able to keep his mouth shut. Throughout his absurdly long career in politics, he has always said too much, made stuff up, gone too far. His friends and fans just shrug it off: "That's our Joe".

The trouble is: Mr Biden is now America's commander-in-chief, leader of the not-so-free-anymore world, and his loquaciousness is a problem.

Take, for instance, his decision this week to intervene before the jury reached its verdict on the trial of Derek Chauvin, the white police officer found guilty of the murder last year of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. "I'm praying the verdict is the right verdict. I think it's overwhelming in my view," Mr Biden said. "I wouldn't say that unless the jury was sequestered," he quickly added — as if there were nothing untoward in a President weighing in pre-emptively on the most racially charged legal trial in America since the O.J. Simpson case in 1995.

As things turned out, the jury agreed with Mr Biden and found Chauvin guilty on all three counts. Yet what ought to have been a calm vindication

of American justice was treated as a grubby political show trial. Angry right-wingers will regard the verdict as a sop to left-wing mobs who would have set fire to cities across America had Chauvin not gone down.

So far, the new President's aides have done an impressive job of keeping his promiscuous verbosity under wraps. His public appearances are carefully managed, his speeches tightly scripted. In the coming week, he will mark his first 100 days in the White House, and yet has only given one real press conference.

After the political earthquake of Donald Trump's presidency, everybody in Washington is eager to make out that sanity is back in charge. Under Mr Biden, the headlines have certainly been a lot less sensational. Pay attention to what he's been saying, though — and you realise America's executive branch is as mad as ever.

Mr Biden has brought back civility to politics and international affairs, we are told. Yet he's already called Xi Jinping a "thug" and Vladimir Putin a "killer". His presidency would restore America's clout in the world, we were told. From Bush to Obama to Trump

and now to Biden, America's great power continues to wane.

But who cares when the money keeps flowing? Mr Biden is carrying out the biggest government spending splurge of all time. His Covid relief package alone came to \$1.9 trillion: to be poured on top of what looks set to be the world's strongest economic recovery. For now, polls suggest people like the free cash. Those who worry about the deficit or inflation are told they don't understand modern economics.

Next comes the \$2.5 trillion infrastructure bill, to which Democrats are tackling all sorts of spending commitments for pet causes.

Mr Biden is canny enough to have realised at some level that he won the Democratic nomination and the presidency precisely because the public didn't think he was rabidly left-wing. He's also sufficiently sharp to recognise that he must keep appeasing the radicals who increasingly dominate the airwaves and his party.

At some stage, probably next year as the mid-term elections approach, Mr Biden will try to drag the Democratic donkey back towards the middle ground. For now, he seems happy to let the woke warriors take him for a

wild progressive ride. On Tuesday, after the Chauvin verdict, Mr Biden did do the presidential thing of calling on the nation to come together.

"Not enough" might be the leitmotif of Mr Biden's presidency so far. It sometimes feels as if the President is in an abusive relationship with the radical Democratic fringe. He promises ever more urgent and expensive solutions to global climate change, and his party just demands more. He talks about the nobility of the American ideal, yet his UN ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, claims: "White supremacy is weaved into our founding documents and principles."

"Words have consequences", Mr Biden used to say over and over when campaigning against the loudmouth Donald Trump. But that does not appear to be a lesson he has learned. As a candidate, for instance, Mr Biden was desperate to emphasise his enthusiasm for all immigration. In a televised debate, he said: "I would in fact make sure that we immediately surge to the border all those people seeking asylum."

Inevitably, as soon as he became President, migrants did as he asked. The result has been a catastrophe. In

March, US Customs and Border Protection stopped nearly 200,000 people who were trying to enter the country, including tens of thousands of unaccompanied children. Mr Biden's White House recently admitted that the situation has reached "crisis" levels.

To his admirers, Mr Biden is finding a third way between the old centre and the new left. Because he campaigned as a moderate, they say, he can govern as a radical. His impressive vaccine rollout is drawing worldwide praise. Add to that his gargantuan spending packages, and patter about new deals and transforming the soul of America: he can still be hailed as a 21st-century answer to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

But many of the problems blamed on Mr Trump are only getting worse under Biden. His administration so far has been defined by a kind of geriatric wokeness. "I want to change the paradigm," he said in that only presidential press conference. He has been using stock phrases for more than 50 years and so have most American politicians. The language of progress never changes.

By arrangement with the Spectator

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	48,944.14 1.15
Nifty 50	14,653.00 1.16
S&P 500*	4,188.44 0.02
Dollar (₹)	74.65 0.12
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.67 0.30
Euro (₹)	90.07 0.37
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,906▲69 0.14
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.90 0.38
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.055 0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.584 0.014

* As of 8:30 PM IST

TVS Motor profit rises four-fold to ₹319 cr in Q4

TVS Motor Company posted nearly four-fold increase in its consolidated net profit to Rs 319.19 crore for the March quarter, on the back of robust sales in the domestic and international markets. The company had reported a net profit of Rs 81.84 crore a year ago. Revenue from operations rose to Rs 6,131.90 crore from Rs 4,104.71 crore. Total two- and three-wheeler sales stood at 9.28 lakh units in Q4, up 47 per cent.

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■ Bid to avert IL&FS, PNB-like scams Lenders require RBI nod to hire auditor

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 27

In a bid to improve the quality of financial reporting of lenders and to prevent IL&FS and Punjab National Bank-like scams, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday made it mandatory for lenders to take its prior approval for the appointment and re-appointment of statutory central auditors (SCAs) and statutory auditors.

The apex bank also mandated that the statutory audit for entities with an asset size of at least Rs 15,000 crore at the end of the previous year should be conducted by a minimum of two audit firms.

All other lenders of lesser size should appoint at least one audit firm to conduct the statutory audit, the apex bank said in its guidelines on appointment of statutory auditors of commercial banks (excluding regional rural banks), primary (urban) co-operative banks (UCBs) and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs). The guidelines will be applicable to commercial banks from financial year 2021-22.

However, UCBs and NBFCs shall have the flexibility to adopt these guidelines from H2 of FY22 so that there is no disruption.

The guidelines provide instructions for appointment of SCAs/ SAs, the number of auditors, their eligibility criteria, tenure and rotation, etc. while ensuring the independence of auditors. “The



revised Guidelines being issued will ensure that Statutory Auditors are appointed in a timely, transparent and effective manner,” the RBI said.

Makarand Joshi, founding partner, MMJC and Associates—a corporate compliance firm—said, “Rotation of auditors is heavily relied upon by regulators to ensure that any element of true and fair view cannot be kept under wraps for a fairly long period. The issues in large NBFCs like IL&FS and DHFL witnessed over the past few years has been a wake-up call for the regulator. This is an attempt to improve transparency and reliability. The new norm would mean that management will have to invest time to make a new auditor familiar with working of NBFC or financial institution more frequently.”

Public sector banks have to allot the top 20 branches (to be selected in order of the level of outstanding advances) to SCAs to cover a minimum of 15 per cent of the total gross advances

of the bank by SCAs. For other entities—excluding payment banks and core investment companies—SCAs/SAs shall visit and audit at least the top 20 branches/top 20 per cent of the branches of the entities (in case of entities having less than 100 branches), to be selected in order of the level of outstanding advances, to cover a minimum 15 per cent of their total gross advances.

Commercial banks (excluding RRBs) and UCBs will be required to take prior approval of RBI (Department of Supervision) for appointment/reappointment of statutory central auditors and statutory auditors, on an annual basis, the banking regulator said.

In order to protect the independence of the auditors, lenders will have to appoint the SCAs/SAs for a continuous period of three years. Commercial banks and UCBs can remove the audit firms during this period only with the prior approval of the department.

JSPL divests Jindal Power for ₹3,015 cr

FC BUREAU
CHENNAI, APRIL 27

Jindal Steel and Power said its board has approved divesting its entire stake in subsidiary Jindal Power for Rs 3,015 crore. This will cut the company's debt and carbon footprint, it said.

Jindal Steel & Power has accepted a binding offer from Worldone Pvt Ltd, a promoter group company, to divest its 96.42 per cent stake in Jindal Power.

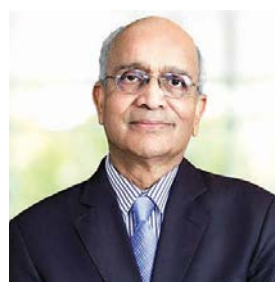
The equity value is an all-cash offer of Rs 3,015 crore for the stake in JPL, including 3400 MW coal fired power plants in Chhattisgarh and other non-core assets owned by JPL.

JSPL said Worldone was selected in a bidding process run by an independent third-party merchant banker, Grant Thornton Advisory, wherein the acquirer submitted the highest binding bid on acceptable terms and conditions.

The proposed sale is subject to approvals of shareholders, regulatory clearances, go-ahead from lenders of the company and Jindal Power, contractual approvals and the like.

Recently, the company had divested its assets in Oman and had pared part of its debt. With that deal, overall debt had come down from about Rs 34,000 crore to less than Rs 28,000 crore, as per reports. JSPL wanted to bring it further down.

Maruti expects second wave to boost car sales

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, APRIL 27

R.C. Bhargava

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest carmaker, on Tuesday said a fresh surge in coronavirus cases in the country would strengthen demand for personal mobility, and that lockdowns in some cities had not yet hurt the carmaker's sales or production.

Following a steep fall in car sales last year when the pandemic first hit, Maruti's sales picked up in India over the past two quarters as people opted out of public transport and poured their lockdown-led savings into big-ticket items such as cars.

Still, Maruti's fourth-quarter results took a hit due to rising commodity prices and supply chain disruptions. Maruti has passed on some of the

costs to customers and already bumped up car prices twice this year.

“With this second pandemic wave the demand for personal transport will, if anything, strengthen, not weaken. Because more and more people will want to have their personal transport,” R.C. Bhargava, chairman at Maruti Suzuki told reporters after Maruti posted a near 10 per cent drop in quarterly profit.

“If the current demand situation continues, April-June should be “decent,” he said.

The carmaker, which sells one out of two bought in the country, reported a 9.7 per cent year-on-year (YoY) decline in profit at Rs 1,166 crore for the March 2021 quarter, on the back of weak demand and higher commodity costs but revenue was strong.

The New Delhi-based company reported a profit of Rs 1,291.7 crore in the year-ago period.

Revenue from operations in Q4 FY21 stood at Rs 24,023.7 crore, up 32 per cent from Rs 18,198.7 crore in the year-ago period backed by strong double-digit growth in sales.

Maruti Suzuki sold 4,92,235 vehicles in the March quarter, up 28 per cent YoY.

MARKET SENTIMENTS LOOK UP

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 27

The Sensex gained over 500 points for the second day in a row, after the Covid scare seemed to come down due to a drop in fresh daily cases. The Sensex closed 558 points, or 1.15 per cent, up at 48,944 while Nifty-50 rose to 14,653, up 168 points.

The BSE Mid-cap and Small-cap indices up 1.04 per cent and 1.49 per cent.

The daily Covid cases on Monday was lower at 3.23 lakh compared to around 3.5 lakh on Sunday and Maharashtra also reported lower daily infections at 48,700. The market sentiment also got a boost as help started pouring in from many countries. “Investors’ expectations from earnings outcome by heavyweights, the progress of the vaccination drive and a dip in the Covid cases further boosted sentiments,” said Ajit Mishra, VP-research, Religare Broking.

On Tuesday, FPIs were net sellers by Rs 1,454.75 crore.

RETAIL TRADE COUNTS LOSSES

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 27

Lock-down and restrictions in a few states has caused a business loss of Rs 5 lakh crore to unorganised traders, while the organised retail too estimates around 40 per cent loss in states affected by the second wave.

The Confederation of Indian Traders says curfew and other restrictions has caused a business loss of about Rs 5 lakh crore in the past 25 days nationally. Out of Rs 5 lakh crore, the loss of retail traders is estimated to be about Rs 3.5 lakh crore and wholesale business of Rs 1.5 lakh crore.

Delhi alone recorded a business loss of more than Rs 25,000 crore. The calculations are based on the trader feedback from 14 states, excluding West Bengal, NE, Punjab, Haryana, J&K and Goa.

Interstate trade and loading and unloading activities also are getting affected due to night curfews.

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

FC Goa play out yet another draw

Margao: FC Goa conceded an 89th minute goal to squander the chance to become the first Indian club to win a match in the prestigious AFC Champions League (ACL) as they played out a 1-1 draw with Al Rayyan of Qatar here Monday. Jorge Ortiz gave FC Goa the lead in the third minute of the Group E match but Ali Ferydoon equalised with just a minute left in the regulation time. The Indian Super League side went out of reckoning for a knock-out berth after Al Wahda of the UAE beat last season runners-up Persepolis FC 1-0 in another Group E match played earlier in the day. — PTI

Boxer injured in Worlds bout, dies

Lausanne, Switzerland: An 18-year-old boxer from Jordan has died after being seriously injured in a bout at the World Youth Championships, the International Boxing Association said on Tuesday. Rashed Al-Swaissat was treated in the ring and then hospitalised after being knocked out in his preliminary-round light-heavyweight fight against Estonian boxer Anton Vinogradov on April 16 in Kielce, Poland. “It is with deep sadness that we learned of the passing of Rashed Al-Swaissat of Jordan, who had been admitted to hospital on April 16 further to his fight during the AIBA Youth World Championships,” AIBA said. — AP

Repsol Honda gear up for Spanish GP

Spain: After an emotional return to MotoGP in Portimao, Marc Marquez's rehabilitation continues in Jerez as Pol Espargaro aims to make amends for the previous round. Heading to the iconic Jerez de la Frontera for the Gran Premio Red Bull de España, the MotoGP World Championship is primed for another exciting weekend. The Repsol Honda Team will again be operating at full capacity as Marquez and Espargaro line up together aboard the RC213V. This weekend there will be a fifth Honda on the grid as Stefan Bradl returns to the World Championship as a wildcard.

Correa keeps Lazio in CL hunt

Joaquin scores brace to beat AC Milan, Napoli blank Torino to go third

Rome, April 27: Joaquin Correa ensured Lazio kept their hopes of Champions League qualification alive on Monday with a double in a 3-0 win over AC Milan while Napoli jumped up to third thanks to a 2-0 triumph at Torino.

Correa opened the scoring for Lazio with only a minute on the clock at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome and added the second five minutes after the break.

Ciro Immobile struck the third with three minutes left as Lazio moved five points off the Champions League spots with a game in hand on their rivals.

“This was like a final for us, the last chance to stay in with a shout for the top four... It was a clear and dominant victory,” Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi told Sky Sport Italia.

Inzaghi's side sit sixth, behind AC Milan who are level on 66 points with Napoli and Juventus — third and fourth respectively — but have dropped down to fifth after their second straight league defeat.

They are 13 points behind leaders Inter Milan, who can win their first league title since 2010



Lazio's Joaquin Correa (left) vies for the ball with Ante Rebic of AC Milan in their Italian league match at Rome's Olympic Stadium on Monday.

— AP

on Saturday if they beat Crotone and second-placed Atalanta fail to win at Sassuolo on Sunday.

Stefano Pioli's Milan, who started the weekend in second place, could have been beaten by a larger margin as Manuel Lazzari

was denied a goal just before the break by the tightest of VAR offside calls and Italy forward Immobile struck the post seven minutes before he scored his 18th league goal of the campaign.

Pioli was however left

frustrated by Correa's second, which was given after a lengthy VAR check following what he felt was a foul from Lucas Leiva on Hakan Calhanoglu.

“I don't understand how it wasn't given as a foul on Calhanoglu, said Pioli.

THE RESULTS

Torino	0
Napoli	2
<i>(Bakayoko 11, Osimhen 13)</i>	
Lazio	3
<i>(Correa 2, 51, Immobile 87)</i>	
AC Milan	0

“He looked at it again and from the replay you cannot say Leiva doesn't catch Calhanoglu and completely miss the ball.”

Napoli moved into third thanks to first-half goals from Tiemoué Bakayoko and Victor Osimhen earlier on Monday.

They could have been further ahead at the break following a dominant opening period in which Piotr Zielinski hit the post and Matteo Politano was unlucky to see his deflected shot slide wide.

Lorenzo Insigne, playing his 300th Serie A match for Napoli, also hit the upright with a curling shot just before the hour mark.

They failed to add to their tally but ran out winners to put pressure on their rivals. — AFP

SOCIEDAD EDGE PAST EIBAR TO KEEP HOLD ON EUROPA SPOT

Madrid, April 27: Alexander Isak scored a first-half winner as Real Sociedad defeated Basque Country rivals Eibar 1-0 to strengthen their hold on fifth place in the Spanish league.

The win left Sociedad three points ahead of sixth-placed Real Betis and four points in front of seventh-placed Villarreal with five rounds remaining. The teams finishing in fifth and sixth places secure a Europa League berth next season.

It was only the second win for Sociedad in their last seven league matches.

It was the fifth consecutive loss for last-placed Eibar, which is winless in 16 straight league games.

● **The win left Sociedad three points ahead of sixth-placed Real Betis and four points in front of seventh-placed Villarreal with five rounds remaining.**

It stayed seven points from escaping the relegation zone.

Isak scored at Eibar's Ipurua Stadium with a shot from close range in the 26th minute.

Sociedad next visit Huesca, while Eibar host Alavés, another relegation-threatened team.

— AP

Iheanacho leads Foxes fightback to sink Palace

Leicester (United Kingdom), April 27: Leicester strengthened their grip on third place in the Premier League as Kelechi Iheanacho's superb strike capped a spirited fightback in Monday's 2-1 win against Crystal Palace.

Brendan Rodgers' side trailed to Wilfried Zaha's first half goal. But Timothy Castagne equalised soon after the interval with his first goal since September. And Nigeria striker Iheanacho sealed Leicester's second successive victory when he scored with a thunder-

ous finish 10 minutes from full-time.

Leicester are four points clear of fourth placed Chelsea and seven ahead of fifth placed West Ham as they bid to qualify for next season's Champions League.

“It was a very important win for us. It was the third game in nine days so a tough schedule,” Rodgers said.

“Going one behind against Palace, they're super organised and tough to break down. I thought the players were outstanding. They kept the calmness and control

and scored two very good goals.”

With five games left, the FA Cup finalists have already matched their total of 62 points from last season.

A late collapse cost the Foxes a place in the Champions League in 2020, but Rodgers' men are firmly on course to make amends thanks to the sparkling form of Iheanacho. “We spoke about it at the start of the season and put it to bed them. Our performance levels this season have shown that is in the past,” Rodgers said. — AFP

TOKYO | OLYMPICS

Host towns pull out over corona

Tokyo, April 27: Hundreds of Japanese towns and cities have been forced to rethink plans to host Olympic teams because the coronavirus will prevent public appearances and require costly safety measures.

The western town of Okuizumo spent more than \$5 million preparing to welcome India's hockey team for a pre-Games training camp, only to scrap the visit because of Covid-19.

After sinking money into upgrading sports facilities, Okuizumo balked when it became clear it would have to provide bubble-like biosecurity measures with regular virus tests and medical care.

“We wanted to have one of the world's top tier teams visit our town and show their skills to local children,” town official Katsumi Nagase said.

“But that seems impossible now.”

More than 500 municipalities signed up to host athletes and officials in a scheme aimed at broadening the Olympics' benefits beyond Tokyo.

Some, like Okuizumo, have already scrapped plans to host overseas athletes, while others are devising careful programmes they hope will

● **The western town of Okuizumo spent more than \$5 million preparing to welcome India's hockey team for a pre-Games training camp, only to scrap the visit because of Covid-19.**

keep everyone safe.

Instead of giving residents the chance to meet elite athletes and try out new sports, towns will have to ditch any physical contact, school visits and public training sessions.

Kurihara city in northern Miyagi prefecture was planning to host South Africa's hockey team, but decided the expense was no longer worth it given the limitations imposed by virus measures.

“It's a project that will use our tax resources,” Hidenori Sasaki, an official with the local board of education, said.

“If it becomes just athletes holding a training camp without any exchanges with local residents, local citizens won't enjoy the benefits.”

In some cases, Olympic teams have cancelled, worried about the risk of infection before the Games. — AFP

HOCKEY UMPIRE'S MANAGER VIRENDRA DIES OF COVID-19

New Delhi, April 27: Indian hockey umpire's manager Virendra Singh has died of Covid-19 related complications and his demise was mourned by the game's governing body. Singh was 47. He died in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, on Monday.

Virendra had officiated in a number of All India tournaments and National Championships.

Mourning his demise, Hockey India president Gyanendra Ningombam said, “We at Hockey India are deeply saddened to learn about the untimely demise of Virendra Singh.”

‘SHOOTER DADI’ CORONA POSTIVE, IN HOSPITAL

Octogenarian shooter Chandro Tomar, nicknamed ‘Shooter Dadi’, has tested positive for Covid-19 and admitted to a hospital due to difficulty in breathing.

The Twitter page of the 89-year-old legendary shooter, hailing from the Baghpatt village in Uttar Pradesh, posted the development. — PTI

ORANGE	
Shikhar Dhawan, DC	265
KL Rahul, PBKS	240
Glenn Maxwell, RCB	223
PURPLE	
Harshal Patel, RCB	17
Avesh Khan, DC	12
Rahul Chahar, MI	9



Sunrisers pacer T. Natarajan underwent a knee surgery on Tuesday.

Lee donates bitcoin worth ₹40 lakh

Inspired by his countryman Pat Cummins' gesture, former Australian pacer Brett Lee on Tuesday decided to donate one bitcoin (approximately ₹40 lakh) to help India in its fight against the raging COVID-19 pandemic. "It saddens me deeply to see people suffering due to the ongoing pandemic. I feel privileged to be in a position of making a difference," Lee said.

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RETURN ASSURANCE

BCCI guarantees safe return to foreign players

New Delhi/Melbourne, April 27: The BCCI stepped in to assuage apprehensions of foreign cricketers, especially Australians, at the IPL, as a second wave of COVID-19 infections battered India, prompting the government Down Under to suspend air travel with the country besides asking players to make their "own arrangements" for return.

The fear of being locked out of their own nation drove the likes of Andrew Tye to take an early flight back to Australia while Kane Richardson and Adam Zampa also exited their franchise Royal Challengers Bangalore's bio-bubble on Monday.

A day later, Australia announced that it was suspending air travel to and from India till May 15 amid the swirling COVID-19 cases. The BCCI wrote to the foreign players telling them that their safe return home will be its responsibility once the tournament ends on May 30.

"We understand that many of you are apprehensive about how you will get back home once the tournament concludes... We want to apprise you that you have nothing to worry about," BCCI COO Hemang Amin said in a letter addressed to the players.

"The BCCI will do everything to ensure that you reach your respective destinations seamlessly. The BCCI is monitoring the situation very closely and is working with the gov-



RCB's Glenn Maxwell boards a flight to Ahmedabad.

ernment authorities to make arrangements to get you home once the tournament concludes.

"Be rest assured that the tournament is not over for BCCI till each one of you has reached your home, safe and sound," he added.

Aussie PM rules out government assistance

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison ruled out any government assistance and said that those in the IPL will have to make their own arrangements for return.

"They have travelled there privately. This wasn't part of an Australian tour. They're under their

own resources and they'll be using those resources too, I'm sure, to see them return to Australia in accordance with their own arrangements," Morrison was quoted as saying by *The Guardian*.

The crisis outside the IPL's bio-bubble has led to some talk about whether it is appropriate for the league to go on and whether its organisers and participating players should be doing more to express empathy.

Amin lauded the players for carrying on and giving some joy amid the gloom.

"When you all walk out onto the field, you are bringing hope to millions

of people who have tuned in," he said.

"While you are professionals and will play to win, this time you are also playing for something much more important," he added.

As of now, the IPL still has 14 Australian players, including big names like Steve Smith (Delhi), David Warner (Sunrisers) and Cummins.

Ricky Ponting (DC) and Simon Katich (RCB) are among the high-profile Australian coaches, while iconic former players such as Matthew Hayden, Brett Lee and Lisa Sthalekar are part of the commentary team. — PTI

LYNN ASKS CA TO ARRANGE A CHARTER FLIGHT

New Delhi, April 27: Mumbai Indians batsman Chris Lynn has requested Cricket Australia to arrange a chartered flight to take its players home after the IPL is over and revealed that his franchise will get all members of the team vaccinated next week.

"I texted back that as Cricket Australia make 10 per cent of every IPL contract was there a chance we could spend that money this year on a charter flight once the tournament is over?" Lynn told *News Corp media*.

"I know there are people worse off than us. But we are going from a really tight bubble and are getting vaccinated next week so hopefully the government will let us get home on a private charter.

"We are not asking for shortcuts and we signed up knowing the risks. But it would be great to get home as soon as the event is over."

"Obviously India is in chaos at the moment. But we are at least giving people something to smile about by playing the tournament," Lynn said.

While some Australian players have returned home, their New Zealand counterparts have no such plans.

— PTI

I felt vulnerable in bubble: Zampa

New Delhi, April 27: Australian leg-spinner Adam Zampa on Tuesday said he decided to quit the IPL midway as it was the "most vulnerable" bio-bubble he has been a part of and the tournament should have been held in UAE, like last year.

Zampa and Kane Richardson, who were part of the Royal Challengers Bangalore squad, are set to fly back home later on Tuesday, having pulled out citing personal reasons.

Speaking to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Zampa said he felt a lot safer in the UAE where the IPL was held last year.

"We've been in a few (bubbles) now, and I feel like this is probably the most vulnerable. I just feel like because it's India, we're always being told about the hygiene over here and being extra careful... I just felt like it was the most vulnerable."

"The IPL that was held in Dubai six months ago didn't feel that way at all. I felt like that was extremely safe. Personally, I feel like that would have been a better option originally for this IPL, but obviously, there's a lot of political stuff that goes into it.

"Obviously there's the T20 World Cup that's meant to be happening here later this year. That's probably going to be the next discussion in the cricket world. Six months is a long time," said the leg-spinner.

Zampa said a lot of factors contributed to his decision to leave the IPL.

"Obviously the COVID situation over here is pretty dire. I just felt, rocking up to training and stuff, obviously, I wasn't playing in the team as well. I was going to training and I wasn't finding the motivation."

— PTI

POINTS TABLE						
Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
RCB	6	5	1	0	10	+0.089
CSK	5	4	1	0	8	+1.612
DC	6	4	2	0	8	+0.269
MI	5	2	3	0	4	-0.032
KKR	6	2	4	0	4	-0.305
PBKS	6	2	4	0	4	-0.608
RR	5	2	3	0	4	-0.681
SRH	5	1	4	0	2	-0.180

Sunrisers face uphill challenge

New Delhi, April 27: Operating like a well-oiled unit, Chennai Super Kings will start as overwhelming favourites when they clash with struggling Sunrisers Hyderabad in an Indian Premier League (IPL) match, here on Wednesday.

The MS Dhoni-led CSK have bounced back in style after losing the opening match. They are on a roll with four straight wins and will hope that the new venue — Feroze Shah Kotla ground — also favours them.

The three-time champions had an underwhelming 2020 season but the team, packed with seasoned players, is now displaying the efficiency it is known for.

All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja has been the driving force behind CSK's impressive run so far.

His blistering assault on Harshal Patel in the final over shut out RCB on Sunday. He has been among the wickets with his accurate left-arm spin apart from effecting stunning run-outs.

Openers — Faf du Plessis and Ruturaj Gaikwad — have found form while Suresh Raina and Ambati Rayudu are due for big knocks.

— PTI

Challengers beat Capitals in last-ball thriller

Ahmedabad, April 27: Royal Challengers Bangalore edged Delhi Capitals in a last-ball thriller on Tuesday.

In pursuit of RCB's 171, contrasting half-centuries from Shimron Hetmyer (53 off 25) and Rishabh Pant (58 off 48) took Delhi closer to the finish line. Capitals needed a six off the last ball, but Pant could only manage a four.

Earlier, the ever-reliable AB de Villiers hit an unbeaten 42-ball 75 to power Royal Challengers Bangalore to 171 for five.

It was a collective effort from the Delhi bowlers — Ishant Sharma (1/26), Axar Patel (1/33), Kagiso Rabada (1/38), Amit Mishra (1/27), Avesh Khan (1/24) — who all picked one wicket apiece.

De Villiers, who hit

three fours and five sixes, was the top scorer for RCB.

SCORECARD

Royal Challengers Bangalore: Virat Kohli b Avesh Khan 12, Devdutt Padikkal b Sharma 17, Rajat Patidar c Smith b Patel 31, Glenn Maxwell c Smith b Mishra 25, AB de Villiers (not out) 75, Washington Sundar c & b Rabada 6, Daniel Sams (not out) 3. **Extras (w 2) 2.**

Total (for five wickets in 20 overs) 171.

FoW: 1-30, 2-30, 3-60, 4-114, 5-139.

Bowling: Ishant 4-1-26-1, Kagiso Rabada 4-0-38-1, Avesh Khan 4-0-24-1, Amit Mishra 3-0-27-1, Axar Patel 4-0-33-1, Marcus Stoinis 1-0-23-0.

Delhi Capitals: Prithvi Shaw c de Villiers b Patel 21, Shikhar Dhawan c Chahal b Jamieson 6, Steven Smith c

de Villiers b Mohammed Siraj 4, Rishabh Pant (not out) 58, Marcus Stoinis c de Villiers b Patel 22, Shimron Hetmyer (not out) 53. **Extras (lb 4, w 2) 6. Total (for four wickets in 20 overs) 170.**

FoW: 1-23, 2-28, 3-47, 4-92.

Bowling: Daniel Sams 2-0-15-0, Mohammed Siraj 4-0-44-1, Kyle Jamieson 4-0-32-1, Washington Sundar 4-0-28-0, Harshal Patel 4-0-37-2, Yuzvendra Chahal 2-0-10-0.

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