

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 5 APRIL 2021



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Rahul seeks to woo voters with NYAY, promises ₹6K per month to poor in Kerala



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PM Boris Johnson plans 'Covid passport' trials to reopen mass events



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Akshay Kumar tests Covid positive, ambitious project Ram Setu comes to a halt

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WINDOWS



Pope Francis celebrates the Eucharist during Easter Mass at St. Peter's Basilica at The Vatican on Sunday. — AP

Bomb scare: Docus on 'monthly bribes' paid to cops found

Mumbai: The NIA, which is investigating the Mukesh Ambani security scare case, has seized documents that show payments of alleged monthly bribes being made to officials in the Mumbai Police and the administration. The agency is scrutinising the documents unearthed during a raid on a club in South Mumbai. According to the NIA, arrested police officer Sachin Waze frequented the bar from which these documents have been recovered. **Full report on Page 4**

Landslide & floods kill 41 in Indonesia

Jakarta: Landslides and flash floods from torrential rains in eastern Indonesia killed at least 41 people and displaced thousands, the disaster relief agency said Sunday. More than two dozen others were still missing. In January, 40 people died in two landslides in West Java province. — AP **Full report on Page 6**

Fires rage again in Odisha's Similipal

Bhubaneswar: Large-scale forest fire incidents have been reported from different ranges in Odisha's Similipal National Park. Billowing smoke has enveloped the area triggering health concerns. Besides, the fire has resulted in the rise of temperature in the region. **Full report on Page 4**

COUNTERPOINT



Like father, like son.. your dad used to snatch ballot boxes!

WEATHER

Max: 38°C
Min: 23°C
RH: 18%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Partly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Bahula Navami till 2.20 am
Star: Uttarashada till 2.06 am
Varjyam: 10.06 to 11.42 am
Durmuhurtam: 12.43 pm to 1.32 pm; 3.10 pm to 3.59 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
SUNSET TODAY 6.41 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.06 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 1.59 AM
MOONSET TODAY 12.25 PM

22 jawans killed, 1 missing after forces walk into Maoist ambush

Questions being asked if inputs on presence of Hidma had been planted by Naxals

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
Raipur, April 4

A day after Maoists ambushed a joint team of security forces in Terram area along Sukma-Bijapur border in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar region, bodies of 20 jawans, slain in the encounter with the ultras, were recovered at the attack site on Sunday. With this, the death toll of security personnel in the Terram Maoist attack has mounted to 22.

"Two bodies (of jawans) were recovered on Saturday and 20 on Sunday. One (jawan) is still missing," director general of police (DGP) of Chhattisgarh, D.M. Awasthi, told reporters.

The slain jawans included seven commandos of CoBRA of CRPF, eight personnel of district reserve group (DRG), six jawans from Chhattisgarh armed force (CAF) and one from CRPF's Bastaria Battalion, superintendent of police of south Bastar district of Bijapur, Kamal Lochan Kashyap, said.

A commando of the CoBRA unit identified as Rakeswar Singh Mahas was still missing, he added.

As many as 31 jawans were injured, seven of them seriously, in the incident.

"Reinforcements were rushed to the attack site on Sunday morning to recover the bodies of the jawans killed in the encounter on Saturday. An Mi-7 helicopter evacuated the bodies," a senior police officer posted in Bastar told this newspaper.

According to him, the bodies of jawans were recovered from three different places within an area of 500 meters where Maoists laid ambush to trap them.

Used syringes were seen

► **USED SYRINGES** were seen lying in Tikalgudam village, one of the three encounter sites, indicating that the jawans came under attack by Maoists when they were administering first aid treatment to their injured colleagues

lying in Tikalgudam village, one of the three encounter sites, indicating that the jawans came under attack by Maoists when they were administering first aid treatment to their injured colleagues.

Spent shells of rockets were also found in the village, which has now been completely deserted by the villagers.

Around 2,000 jawans were mobilised from five camps of security forces in Sukma and Bijapur districts to launch counterinsurgency operations in Terram area on Saturday following specific intelligence inputs on the presence of PLGA battalion number one commander Madvi Hidma along with his militiamen in the area.

One of the joint search parties mobilised from Bijapur walked into a 2 km-long ambush laid by Maoists near Jonguda hills when they were returning to their base camp after carrying out the anti-Naxal operation, a senior police officer posted in Bastar said.

"Naxals used Under Barrel Grenade Launcher and Light Machine Gun (LMG) during the ambush. They fired mortars and bullets initially. Several security personnel were injured. The rest of the search party in a box formation took away the injured to safety. The Maoists opened fire on them from LMG from the side of a village, leading to heavy casualty among the

► **Turn to Page 4**



A paramilitary soldier, injured in an encounter with Maoist rebels, undergoing treatment at a hospital in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh on Sunday. — PTI

Forces ordered to eliminate Maoist commander Hidma

Shah cuts short visit to Assam, chairs high-level meeting

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

Union home minister Amit Shah cut short his visit to Assam in the wake of the Naxal attack in Chhattisgarh and asked security forces to launch a massive operation against Naxal outfits in Chhattisgarh following detailed discussions with top intelligence and security officials. Specific instructions have been given to eliminate top Naxal commander Hidma who is said to be behind the attack that left 22 jawans dead. Initial investigations have confirmed use of sophisticated weapons like AK and Insas rifles, Light Machine Gun (LMG) and rocket launchers by Naxals in the bru-

tal attack. Following these instructions a massive operation has been launched by security forces along the Sukma-Bijapur border. One of the soldiers is still said to be missing and a combing operation is on to trace him.

Director-general CRPF, Kuldeep Singh, reached Chhattisgarh early Sunday morning to review the situation. Mr Singh along with CRPF ADG (HQ) Zulfikar Hassan and IG (Operations) Nalin Prabhat and senior officials of the Chhattisgarh Police held a meeting to decide on future strategy for anti-Naxal operations.

Senior security officials claimed that after this massive attack the Naxals managed to escape with

weapons, bullet-proof jackets, and even the shoes of those killed in the incident. Reports suggest that Naxal too suffered heavy casualties. Sources claim that anything between 9-15 Naxals were killed in the encounter even as security forces were trying to establish the exact figure.

Mr Shah condoned the deaths of security personnel in Chhattisgarh. "We will continue our fight against these enemies of peace & progress," he tweeted. The home minister also had a detailed telephonic discussion with Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel following the attack.

The encounter took place along the Sukma-Bijapur border on Saturday.

'Factually incorrect': EC on Mamata's Nandigram claim

Says claim about outsiders at booth 'devoid of substance'

New Delhi, April 4: In a strongly worded rejoinder to West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, the Election Commission has rejected her claim about the presence of outsiders at a polling booth in Nandigram as "factually incorrect" and "devoid of substance".

In a letter to Ms Banerjee on Saturday, Election Commission (EC) secretary general Umesh Sinha also said, "It is being separately examined whether happenings of April 1 merit any action under Sections 131 and 123(2) of RP (Representation of the People) Act and/or Model Code of Conduct."

Section 131 deals with penalty for disorderly conduct in or near polling stations, while Section 123 (2) pertains to "undue influence", that is to say, any direct or indirect interference or attempt to interfere on the part of the candidate or his agent, or of any other person with the free exercise of any electoral right.

The letter did not specify to whom it was referring with regard to taking possible action.

The EC sent the letter to Ms Banerjee, who is the Trinamul Congress chief, in response to a

► **Turn to Page 4**



Actress Jaya Bachchan arrives at the airport to campaign for TMC candidates in Kolkata on Sunday. — PTI

Withdraw 22 candidates for support: Cong to Didi

PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI
BERHAMPORE, APRIL 4

In a dramatic twist, the Congress, which is contesting the West Bengal Assembly elections in alliance with the Left Front and Indian Secular Front, the new outfit floated by influential Muslim cleric of Furfura Sharif Peerzada Abbas Siddiqui, has indicated that it would look into offering it's support to chief minister Mamata Banerjee to tackle the BJP only if she

withdraws as many as 22 Trinamul Congress candidates for the polls in Murshidabad, as a "favour" to it.

State Congress chief and party MP of Berhampore Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who has been a key face in forming the Sanjukta Morcha with the two partners, made the conditional offer on Sunday to the TMC chief in wake of her open letter to UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and many others for support.

► **More on Page 3**

Noted actor Shashikala dies at 88 in Mumbai

Mumbai, April 4: Veteran actor Shashikala, best known for her supporting roles in 1960s-70s films like *Aarti*, *Gumrah* and *Chhote Sarkar*, passed away on Sunday at the age of 88.

B.N. Tiwari, president of the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE), confirmed the news of her death.

"Shashikalaji has passed away. She was 88. We don't know the exact details of her demise," Mr Tiwari told PTI.

When contacted, filmmaker and president of the Indian Film and Television Directors' Association, Ashoke Pandit said, "Shashikalaji has passed away."

Born in Solapur, Maharashtra, Shashikala Jawalkar started acting on stage at the age of five in her hometown. After her father went bankrupt, she moved to Bombay (now Mumbai) with her family and started to look for work in movies.

She made her first big screen appearance in the 1945 movie *Zeenat*. — PTI

107 held in UK as protesters clash with cops



Police personnel stand guard around the statue of PM Winston Churchill at Parliament Square during a "Kill the Bill" protest in London on Saturday. The demonstration is against the contentious Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which would give police stronger powers to restrict protests. A total 107 people were arrested after clashes between officers and demonstrators. — AP

Ex-Adidas owner, wife tied up, beaten during home burglary

Paris, April 4: Former French minister and scandal-ridden tycoon Bernard Tapie, the former owner of Adidas, was attacked along with his wife during a night-time burglary of their home, police sources said on Sunday.

The couple were asleep when four people broke into their house in Combs-la-Ville near Paris around 00:30 am on Sunday, beat them and



Bernard Tapie

tied them up before making off with their loot.

Dominique Tapie was able to free herself and made her way to a neighbour's home from where she alerted the police.

Slightly injured, she was then taken to hospital.

Mr Tapie himself declined to be taken into medical care, the sources

said. There was no immediate information about what goods the perpetrators took and what the loot is worth.

Mr Tapie is a former Socialist minister who rose from humble beginnings to build a sporting and media empire, but later faced a string of legal problems.

He made a fortune in the early part of his career by taking over failing companies. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DU teachers to go back on strike from April 12

New Delhi: The Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) on Sunday said it will go back on strike from April 12 if the "university fails to take concrete steps" to safeguard interest of employees and colleges. DUTA has been protesting for over three weeks against the appointment of senior administrative officers (Sr AOs) and the issue of a 'Pattern of Assistance' document in 12 Delhi government-funded DU colleges. According to a letter addressed to DU's acting vice chancellor P C Joshi, DUTA demanded that the university takes "concrete steps" to ensure the 12 colleges are "governed within the framework of DU Act and Ordinances". "It was decided and communicated to staff associations that while teachers will return to their classes from April 1, 2021, DUTA shall resume the strike from April 12 in case the university fails to take concrete steps to safeguard interest of employees and colleges," it said. DUTA has been raising demands to revoke an order from the Finance Department of the Delhi government that gives senior administrative officers additional charge of the 12 colleges. The vice chancellor wrote a letter to the Finance Department on March 24 and also held a meeting with Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on April 1 to discuss resolution of pending issues and collaboration for quality education. DUTA also requested the vice chancellor to hold a meeting and update the teachers' body on the latest development in the matter. — PTI

Jaguar patrolling teams deployed

New Delhi: The Delhi Police has deployed Jaguar Highway patrolling teams at vulnerable stretches in the north district in a bid to curb street crime, officials said. The initiative has led to the arrest of 21 criminals till March 15, they said. According to police, 16 thieves, two robbers, two people with illegal arms and a snatcher have been nabbed by the patrolling staff. "To curb street crime in north Delhi, a new initiative of deploying Jaguar Highway Patrol Teams at vulnerable stretches, especially Outer Ring Road, was introduced on December 26 last year. The teams have been deployed at their designated stretches in three shifts, which keep patrolling the area round-the-clock, a senior police officer said. "These patrolling teams also keep a tab on PCR calls related to their designated routes and nearby area, and reach the spot instantly. These teams also check suspects by implementing 'rokotoko' strategy," he said. The officer said they have chosen Outer Ring Road as it is usually easy for criminals to escape via this route after committing the crime. The patrolling staff has so far checked 19,786 vehicles. A total of 3,808 vehicles were checked in January, 10,346 in February and 5,632 till March 15, the officer said, adding that 709 vehicles have been impounded this year so far. — PTI

Probe on into Sai Baba idol removal

New Delhi: The Delhi Police is investigating the removal of a Sai Baba idol from a temple in south Delhi's Hauz Khas after some devotees filed a complaint alleging it was demolished, officials said on Sunday. Locals said the idol has been replaced with a Lord Ganesha Idol. Police said while no formal case has been registered in the matter yet, the temple authorities will be called for an enquiry. The complaining devotees approached the police after a purported video of the removal incident surfaced on social media. In the video, a man supervising the removal of the idol could be seen arguing as to what religion the idol represented. According to police, on March 25, a Sai Baba idol was removed from the temple of Shahpur Jat, Hauz Khas, by the temple committee and local residents as the idol was about 10 years old. "We have received a complaint. The matter is being looked into and appropriate legal action will be taken accordingly," said Atul Kumar Thakur, deputy commissioner of police (South). No case has been registered yet. — PTI

4 arrested, restaurants, clubs fined for flouting Covid rules

2-day special drive conducted to crack down on violators as cases rise in city

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

Four people were arrested and several restaurants, night clubs and hotels have been fined and face cases for flouting Covid-19 safety guidelines, police officials said on Sunday following a two-day special drive to crackdown on violators amid rising coronavirus cases in the city.

The drive, in which people were also fined for not wearing face masks and spitting in public areas, was conducted in places with high footfall, including markets, on Friday and Saturday.

Some of the establishments were penalised for serving hookah, police said.

Giving details about the drive in the New Delhi district area, a senior police officer said FIRs were registered against the owners of Jain Chawal Wala at Connaught Place, Informal Restaurant at Janpath, Classic Chicken Restaurant at Shaheed Bhagat Singh Marg and Choice Chicken Corner Kalina at Gole Market for not observing COVID-appropriate behaviour.

A total of 17 FIRs were registered against the violators, police said.

The cases were registered under Indian Penal Code sections 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life), 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) and 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant). Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Vikas Kumar said.

They also have been booked under Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, he said. Besides them, nine people were fined Rs 2,000 each for not wearing masks in the Khan Market area and three others for the same reason at the Ashoka Hotel in Chanakypuri, Kumar said.

According to police, in the South East district, 10 FIRs were registered and

Delhi's Covid surge continues as over 4,000 cases reported 1st time this year

New Delhi, April 4: Delhi recorded 4,033 coronavirus cases on Sunday, the highest daily count this year, as the positivity rate rose to 4.64 percent from 4.48 percent the previous day, according to the health department. Twenty-one more people died due to the disease, the highest since January 1, when an equal number of fatalities were reported.

The number of cumulative cases stands at 6,76,414 and the death toll is 11,081. The city had reported 3,567 cases on Saturday and 3,594 cases on Friday. The last time the city recorded more than 4,000 cases was on December 4 when 4,067 people were diagnosed with Covid-19.

330 people fined for not wearing face mask, not maintaining social distancing and spitting in public places.

Several night clubs, including the M House Club and Bar and Rouse Night Club at Eros Hotel in Nehru Place, were fined for not maintaining social distancing and serving hookahs. Deputy Commissioner of Police (South East) R. P. Meena said. Municipal corporations and the excise department have been asked to cancel their licenses, he said. Besides the Epidemic Diseases Act, they have been also booked under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, Meena said.

He said a case has also been registered against Bokan Cafe for not following Covid-19 protocols.

Restaurants in the New Friends Colony sub-division like Brijwasi, Al Nawaz, Al Jawahar, Zehra Al Noor and Al Bake were also fined and booked under the Epidemic Diseases Act, the police said.

Delhi had reported 2,790 cases on Thursday, and 1,819 coronavirus cases on Wednesday, 992 cases on Tuesday, 1,904 cases on Monday and 1,881 cases on last Sunday. The number of active cases rose to 13,982 from 12,647 a day before.

The 4,033 new cases have come from a total of 86,899 tests, including 54,472 RT-PCR ones, conducted a day ago, the bulletin said. The number of people under home isolation rose to 7,144 from 6,569 a day ago. The containment zones rose to 2,917 from 2,618 on Saturday, it said.

The number of cumulative cases as on January 1 had stood at over 6.25 lakh and the total fatalities were 10,557. The number of daily cases had started

to come down in February.

On February 26, the month's highest daily count of 256 cases was recorded.

However, the daily cases began to rise again in March and have been steadily increasing since then.

Of the 6,139 beds set aside for coronavirus patients in government and private hospitals in Delhi, 3,404 are unoccupied, according to government data.

Earlier this week, 230 more ICU beds for coronavirus patients have been added in 33 private hospitals on the directions of the city government.

The number of non-ICU beds in these private facilities has been increased by 842. — PTI

Varsities in Delhi gear up to curb Covid-19 on campuses

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

The increase in coronavirus cases in the national capital has prompted institutions of higher education here including the Delhi University (DU) and the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) to take necessary steps to control the spread of the virus on their campuses.

While the DU issued guidelines on Saturday advising students to stay home or at their hostels and avoid physical presence for their academic work unless "very essential", the JNU on Sunday made it mandatory for all to wear masks at all the times inside the campus.

In a notice, the DU said that academic activities and essential works will continue with thermal screening at gates, social distancing and wearing

masks mandatorily, while entry inside the Faculty of Science, Faculty of Arts, hostels and halls among other places will be restricted and no outsiders allowed. The university has also cancelled booking of conference centre and seminar hall for any functions till further notice.

The JNU instructed faculty and staff members to use face masks at all times "to set an example" with regard to observing Covid-19 protocols. Shopkeepers and canteen staff have also been instructed to wear face masks.

The circular said that "any violation would attract closure of shop or canteen for two days initially, and further violation will be dealt with strictly as per guidelines and norms of the government of India, the Delhi government and the University notification, etc".

Farmers not leaving protest sites near Delhi, says Tikait

Ahmedabad, April 4: Refuting claims that farmers have left protest sites along the Delhi border, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait on Sunday said they had gone to the fields to work and would return when the Central government was "free from West Bengal elections".

Farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, have been protesting at the Delhi border for over 4 months now against the Centre's three agri marketing laws, and have demanded its repeal along with a legal guarantee on the minimum support price mechanism.

Tikait, who reached Gujarat to drum up support for the stir, began his two-day visit by praying at the Ambaji Temple in Banaskantha district and then addressing groups in Ambaji and Palanpur.

He told a gathering that the three laws were enacted to help businessmen and not farmers, and the latter had decided to not move from the protest sites till victory, that is acceptance of all their

EXHORTING FARMERS from Gujarat to use tractors to protest, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait said these vehicles are the "tanks of farmers" and were put to good use in Delhi to remove police barricades

demands, was achieved.

"All reports that farmers have left the agitation sites are wrong. Farmers come and go. At present, they have gone to work in their fields. We have told them to come back once the government is free from (West) Bengal elections. The entire government is camping in Bengal. Once the government returns, we will start negotiations with it," Tikait claimed.

He said farmers from Gujarat must also join the protest in large numbers so that the country feels confident that cultivators from the state from where some of the big leaders hail, a possible reference to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, are also against the new laws. Exhorting farmers from Gujarat to use tractors to

protest, Tikait said these vehicles are the "tanks of farmers" and were put to good use in Delhi to remove police barricades.

While former Gujarat chief minister Shankarsinh Vaghela accompanied Tikait in his rally from Ambaji to Palanpur, Congress MLA Geniben Thakor welcomed the BKU leader when he entered the state earlier in the day.

Incidentally, Tikait had taken a swipe at the BJP government in Gujarat earlier in the day by showing his passport to reporters while entering the state after alighting from a train in Abu Road in neighbouring Rajasthan.

Asked about whether he was carrying a Covid-19 negative certificate, which is mandatory while travelling to Gujarat, Tikait showed his passport and said, "I have all the documents with me. This is my passport if it is required to enter Gujarat".

Tikait will visit Sabarmati Ashram on Monday and go to Bardoli on the second day of his Gujarat visit.

— PTI



Farmers raise slogans during a panchayat on the National Highway-9 near Ghazipur in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

Centre punishing AAP govt in Delhi for supporting farmers' agitation: Kejriwal

Chandigarh, April 4: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday alleged that the BJP-led Centre was trying to punish his government for supporting the farmers' agitation by creating hurdles in its functioning with the new law that gives primacy to the lieutenant governor.

Addressing a farmers' 'mahapanchayat' in Haryana's Jind district, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener asserted that he is ready to make any sacrifice for the

sake of farmers who are agitating against the three central agri laws.

He went on to say that anyone who opposes the farmers' stir is a "traitor".

They (BJP) have brought a Bill in Parliament to punish Kejriwal. We bore the brunt. They are punishing us for supporting farmers' agitation, said Kejriwal, while lashing out at the Centre for the enactment of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill in March.

The chief minister said

all powers will be now be with the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi.

What kind of law is this, he said, adding that his party despite winning 62 seats would have no power.

He claimed that each member of the BJP had said in Parliament that Kejriwal was punished for supporting farmers' agitation.

I want to tell them that our 300 farmers have laid down their lives. For the sake of this agitation, even if Kejriwal dies we are not scared of your punishment, he said.

He said he was ready for any sacrifice for the farmers' agitation.

Today farmers are seeing us as their well-wisher. Whatever punishment the central government wants to give me, I do not care, he said.

Kejriwal said that it is the responsibility of every Indian who loves his country to support the farmers.

Any person who is with this agitation is a patriot and the one who is against the farmers' agitation is a traitor, he said. — PTI

Proper use of underground spaces among proposals to decongest CP

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

To decongest traffic at Connaught Place and ensure there's no unauthorised parking, the Delhi Traffic Police has submitted a proposal to civic authorities to upgrade the "underutilised" underground parking near Palika Bazaar, officials said on Sunday.

According to the officials, traffic congestion at Connaught Place, especially during weekends, is primarily due to shortage of parking space and less room on footpaths for people to walk because of encroachment by hawkers.

"We want to improvise the parking system and make it more efficient. We want to get the underground parking as well as the multi-level parking properly utilised," a senior traffic police official said.

"At present, the underground parking area in Palika Bazaar is being used only 40 per cent and even the multi-level parking system at Baba Kharak Singh Marg is being utilised for only

about 20-30 per cent while the surface parking is being fully used," the official said.

He said the traffic police has suggested the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) to fix slightly higher parking charges for vehicles which are parked for more than four hours in Connaught Place.

The Delhi Traffic Police said it has conducted a series of meetings with officials of the New Delhi Traders Association (NDTA) and the NDMC over the past two months regarding a proposal to upgrade the parking facility at Connaught Place.

A d d i t i o n a l Commissioner of Police (Traffic Southern Range) S D Mishra said the proposal has been made to set up an enhanced parking facility at Connaught Place and create space for pedestrians.

"We want to create a deterrent and send this message across that unauthorised parking on the road will not be tolerated, he said.

The plan to make Connaught Place a vehicle-free zone, to decongest the heritage shopping

arcade continued to be delayed for years and remained only on paper due to stiff resistance from traders, inadequate parking facilities and lack of a foolproof traffic management plan that were cited as reasons for the non-implementation of the plan.

According to the latest proposal, the underground parking facility near Palika Bazaar needs to be upgraded as it is in a very "bad shape". Also, the safety aspect needs to be addressed as there is no suitable lighting.

During the meetings, NDTA general secretary Vikram Badwar had pointed out that one of the main reasons for the underutilisation of underground parking adjacent to Palika Bazaar was the "pathetic condition" of the parking space.

Responding to this, the traffic officials said women, differently-abled persons and the elderly who own shops in Connaught Place can park their cars at surface-level parking, but the NDTA should try to convince others to start using the underground parking.

AAP govt built no hospital, flyover between 2015-19: BJP

New Delhi, April 4: The BJP on Sunday hit out at the ruling AAP in Delhi alleging that it did not build any hospital and flyover during its rule between 2015 and 2019.

Citing replies to two RTI queries filed in 2019 by Tejpal Singh, a city resident, the BJP's national media in-charge and chief spokesperson Anil Baluni said, that by making "false" claims about development works, the AAP has cheated people of the national capital.

According to Bulani, the Directorate of Health Services, Delhi, said that "according to information available in Hospital cell of DGHS, it is informed that no new hospital has been commissioned under Delhi government, during April 2015 to 31st March 2019." In another reply, the Public Works Department of Delhi government said it has not undertaken any flyover construction work between April 1, 2015, to 31st March, 2019, the BJP leader said. — PTI



SHORT TAKES

SP founder member Bhagwati Singh dies

Lucknow: Founder member of the Samajwadi Party and former UP minister Bhagwati Singh died here on Sunday. The 89-year-old died at a degree college in Lucknow's Bakshi ka Talab area where he was staying, according to family sources. The last rites of Singh will not be done as he had pledged to donate his body to the King George Medical University, the sources said. Expressing grief over Mr Singh's death, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav said in a tweet, "May God give peace to the soul, and strength to the family to bear the loss". Being a founder member of the SP, Mr Singh was considered to be close to SP patron Mulayam Singh Yadav. The SP chief's press conference scheduled for the day has been cancelled as a mark of respect to Mr Singh. — PTI

LDF, UDF competing for scams: Nirmala

Thiruvalla: Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday alleged there was "competition" between the ruling LDF and Opposition UDF fronts in Kerala to outdo each other in scams and said they were not interested in people's welfare, but only "filling their pockets". She also attacked the Left government over the Sabarimala issue, alleging that there was an attempt to stealthily send women, who were not Ayyappa devotees, to the hill shrine and raise the "Lal Salaam" salute, a communist greeting. Speaking at a road show at Thiruvalla in Pathanamthitta district, where the Sabarimala Lord Ayyappa temple is located, Sitharaman flayed the police action against devotees. The state had witnessed violent protests by activists of the BJP and right wing outfits two years ago against the left government's decision to implement the 2018 SC verdict, allowing women of all age groups to offer prayers at the shrine, where traditionally, those aged between 10-50 years are barred. — PTI

BPF moves SC to put off Tamulpur polling

Guwahati: The Bodoland People's Front (BPF) on Sunday moved the Supreme Court seeking postponement of polling in Tamulpur assembly seat, after its candidate — Rangia Khungur Basumatary — defected to the BJP less than a week before voting and after the deadline for withdrawal of nominations. Tamulpur, a constituency in Bodoland Territorial Council is scheduled to vote on Tuesday in the third and final phase of the elections in Assam. Earlier the BPF chief Hagrama Mohilary in a letter had pleaded to the Election Commission, seeking permission to change the BPF's candidate for the Tamulpur seat.

VIJAYVARGIYA: NO NRC PLAN FOR W. BENGAL

PRADIPTA TAPADAR KOLKATA, APRIL 4

Countering Opposition claims that the BJP, if voted to power in Bengal, will update the National Register of Citizens (NRC), thereby "taking away the citizenship rights of people," Kailash Vijayvargiya, the saffron camp's national general secretary, on Sunday reaffirmed that no such plan is on the radar. He, however, stated that the party intends to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and provide rights to refugees who fled religious persecution in neighbouring countries and moved to India. "We are only looking forward to implementing the CAA after the elections, as promised in the manifesto. It is an important issue for us, as we strive to grant citizenship to the persecuted refugees. We do not have any plan of conducting the NRC exercise, even if we win the elections," he said. According to state BJP sources, the new citizenship law will benefit more than 1.5 crore people in India, including over 72 lakh in West Bengal. Accusing the TMC of "running a disinformation campaign against the saffron camp, the 64-year-old leader wondered why the ruling party in the state is opposing the CAA, which could be of benefit to many. — PTI

Is he god or superhuman? Didi takes swipe at PM

How can you, as a PM, direct the state government officers to be ready for BJP oath-taking? Mamata

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, APRIL 4

Modi insulting women of Bengal: TMC

Kolkata, April 4: Three Trinamul Congress women leaders, including West Bengal minister Sashi Panja, on Sunday accused the prime minister of showing disrespect to chief minister Mamata Banerjee by way of his "mocking tone" of addressing her at election rallies. Ms Panja told reporters at Trinamul Bhavan here that Narendra Modi, through his sarcastic "didi o didi" (listen elder sister) exclamations at public meetings, "insults not only Banerjee, but the women of Bengal in particular." "This is another glaring instance of the numerous ways our CM is being harassed and heckled by the BJP. This behaviour of the PM is anti-woman, akin to harassment. We will leave it to the people of West Bengal to give a befitting reply to Modi and (Union home minister) Amit Shah," she said. TMC leader Ananya Chakraborty said the PM shows his patriarchal mindset by addressing a woman leader in such a manner as they are "soft targets". — PTI

Campaign for the third phase of West Bengal election for 31 Assembly segments that will go to polls on April 6 ended on Sunday. After polling in 60 Assembly segments in the southwestern parts of the state in the first two phases, constituencies in the southern part are going to the polls in the third phase. Senior BJP leader Swapan Dasgupta, TMC minister Ashima Patra and former CPI(M) minister Kanti Ganguly are among the 205 candidates whose campaigns for the third phase ended on Sunday evening.



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee during an election rally at Sonarpur of the South 24 Parganas district ahead of the 3rd Phase of the Assembly polls on Sunday. — ASIAN AGE

Adhir: Mamata has realised she can't defeat BJP alone 'Didi scared of defeat in Nandigram'

PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI BERHAMPORE, APRIL 4

In a dramatic twist, the Congress, which is fighting the West Bengal Assembly Election in an alliance with the Left Front and influential Muslim cleric of Furfura Sharif Peerzada Abbas Siddiqui's new outfit: Indian Secular Front, has indicated that it would look into offering it's support to chief minister Mamata Banerjee to tackle the BJP only if she withdraws as many as 22 Trinamul Congress candidates for the polls in Murshidabad, as a "favour" to it. State Congress chief and party MP of Berhampore



Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who has been a key face in forming the alliance: Sanjukta Morcha with the two partners, made the conditional offer on Sunday to the TMC chief in wake of her open letter to UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and many others for support. His calculated move however has raised

Mamata has been scared of defeat in Nandigram. That is why she wrote to Ms Gandhi to get Congress support to combat a communal BJP. But I request the CM: You first withdraw 22 TMC candidates in district in favour of Congress.

— Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Congress leader

eyebrows of the Left and ISF which see the TMC and BJP as common enemies in the poll battle. At Berhampore, Mr

Chowdhury said, "Ms Banerjee has been scared of her defeat in Nandigram. That is why she wrote to Ms Gandhi to get the support of the Congress to combat a communal BJP here. But I request the CM: You first withdraw all the 22 TMC candidates in this district in favour of Congress. Then we will think about supporting you." He however added, "Ms Banerjee, who has realised of her failure to fight the BJP alone, back-stabbed our party earlier by poaching many of our MLAs and taking control of municipalities and Panchayat bodies, which were won by us, with the help of her former protégé, Shuvendu Adhikari."

CM's kin made ₹900cr from smuggling web: Shuvendu

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, APRIL 4

In an explosive claim, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's protégé turned adversary: Shuvendu Adhikari on Sunday alleged that her MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee has pocketed an ill-gotten wealth of ₹900 crores as the proceeds of coal-cattle-sand smuggling network as an audio clip recording the conversation of absconding Trinamul Congress leader

Vinay Mishra and a suspect about the illegal financial transactions has gone viral in the last 24 hours in the state. "While the suspect: Ganesh Bagaria has been grilled by central agencies, Vinay is absconding with his brother Vikash in custody after getting arrested by the CBI. There is much information, which surfaced their conversation, relating to the CM nephew. Around ₹900 crores were sent to Bhaipo (nephew) by Vinay and



Ashok Mishra, a cop arrested by the Enforcement Directorate, as part of the coal-cattle-sand smuggling network



Shuvendu Adhikari

which flourished in 2012-13 in the state. I also had complained earlier that a section of the police personnel, whom Bhaipo kept

posted in various areas through her Pishi in Nabanna as part of his chain, helped in reaching the money directly to him," Mr Adhikari argued. He reasoned, "Bhaipo is the main architect of this state-sponsored scam under the patronage of the CM while others are suppliers. The CM too can not shirk her responsibility because she has made her Tolabaj Bhaipo (Extortionist Nephew) the second in command in her

party, be it officially or unofficially. He controls the police and looks after the postings. The cop, an inspector, arrested by the ED used to send the money to the tune of around ₹15 lakhs every month in an escort to Shantiniketan (residence of Abhishek)." Rejected the charges TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh however sought Mr Adhikari to reveal why he did not make the allegations, if it was true, when he was in the party and the government of Ms Banerjee.

Cong dividing people of Assam for power: Shah

Home minister cut short state visit due to Naxal attack

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, APRIL 4

Union home minister Amit Shah who cut short his visit to Assam in the wake Naxal attack in Chhattisgarh on Sunday said that BJP has already got the majority in first two phases of polling and accused the Congress party of having no vision for the development of the state.

Addressing an election rally in Barpeta district, on the last day of campaigning for the third and final phase of polls in Assam, Mr Shah accused the Congress of dividing people to rule over them, while the BJP follows the mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas and Sabka Vishwas' (with all, development for all and belief in all). Launching a frontal attack on Congress led grand alliance with AIUDEF, Mr Shah said, "The Congress cannot solve any problem and their leader Rahul Gandhi comes as a tourist to the state. They have no vision for development." Asserting that in the last five years the state has started moving on the path of development, Mr Shah said, "I had come to you five years ago and



Security personnel stand in queues to collect their duty passes for the third and final phase of Assam Assembly elections in Guwahati on Sunday. — PTI

urged you to repose faith in the Prime Minister and promised we will end violence and agitations. The BJP government in the state and Modiji has ensured this during the last five years." Reiterating that in the next term, the NDA is committed to make the state flood-free, Mr Shah said that the Prime Minister has already initiated the process. Mr Shah further said, "Let me share another good news with you. Elections are being held in West Bengal too and 'didi ja rahi hain aur BJP aah rahi hain (Didi, referring to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, is

Ready to quit cinema for politics, says Haasan

Coimbatore, April 4: Actor-turned-politician and Makkal Neethi M A i a m (M N M) founder Kamal Hassan on Sunday said he is ready to quit cinema if it becomes hurdle for his political career, which was meant for serving the people. "I will finish all my present assignments and quit films, if they become a hurdle to my political career," he told reporters here.

Saying his entry into politics was historic, as he was one among the 30 per cent who remained aloof from politics, he said that late chief minister M.G. Ramachandran had as MLA acted in many films to propagate his ideals and to achieve his goal of serving people. However, if cinema was becoming an obstacle, Mr Haasan said he would leave it to serve people. — PTI

Rahul seeks to woo Keraliites with Nyay, ₹6K for poor

Wayanad, April 4: As the campaign for the April 6 Assembly polls draws to a close, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday gave a further push to his "Nyuntam Aay Yojana" (Nyay) to reach out to the voters, promising that every poor person in the State will get ₹6,000 every month "without fail", if the UDF is voted to power. "The UDF is proposing something revolutionary. Something that has never been tried in any Indian state before," Mr Gandhi told a UDF meeting organised at Vellamunda in Mananthavady. Mr Gandhi, who reached the venue after offering prayers at the ancient Lord Mahavishnu Temple in Thirunelli, said the idea of Nyay was very simple. "The idea is that we are going to put money directly into the hands of the poorest people in Kerala. And not a small amount of money. Every poor person in Kerala is going to get ₹6,000 a month — ₹72,000 a year — without fail every month into his bank account," the Congress leader, who represents Wayanad constituency in the Lok Sabha, said. Mr Gandhi has given an increased focus on the Nyay scheme in his poll



Rahul Gandhi

meetings, apparently in a bid to counter the ruling Left which is relying heavily on the welfare schemes implemented by it in the last five years to win votes in the crucial polls. In the last five years, the Pinarayi Vijayan-led LDF government has substantially increased the welfare pension for the elderly. The welfare pension was ₹600 when the UDF rule came to an end in 2016. It is now ₹1,600 per month, with the left government increasing the amount in multiple phases. The government has also ensured that the pension amount reaches the beneficiaries every month without fail. Bringing up the Nyay idea during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Mr Gandhi had described it as ground-breaking, which would mark the beginning of the final assault on poverty. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Arms, ammunition seized near Attari

Amritsar: In a joint operation with the Border Security Force, the Punjab Police Sunday seized assault rifles and live cartridges near the Attari border which, officials said, were pushed into the Indian territory by Pakistani nationals associated with Sikh hardliners. Police said the recoveries were made just 10 metres from the border with Pakistan in the joint operation carried out based on a tip-off. The recoveries included one FAL 222 rifle with magazine loaded with nine live rounds, one AKM-47 rifle with a magazine loaded with five live rounds, one 303 bore gun with seven loaded live rounds, besides one 30 bore caliber China-made pistol with one magazine. Police said they had received specific intelligence inputs that a cache of weapons was pushed into the Indian territory in the area of border outpost Pulmoran near border village Dhanoa on the intervening night of April 3-4.

— PTI

13 injured in power plant in Sonbhadra

Lucknow: Thirteen labourers were injured when a scaffolding collapsed in Uttar Pradesh's Sonbhadra district in the early hours of Sunday, the company which had employed them for maintenance work said. In a letter addressed to the district magistrate and superintendent of police of Sonbhadra, factory manager of Lanco Anpara Power S.K. Dwivedi said the accident took place around 2.45 am when the iron structure fell during maintenance work. While eight labourers were discharged after treatment, another five are in a serious condition and have been admitted to a government hospital, he said. Of the five labourers, three got head injuries, one suffered a broken hand and another fractured his leg, Dwivedi said, adding, "All are out of danger". Dismissing reports in a section of the media about a boiler blast at the plant, Dwivedi told PTI, "The unit was closed for maintenance since March 22, and the maintenance work is of around one month duration." — PTI

PTI scribe Shrikanth dies of coronavirus

Chennai: Senior PTI journalist V. Shrikanth died here on Sunday, family sources said. Shrikanth, known in the organisation by his initials VS, was undergoing treatment for Covid at a city hospital where he breathed his last on Sunday. He is survived by wife and daughter. The 53-year-old Shrikanth, with over three decades of dedicated service to the organisation, was Chief Sub-Editor at the PTI's Chennai regional office. He had donned different roles and was passionate about sports. Shrikanth had done reporting also and covered many sporting events as well. He was known for his cheerful attitude and dedication to work and often added value to copies by researching data and incorporating them wherever required. His funeral is expected to be held tomorrow. — PTI

BATSMAN NEARLY KILLS FIELDER FOR TAKING HIS CATCH

Gwalior: A 23-year-old batsman who was approaching 50 runs in a cricket match in Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh hit a fielder with his bat after the latter took a catch and got him out, police said on Sunday. The fielder, identified as Sachin Parashar (23), had to be rushed to a government hospital in a critical condition and the batsman, Sanjay Paliya, was charged with attempt to murder, city superintendent of police Ramnaresh Pachouri said. The incident took place on Saturday during a game being played on Mela Ground under Gola Ka Mandir police station limits, the CSP added. "Paliya got angry after Parashar took his catch and got him out on 49, just one run short of a half century. Paliya rushed towards Parashar and started hitting him on the head with his bat. Other players tried to stop Paliya. Parashar continues to be unconscious in hospital," Mr Pachouri said. Paliya absconded from the place and efforts were on to nab him, the city superintendent of police said. — PTI

Mumbai reports 11,206 positive cases, highest since pandemic started
Complete weekend lockdown, night curfew in Maha amid Covid-19 spikeBHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, APRIL 4

After 'Mission Begin Again,' it's now 'Break the Chain' campaign in Maharashtra. In a bid to contain the rising spread of coronavirus, the Maharashtra government has imposed stringent restrictions across the state.

A strict lockdown over the weekends and night curfews on weekdays are a part of the measures taken by the State Cabinet on Sunday. Essential services have been exempted from the existing night curfew. The new restrictions will be implemented from 8 pm on Monday.

The 'Break the Chain' rules include a curfew from 8 pm to 7 am and a ban on gatherings of five or more throughout the day. The malls, restaurants, bars and places of worship will be closed. Hotels and restaurants will provide only take away and home delivery service till 8 pm.

Minority affairs minister and NCP leader Nawab Malik said, "Night curfew will continue and prohibitory orders issued under section 144 will be in force during the day time during the week. Industries and production sector, vegetable markets will function with Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) and construction sites will operate if there is an accommodation facility for workers."

Government offices will be allowed to function only at 50 per cent of their capacity, whereas work from home will be encouraged for offices, except for insurance, mediclaim, electricity and civic offices. However, work from home has been made compulsory for private offices.

Theatres, drama theatres

MAHARASHTRA REPORTED nearly 57,074 new cases on Sunday – around 60 per cent of all cases reported from across the country on the day, while 222 patients succumbed to the infection

will be shut, while film and television shootings will continue if there is no crowding. Parks and playgrounds will also be closed. Religious places will have to follow the SoPs, which will be issued soon.

However, there will be no new restrictions on traffic, as both public and private transport have been allowed to run.

The "Break the Chain" decisions were taken after Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray led a cabinet meeting to discuss the situation. Two days back, he had warned about a second lockdown to combat the spike in coronavirus cases in the state.

The CM via video conferencing also discussed the issue with major entrepreneurs, film producers and channel representatives. Former chief minister Devendra Fadnis and opposition leader Raj Thackeray were called up and the matter was discussed with them on the phone.

Maharashtra reported nearly 57,074 new cases on Sunday – around 60 per cent of all cases reported from across the country on the day, while 222 patients succumbed to the infection. With the addition of new infections, the overall tally in the state reached 30,10,597 while the death toll mounted to 55,878. Maharashtra now has 4,30,503 active cases.

State capital Mumbai reported over 11,206 cases on Sunday – the most in a day since the pandemic began in December 2019.



A fire broke out in a private hospital in Madhya Pradesh's Ujjain city on Sunday but a major tragedy was averted as the patients lodged there were shifted to other medical facilities in time. Four patients were 'affected' due to the smoke and the condition of two of them is critical. A total of 80 patients, including 62 infected by coronavirus, were being treated at the Patidar Hospital.

— PTI

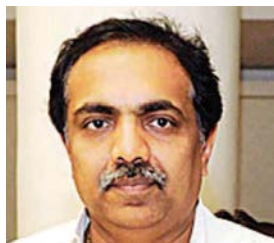
Maha mantri addresses NCP gathering without face mask

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, APRIL 4

Even as the Maharashtra government is urging people to follow Covid norms, a large number of NCP, one of the ruling parties in the state, workers gathered for a bypoll meeting in Pandharpur. Most of the people attending the meeting did not wear masks.

Maharashtra NCP president and state minister Jayant Patil also removed his mask while addressing the meeting.

Many NCP workers were seen on the stage in the visual without masks. Addressing the gathering, Mr Patil said that after looking at "your faces (without mask)", it seems that coronavirus



Jayant Patil

has left the world. "Therefore, I am also speaking after removing the mask," he added and took off his mask.

Interestingly, the meeting was held at a time when the local district administration has already imposed strict measures like the closure of shops and commercial establishments on weekends because of the rise in

cases.

When asked about his remarks after the meeting, Mr Patil told reporters that he spoke sarcastically. "Whatever I said (at the meeting) was sarcasm. People were sitting in the meeting as if Covid had ended. No one was wearing a face mask. During my speech, I also talked about the serious situation caused by a surge in infections in Maharashtra," he said.

The meeting was held ahead of the Pandharpur-Mangalwedha Assembly bypoll scheduled to be held on April 17. Threethime NCP legislator from Solapur district Bharat Bhalke had died in November 2020 while undergoing treatment for post-Covid complications.

Assam makes corona test must for air, train passengers

GUWAHATI, APRIL 4:

A day after Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed that there is no Covid in the state and hence no need to wear mask now, the health and family welfare department Sunday issued fresh notifications for mandatory testing of air and train passengers coming to the state from Mumbai and Bengaluru to check

the spread of virus.

Separate orders have been issued for air and train passengers and the rates for Covid testing by the department's principal secretary Samir Sinha.

The minister had on Saturday said that there is no Covid in Assam and so there is no need to wear a mask now which triggered widespread criticism.

— PTI

Haryana govt's issues new guidelines to check Corona

CHANDIGARH, APRIL 4:

The Haryana government on Sunday issued fresh guidelines putting a ceiling on the number of people permitted at functions in open spaces and indoors, and at funerals in the wake of a surge in Covid cases in the state.

While at the most 200 people would be allowed at events indoor, the crowd capacity outdoors has been put at 500. At

funerals, a maximum of 50 people would be allowed to attend, the new guidelines stated. Earlier, the limit on gatherings was implemented in Gurgaon and Faridabad.

Under the new SOPs, organisers of social, academic, sports, entertainment, cultural, religious and political gatherings must take permission from district magistrates.

— PTI

Bollywood actor Govinda tests positive for Covid-19

Mumbai, April 4: Actor Govinda has tested positive for the novel coronavirus and is under home quarantine, his wife Sunita Ahuja said on Sunday.

The 57-year-old actor has "mild symptoms" and is following necessary protocol.

"He (Govinda) tested positive today morning. His symptoms are absolutely mild. There's nothing to worry about. He is



quarantining at home and taking precautions," Govinda Sunita told PTI.

Govinda was last seen on the big screen in the 2019 comedy "Rangeela Raja".

Earlier in the day, superstar Akshay Kumar and "Bandish Bandits" actor RitwikBhowmik also tested positive for Covid-19. — PTI

22 jawans killed after forces walk into Maoist ambush

■ Continued from Page 1

security personnel," CRPF director general Kuldeep Singh, who visited Chhattisgarh on Sunday to take stock of the situation, told reporters in Raipur.

Questions are now being asked if the inputs on presence of Hidma in Terram area, based on which the counterinsurgency was launched by security forces, had been planted by Maoists.

"I cannot comment on it. The security forces tried to make inroads into the core area of Maoists and held fort for four hours. That itself is a big achievement," a senior CRPF officer here told this newspaper. Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel who flew to Raipur in the evening after winding up his election campaign for

Congress in Assam, said Maoists have also suffered huge casualties in the encounter.

"We received reports that Maoists took away bodies of their colleagues in four tractors from the encounter site," he said.

Mr Baghel indicated that his government would toughen its stand towards Maoists after the incident. "Maoists are fighting their last battle of survival now," he said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi shared his condolence message to the bereaved families of the slain jawans on Twitter. "My thoughts were with the families of those martyred while fighting Maoists in Chhattisgarh. The sacrifices of the brave martyrs will never be forgotten. May the injured recover at the earliest," he said.

As Covid cases rise, PM holds high-level meet

■ Continued from Page 1

sustainable Covid-19 management, awareness of the community and its involvement needed for which a special campaign for Covid appropriate behaviour with emphasis on 100 per cent mask usage, personal hygiene and sanitation at public places, workplaces and health facilities will be organised from April 6-14. Mr Modi directed officials to continue with the mission-mode approach in the States and districts reporting high cases so that the collective gains of Covid-19 management in the country in the last 15 months are not squandered. Mr Modi called attention of health authorities to avoid mortality under all circumstances by ramping up healthcare infrastructure, through availability of oxygen, ventilators besides required logistics, and ensuring that clinical management protocols are followed across all hospitals as

well as for those in-home care. He also highlighted the need to ensure effective implementation of containment measures and urged states to take stringent measures with comprehensive restrictions in places witnessing high surge to curb the spread. The PM directed that Central teams, consisting of public health specialists and clinicians, should be sent to Maharashtra in view of high case load and deaths, and to Punjab and Chhattisgarh because of the disproportionate number of deaths being reported there.

During the meeting, a detailed presentation was made highlighting alarming rate of growth of Covid-19 cases and deaths in the country with 10 states contributing to more than 91 per cent of cases and deaths. It was noted that the situation in Maharashtra, Punjab and Chhattisgarh is of serious concern.

the state".

At least this should have been appreciated that the "side show" was fraught with immense potential to have an adverse impact on law and order across West Bengal and may be in some other states, it said.

"And all this was being done when the election process was/is on. There could not have been a greater misdeed/misdeed," the letter stated. — PTI

NIA finds papers detailing 'monthly bribes' paid to cops

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, APRIL 4

The NIA, which is investigating the Mukesh Ambani security scare case, has seized documents that show payments of alleged monthly bribes being made to officials in the Mumbai Police and the administration. The agency is scrutinising the documents unearthed during a raid on a club in South Mumbai.

According to the NIA, arrested police officer Sachin Waze frequented the bar from which these documents have been recovered.

The agency has further stated that if needed the documents would be shared with the Income Tax and CBI authorities for further probe as the NIA is supposed to investigate anti-terror cases only.

One of the documents shows the name of the office as well as officers by designation and there was an amount mentioned against their names, and the same had been tabulated monthly, the officials said.

The investigators suspect that the amounts mentioned against the office and officers could be the bribe money paid every month.

The NIA is scrutinising the documents unearthed during a raid on Thursday on a club at Girgaum in South Mumbai to probe further the role of Waze, who is in the custody of the NIA



Sachin Waze

THE AGENCY has further stated that if needed the documents would be shared with the Income Tax and CBI authorities for further probe as the NIA is supposed to investigate anti-terror cases only.

till April 7.

Before sharing further details, the NIA is likely to seek an explanation from the club owner and others about the documents.

The NIA had Thursday also recovered documents pertaining to SIM cards procured through Gaur for his personal use.

Gaur is alleged to have procured the SIM cards from Ahmedabad in Gujarat and these were handed over to Waze through Shinde, an officer said.

One of these SIM cards was used by Waze to give a call to Hiran, which turned out to be Hiran's last call before his murder.

Hiran was allegedly killed by Waze after reports started surfacing that the case may be handed over to the central agency for probe.

Wildfire rages again in Odisha's Similipal reserve

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 4

Large-scale forest fire incidents have been reported from different ranges in Odisha's Similipal National Park. Billowing smoke has enveloped the area triggering health concerns, reports said on Sunday.

Besides, the forest fire has resulted in the rise of temperature in the region.

As per reports, as many as 52 fresh fire spots have come up in different ranges of the wild. Several fire points have been identified at Pandabandh and Champapulia under Tiger Reserve South, 6 were noticed in STR North.

Notably, the Similipal Tiger Reserve was affected by a massive wildfire for 10 long days in February and damaged thousands of medicinal trees.

Kendumundi forest ranges.

Even as over 1,000 personnel of the Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF), Fire services and forest officials have been engaged in extinguishing the inferno in the national park, they have reportedly failed to bring the flames completely under control, said reports.

Earlier on March 31, as many as 50 fire spots were reported in Similipal. While 28 fire points were identified in Similipal Tiger Reserve South, 6 were noticed in STR North.

Notably, the Similipal Tiger Reserve was affected by a massive wildfire for 10 long days in February and damaged thousands of medicinal trees.

Chhattisgarh: Rise of Hidma in Maoist rank

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, APRIL 4

Madvi Hidma, for whom 22 jawans laid their life while trying to hunt him down in Terram area of the Sukma-Bijapur border in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar region, on Saturday rose rapidly in the Maoist ranks in the past two decades.

Hidma, hailing from Puvarti village in south Bastar district of Sukma, is literally a 'born' Naxal being graduated from a Maoist school in Jagargunda area, declared as "Liberated Zone" by the rebels, before being initiated into Leftwing extremism in the early 1990s.

"He is the only 'desi' (homegrown) Naxal leader who rose rapidly in the ranks of Maoists in Bastar. He posed a serious challenge for security forces not for being a skilled combat strategist only but also being a homegrown tribal rebel", a senior police officer involved in crafting counterinsurgency strategies told this newspaper on Sunday.

Maoist leaders from undivided Andhra Pradesh have hitherto been taking leadership of Leftwing cadres of Bastar in the last three decades,



Madvi Hidma

prompting security forces in Chhattisgarh to create a narrative of 'locals vs outsiders' to woo local tribal cadres away from the rebel fold.

Hidma, now in mid-forties, has threatened to counter that narrative by claiming him as the 'desi' Maoist leader to arrest gradual erosion of Maoist base among the local tribals in Bastar, a research scholar on Leftwing extremism in Chhattisgarh told this newspaper.

"Hidma has virtually become a myth in Bastar. No one was sure if the real Hidma is alive or dead. Nobody knows how many Hidmas have been created by Maoists. Maoists as per their strategy try to promote and preserve the image of a leader to sway their cadres", Dr Girish Kant Pandey, who has done his PhD on Leftwing extremism in Bastar, told this newspaper.

Hidma, who shot into

the limelight for his involvement in 2010 Naxal attack on a CRPF party in Tadmetla in Sukma district killing 76 jawans, was second-in-command of late Ramanna who was then secretary of

Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee (DKZC). Hidma has grown as a ruthless Maoist leader and military strategist under the tutelage of Ramanna, who died last year.

He is now heading PLGA's battalion number one and a member of the powerful Central Committee (CC) of outlawed CPI (Maoist).

He was also believed to have led the attack on the convoy of Chhattisgarh Congress president Nand Kumar Patel at Jeeram Ghati in Bastar on May 25, 2013, killing 32 people including 26 Congress leaders.

He was involved in the attack on security forces in Tahakawada in south Bastar district of Bijapur on March 11, 2014, killing 15 jawans.

On March 21, 2020, he led an attack on a CRPF party in Minpa in Sukma district killing 17 jawans.

He was allegedly involved in the killing of 32 CRPF jawans in Burkhapal in Sukma district on April 25, 2017.

THE ASIAN AGE

5 APRIL 2021

EC's perverse inaction bodes ill for democracy

With the polling scheduled tomorrow in various states and the UT of Puducherry, the current round of Assembly polls would conclude in the country, leaving only the last five phases of the election in West Bengal, the last of which is slotted for April 29. But even in that state, the areas where the BJP is likely to mount a credible challenge to the ruling Trinamul Congress of chief minister Mamata Banerjee would have voted by Tuesday. For all practical purposes April 6 thus marks the end of spice time this election season.

Since the contest between the TMC and the BJP is thought to be sharp, virtually leaving out the Congress-Left-ISF combine on the periphery of the proceedings, the national leadership of the Congress in the shape of the Gandhis had given West Bengal the go-by. They had confined their campaigning to Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam. Perhaps, if they are so inclined, they may now choose to canvass for their party in the state without attracting the charge of indirectly helping BJP by laying into Trinamul Congress — which they would have to do, being the opposition.

The campaigning in all states has been vigorous, and in West Bengal also indecorous — thanks to the degrading levels to which BJP and TMC took it — and violent. In Assam too, the BJP campaign language appeared shrill. But the Election Commission of India does not appear to fully use the authority it has to straighten out the election process and electioneering. Therefore, there's not much use hoping that it would move to cut out the gangster-film lingo and style in campaigns, a wholly new trend we have come to associate with the past six years. It is futile to expect that the era

of chief election commissioners like T.N. Seshan and James Michael Lyngdoh is about to return anytime soon.

If truth be told, the ECI's conduct was being judged by the people as much as that of political parties in the fray. In West Bengal, the EC practically placed the burden of the conduct of the polls at the law and order level on the central forces, edging out the state police in order to ensure impartiality. However, the central forces sat mute as CM Mamata Banerjee got confined to one polling booth as violent TMC and BJP mobs were rampaging. The central forces were doing aerial surveillance as well. What use was all this is a question that needs to be looked at by all concerned.

The ECI also watched mutely as the central investigating agencies — Income Tax and the Enforcement Directorate — conducted searches on prominent Opposition politicians in Tamil Nadu and in West Bengal on senior leaders of the TMC, against which the BJP is ranged. In Assam, EC's local officials placed EVMs full of ballots after the polling into the vehicle of the local BJP candidate. What does it say for India's democracy? Similar objections have been raised by Opposition parties in previous elections, too.

Also in Assam, with alacrity the ECI took a lenient view and relaxed the penalty it had imposed on Himanta Biswa Sarma, the most important state BJP leader who had been barred for campaigning for 48 hours since he was accused of threatening an Opposition leader. In Tamil Nadu, it refused to give similar relief to DMK leader A. Raja. A stiffening of the ECI's spine is needed for the health of our democracy.

Hong Kong for 'patriots'

China's takeover of Hong Kong will be complete nearly 25 years after Britain handed the colony back to the mainland in 1997. Last week, China passed sweeping changes to the electoral rules to tighten control over the city by which only "patriotic" citizens can run for positions of power. In effect, this is a takeover of Parliament ensuring that pro-democracy legislators and other opponents of the regime are kept out. This means the end of democracy is at hand though Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam promises that the vetting committee will not keep people out based only on their political views. The first vote under the new configuration of the Legislative Council is to be held in December.

China's moves to bring the Hong Kong legislature under its thumb were predictably aligned to the current scene when the world is still busy fighting recurring waves of the pandemic triggered by newer variants. While the number of directly elected members of the legislature has been brought down to 20 from 35, the council itself expands to 90 seats from 70 but all members will presumably be pro-China as a double vetting system would eliminate most critics of Beijing. The movement for greater freedoms under the Basic Laws of Hong Kong in 2019 has been brought to heel through police brutality that broke the spirit of the demonstrators even before fears of Covid-19 forced the people on to the back foot in the early days of the 2020 pandemic.

The "one country, two systems" promise of 1997 is just a dim memory now. The former British colony was considered a model of enterprise in a free market. While the economy of the city may not suffer under China, the wide reaching national security law that bans "secession, subversion and collusion with foreign forces" will ensure Hong Kong's halcyon days of political freedoms are over. The world must fear now over which other areas China's ambitions will soar to as the country, now economically more powerful, casts its eyes wider through the Belt & Road initiative.

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Subhani

THE REAL INFLUENCERS...



Quad Quandary: Of social intimacy, political conflict



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

Even at the height of the Cold War and the anti-Communist McCarthyism of the 1950s in the United States, when Americans were warned to look for "Reds under the bed", Hollywood never dreamt up a story in which a high-level Soviet woman spy makes it to the US defence secretary's bedroom. So an Australian television series, *Secret City*, that shows the wife of the Chinese ambassador in Canberra, an attractive Mata Hari doubling up as a Chinese secret agent, having a torrid affair with none less than the defence minister of Australia, shows how intimate have been the links between the power elites of China and Australia.

Social intimacy between the Chinese power elite and their Australian, Japanese and even American counterparts has been cemented over four decades of intense diplomatic, business and people-to-people engagement between them. By contrast, the very limited social contact between Indian and Chinese elites sets India aside from its partners — Australia, Japan and the United States — in the four-member Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, that has come to be known as the "Quad". This despite India's increased social and business interaction with China over the past three decades.

Many analysts have pointed to the key paradox in the Quad — that each of the four countries have extensive economic links with China that they cannot wish away even as they seek to engage in what some have termed the "geo-economic containment" of China. All four coun-

tries have been trying to reduce their economic dependence on China even as China is itself trying to reduce its dependence on external trade. While the numbers are changing, the magnitudes are still large.

India cannot ignore the fact that Australia, Japan and the United States continue to do far more business with China than they do with India. It could take a long time before their trade and investment links with India are large enough for them to ignore China. Till that happens, India must expect that its three Quad partners will hedge their bets in dealing with China.

Apart from the business and economic links, it is the social links with China that set Japan, Australia and the United States apart from India in a significant way. Japan and China have had centuries old and intimate social and cultural links that continue to manifest in high level of people-to-people interaction between the two neighbours. Millions of Chinese and Japanese travel to each other's countries. Chinese students are to be found in the thousands in Japan and vice versa. Taken together, the business and social relations between the two have created an influential pro-China constituency within the Japanese elite. The level of social and cultural interaction between Indian and Japanese elites is woefully limited.

As for Down Under, the plot of *Secret City* has not been conjured out of thin air. It reflects the kind of social intimacy that the Chinese and Australian elites have established over the past century. As with Japan so with Australia, inter-

elite interactions with China remain far in excess of such interaction with India. While an increasing number of Indians now study and work in Australia and Indo-Australian relations have improved over the past decade, there are few among the Australian elite who take a more favourable view of India than they do of China.

The US is in a special class of its own when it comes to "Sinomania". Indeed, it's recent "Sino-phobia" has not yet turned China into the kind of object of hate and derision that the much less powerful Russia still is. US-China people-to-people relations have had a long history. Chinatowns and chop suey have been an important part of American social life from New York to San Francisco. Millions of American and Chinese students and tourists have visited each other's countries for close to a half century now. Several US universities and think tanks are funded by Chinese businesses.

The more limited interaction that Indian elites have had with their Chinese counterparts over the past couple of decades of increased social and economic interaction will now only atrophy given the deterioration in the bilateral relationship in recent months. The behaviour of the Chinese authorities would seem to suggest that they do not really care if their business and social relations with India will suffer on account of the geopolitical differences. That will be a pity.

Consider next the geopolitical space within which the Quad functions, namely the Indo-Pacific. This too is a

peculiar construct. Almost all countries of the Indo-Pacific not only remain economically engaged with China, they do more business with China than they do with the United States or India. Not surprisingly, therefore, they all signed up for membership to what has been described as the "China-led" Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Japan is the only RCEP country that insisted on keeping the door open to India even as India chose to walk out. Most others looked the other way and went along with China.

Handling this paradox at the heart of the Indo-Pacific region in general and the Quad in particular will remain a challenge for all countries, including China. Continued assertiveness and muscle-flexing by China can only strengthen the resolve of countries in Asia and Europe to reduce their dependence on China. While China is big enough to continue to grow on the strength of its domestic economy, it's very size and expanse makes it dependent on links with the rest of the world. China has also learnt from the former Soviet Union's experience that excessive insularity is as much of a threat to internal growth and stability as excessive dependence. Economies large and small have to strike a balance between self-reliance and building relations of interdependence with the rest of the world. Given the kind of links that China has established with all major economies, it remains to be seen how effective the Quad countries can be in decoupling themselves from China and for how long China can afford to completely ignore global opinion.

The writer is an economist, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His latest book is India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution.

India cannot ignore the fact that Australia, Japan and the United States continue to do far more business with China than they do with India

LETTERS

REIN IN MAOISTS

The brutal killing of as many as 22 jawans in the encounter with Naxals in Chhattisgarh during operation along the Sukma-Bijapur border on Saturday is most shocking. It bears recall that 25 CRPF personnel were brutally murdered in the same Sukma district in April 2017 followed by nine in March 2018 during encounters with the Maoists. A multi-pronged initiative, meticulously planned and uncompromisingly implemented, is direly imperative.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

DMK MIGHT WIN

ALMOST ALL THE pre-poll surveys conducted by various agencies have predicted a very clear victory for the DMK alliance in Tamil Nadu. Most of the people who have given their opinion in the above polls have preferred M.K. Stalin over the incumbent, E. Palaniswami as the next chief minister of the state. While the wishes of the Tamil Nadu electorate are clearly written on the wall, there is also a serious apprehension about tampering of the electronic voting machines, to favour the ruling party, particularly when we have to wait for almost a month after the elections are conducted. In West Bengal and Assam, serious lapses have been reported.

Tharcus S. Fernando
Chennai

CAREFUL, GANGULY

REMEMBER HOW Greg Chappell's showers of praise proved to be the undoing of Irfan Pathan? Now he may have been a mentor to great cricketers like Yuvraj Singh, Harbhajan Singh and Mohammed Kaif, and will certainly give the best advice unlike the erstwhile India coach, but Sourav Ganguly should be careful that his "obsession" with Rishabh Pant, the new Delhi Capitals captain, does not go to the latter's head. After all, he is the BCCI president and like Caesar's wife must appear to be beyond reproach not only in his actions but also in his image.

N. Mahadevan
Chennai

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



Mahir Ali

A man's world: Discomfiture of Oz PM reflects a global defect

It wasn't a particularly sensitive choice of words when the Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, declared on Monday that his government would henceforth look towards women through a "fresh lens".

Not just because the male gaze, with or without the benefit of any kind of lens, is a huge part of the problem when it comes to women, but also since an accusation against one of his MPs involves taking inappropriate photographs of women.

Several other accusations have been made against the MP, who has agreed not to contest further elections. But Morrison has resisted calls to dump him right away, because were he to do so, the ruling Liberal-National party coalition would lose its parliamentary majority.

If that's a lame excuse for clinging on to Andrew Laming, the Prime Minister has other related woes to countenance. He announced a cabinet reshuffle on Monday, demoting but not sidelining two of his most prominent ministers. One of them, former

attorney general Christian Porter, faces an allegation of rape as a teenager. The other, former defence minister Linda Reynolds, has apologised for belittling a staff member who was allegedly raped by a colleague in Canberra's parliament house.

Not surprisingly, the response to these allegations has focused on political management of the consequences. And Mr Morrison's clumsy reactions have tended to underline his discomfort with such matters. In responding to the rape allegation by the former Liberal Party staffer, for instance, he claimed to have been alerted to its enormity by his wife, who apparently asked him to contemplate the consequences if something like that had happened to one of his daughters.

The implication was that a man needs a wife and daughters to grasp the gravity of such situations. When women across Australia, including outside parliament, were agitating for their rights, the Prime Minister compounded his faux pas by celebrating the fact that in Australia protesters at least weren't being shot in the streets.

What an amazing concession. By the same token, one could conclude that women in Australia should consider themselves fortunate not to be in the same predicament as women in, say, Saudi Arabia — or, for that matter, the subcontinent. Ladies, count your blessings. It ought to go without saying that some of the issues highlighted in Australia are by no means exclusive to it. Misogyny and patriarchy are common to cultures across the world. And, by some standards, their manifestation in Australia is mild compared with other countries.

That can hardly serve as a valid excuse, though, for trying to brush the issue under the carpet. Australia was very much a part of the first wave of Western feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and significant advances in women's rights have been registered since Gough Whitlam's game-changing government in 1972. It has equally been clear since that legislation does not necessarily change very much. Almost a half century on, even basic advances made back then, such as equal pay for

equal work, remain unimplemented in a meaningful sense.

Notwithstanding a few exceptions, the same story can be told about much of the Western world. It's even worse elsewhere. The formidable Egyptian feminist and writer Nawal el-Saadawi died at the age of 89 this month with too many of her hopes unfulfilled. Just days later, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan annulled Turkey's ratification of the Istanbul convention on violence against women. The absurd backlash against this month's Aurat March falls in the same category. Subtly or otherwise, the world we live in still thrives on sexism and patriarchy, because all too many men remain trapped in a chauvinist mindset everywhere.

Obviously, there are vast differences between, say, Saudi Arabia — where women have only recently been afforded (by men) the right to drive cars — and Australia. Nonetheless, the fact that Australia's latest woes in this sphere have emerged amid the highest echelons of political power provides cause for a pause to ponder

all that has gone wrong in the past 50 years.

The biggest risk is that while a few heads might roll — although even that seems dubious — nothing will substantially change in the way women are treated in parliament and in homes and workplaces across the nation, beyond occasional lip service and hand-wringing by the very same people (again mostly, but not exclusively, men) who help to perpetuate the status quo.

Sure, there has been progress over the decades, but never enough to eradicate centuries of sexist prejudices. Let alone to clearly illuminate the intersections of class, race and gender that continue to guide the destiny of individuals. My granddaughter turned two yesterday, and I would like to think she will come of age in a very different Australia and a world substantially changed for the better, for all human beings. There are depressingly few grounds, though, for imagining such a future.

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

TWO ROCKETS
HIT NEAR IRAQ
AIRBASE

Baghdad, April 4: Two rockets hit near an Iraqi airbase hosting United States soldiers north of Baghdad on Sunday, three days ahead of a new “strategic dialogue” with Washington, a security source said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the strike at Balad airbase, which caused no casualties or property damage, but the US routinely blames Iran-linked Iraqi factions for such attacks on its troops and diplomats.

500MN FB
ACCOUNT DATA
FOUND ONLINE

New York, April 4: Details from more than 500 million Facebook users have been found available on a website for hackers.

The information appears to be several years old, but it is another example of the vast amount of information collected by Facebook and other social media sites, and the limits to how secure that information is.

The availability of the data set was first reported by Business Insider.

TERROR PLOT: 5
WOMEN NABBED
IN FRANCE

Paris, April 4: Police in southern France have arrested four women and a girl as part of an anti-terrorist investigation into a suspected attack plot targeting the city of Montpellier. A police official in the Hérault region confirmed the overnight arrests in the city of Beziers, and said Sunday that the DGSi domestic intelligence service and national anti-terrorist prosecutor's office are handling the probe. Investigators centred on an 18-year-old woman living in a housing project in Beziers who is suspected of plotting an attack.

EVACUATIONS AS
WASTEWATER
POND LEAKS

Miami, April 4: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis declared a state of emergency Saturday after a significant leak at a large pond of wastewater threatened to flood roads and burst a system that stores polluted waters.

Officials in Florida ordered more than 300 homes to be evacuated and closed off a highway Saturday near the large reservoir in the Tampa Bay area north of Bradenton. Residents who live around the Piney Point reservoir received an alert via text saying to leave the area immediately because the collapse was “imminent.”

MAN YELLS
ANTI-ASIAN
SLURS

New York, April 4: New York City police asked for the public's help Saturday in finding a man wanted for yelling anti-Asian slurs at a 44-year-old woman and her three children, spitting at her and kicking her cellphone off a subway train.

Police are calling Tuesday's incident a hate crime.

Authorities described the suspect as a dark-skinned man who is 50 to 55 years old, about 6 feet (1.8 metres) tall and about 150 pounds (68 kilograms). He was last seen wearing a dark camouflage sweater, dark sweatpants and black sandals. Police said he was wearing a black sock on his left foot and a white sock on his right foot.

COURT JAILS
HAFIZ SAEED'S
FIVE AIDES

Lahore, April 4: A Pakistani anti-terrorism court has sentenced five leaders of Mumbai attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed's Jamaat-ud-Dawah (JuD) to nine years of imprisonment each in a terror financing case. Three of them — Umar Bahadar, Nasarullah and Samiullah — have been convicted for the first time since the Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Lahore pronounced its verdict some time ago in the terror financing cases registered by the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of the Punjab police. The other two — JuD spokesperson Yahya Mujahid and senior leader Prof Zafar Iqbal — had already been convicted in other terror financing cases.

Boris plans ‘Covid passport’
trials to reopen mass events

PM wants matches, night clubs to resume as lockdown is eased in phases

London, April 4: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to unveil a series of measures including so-called “Covid passports” to allow mass events such as sports matches and night clubs to resume safely as England's lockdown is eased in phases.

In announcements expected on Monday, Johnson is expected to lay out details of trial events in the coming months that will explore how ventilation and testing before and after events could help audiences back into arenas and auditoriums over a year after being shut down to control the spread of the deadly virus.

The pilot schemes involving what is being dubbed as “Covid-status certification” will include the football FA Cup final at Wembley Stadium in London and are expected to involve a smartphone app or a paper certificate.

The trials will last until mid-May, when the next phase of lockdown easing is scheduled before a complete easing of restrictions by June 21 under Johnson's roadmap.

Vaccination is a hugely powerful tool, but it can never provide 100 per cent protection. That is why we need to look at every option potentially available to ensure the fastest, safest and most sustainable road back to normality, writes Cabinet Office minister Michael Gove in *The Sunday Telegraph*.

“Given the hit the night-time economy and the entertainment sector has taken over the last year, anything which might help businesses reopen sooner must be worth considering. The Israeli approach involves a smartphone app and the NHS app could serve a similar purpose here,” notes the minister.

— PTI



Pope Francis swings a thurible of incense as he prepares to celebrate the Eucharist during Easter Mass on Sunday at St. Peter's Basilica in The Vatican during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pope urges jabs for the poor

Rome, April 4: Millions of Christians around the world celebrated a second Easter under Coronavirus restrictions on Sunday with Pope Francis calling for vaccines to be shared among the poorest nations as Covid-19 surges.

Despite vaccine rollouts gathering pace in many richer countries, dramatic spikes in cases have seen deeply unpopular restrictions enforced from Canada to Europe and South America.

Vaccination was “an essential tool” in the fight against the virus, the pope said in his Easter Sunday address, with Italy under a

strict lockdown over the weekend.

“I urge the entire international community... to commit to overcoming delays in the distribution of vaccines and to facilitate their distribution, especially in the poorest countries,” he said to a congregation of only around 100 people inside the vast St. Peter's Basilica.

Stricter curbs have come into effect in Belgium as well as in France, where authorities are scrambling to deal with a serious spike in cases that has overwhelmed hospitals in Paris. In the Covid-19 intensive care unit of the Ant-

ony Private Hospital south of Paris, no bed stays free for long.

Nurse Louisa Pinto gestured to a vacated room where a cleaner was already at work, scrubbing down the mattress for the next arrival. “The bed won't even have time to cool down,” she said.

Across the Atlantic, Canada crossed the threshold of one million Coronavirus cases, forcing several provinces to tighten restrictions for the Easter weekend. And celebrations have been dampened in South America too, where Brazil is in the grip of a devastating outbreak like-

ly fuelled by a more contagious variant.

The worrying situation led Peru to go into an Easter lockdown, Bolivia to seal the frontier with Brazil, and Chile to close all borders.

But in Jerusalem, curbs have been partially lifted due to Israel's successful vaccination campaign, allowing Easter celebrations to go ahead.

Easter mass was held at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built at the site in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem where Christians believe Jesus was crucified and buried.

— AFP

107 NABBED AS
PROTESTERS,
UK COPS CLASH

London, April 4: A total 107 people have been arrested after clashes between officers and demonstrators at a “Kill the Bill” protest in central London on Saturday, the Metropolitan Police has said.

Projectiles were thrown around as Met Police officers pushed protesters away in an effort to disperse crowds. Earlier, the police said that around 10 of its officers had received injuries during the operation. In an update on Sunday, the Met Police said the arrests were made for a variety of offences including breach of the peace; violent disorder; assault on police and breaches of Covid legislation.

While our advice to people remains not to attend large gatherings, the vast majority of people who attended central London Saturday, adhered to social distancing, and engaged and listened to my officers. As the afternoon wore on it became clear that a small number of people were intent on remaining to cause disruption to law-abiding Londoners, Commander Ade Adelekan, who led the policing operation in Parliament Square in London, said on Sunday.

— PTI

Easter egg protest
held in Myanmar

Yangon, April 4: Anti-coup demonstrators in Myanmar decorated boiled eggs on Easter Sunday in the latest protest against the country's military junta. Myanmar has been gripped by turmoil since a Feb. 1 coup ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Security forces have sought to quell a mass uprising with lethal force, with the death toll reaching 557 as of Saturday, according to local monitoring group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).

To coincide with Easter Sunday, scores of Myanmar protesters decorated eggs with political messages and left them on neighbour's doorsteps and hanging in bags on front of gates.

Pictures posted on social media showed eggs adorned with Suu Kyi's likeness and three-finger salutes — a symbol of the resistance — while others said “save our people”

and “democracy”.

“I am Buddhist but I have joined this campaign because it is easy to get hold of eggs. I spent almost one hour decorating my eggs,” one Yangon based egg decorator said.

“I am praying for Myanmar's current situation to get back to democracy.” One Facebook group promoting the egg protest urged people to be respectful of Christian traditions on Easter Sunday.

Myanmar's most senior Catholic, Cardinal Charles Bo posted an Easter message on Twitter: “Jesus has risen: Hallelujah - Myanmar will rise again!”

Early bird protesters also hit the streets of Mandalay Sunday, some carrying flags and riding motorbikes.

Their demonstration comes even after four protesters were killed Saturday in the cities of Bago and Monywa.

— AFP

N. Ireland police
appeal for calm

London, April 4: Police in Northern Ireland have appealed for calm after officers were attacked with petrol bombs and cars were set on fire during a second night of unrest. Three cars were hijacked and set on fire Saturday night in Newtownabbey, an area on the outskirts of Belfast, police said.

North Area Commander Chief Superintendent Davy Beck said 30 petrol bombs were thrown at officers in an “orchestrated attack on police.”

A 47-year-old man was arrested and remained in police custody. On Friday night, 27 police officers were injured and eight people were arrested during riots in Belfast and Londonderry.

Police said they came under “sustained attack” from a large group of young people throwing stones, bottles and fireworks. The Police Federation for Northern Ireland called for an end to the violence and said people

● **POLICE SAID** they came under “sustained attack” from a large group of young people throwing stones, bottles and fireworks.

destroying their own communities was “not the way to protest or vent.”

Tensions have flared as some members of Northern Ireland's legislature sought to censure two dozen politicians from the Irish republican Sinn Féin party who attended the June funeral of Bobby Storey, a former head of intelligence for the Irish Republican Army.

Officials recently said they would not prosecute the politicians for alleged breaches of Coronavirus restrictions. All the main unionist parties have demanded the resignation of Northern Ireland's police chief over the controversy, claiming he has lost the confidence of their community.

— AP

Suga aims to calm
China-Taiwan strain

Tokyo, April 4: Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on Sunday said Taiwan's peace and stability is key to the region and that Japan will cooperate with the United States to calm rising tensions between China and Taiwan.

Suga is set to meet with President Joe Biden in Washington next week, the US leader's first in-person summit since taking office in January. Tokyo considers its US alliance to be the cornerstone of its diplomatic and security policies, and is eager to develop close relations with the new US administration. Taiwan is expected to be on the agenda as the leaders seek ways to deal with China's growing security threat in the region. Chinese warplanes are increasingly entering Taiwanese airspace, and China has protested an agreement to bolster cooperation between the US and Taiwanese coast guards that followed Washington's new sales of arms equipment to Taipei.

“It is important for Japan and the United States to cooperate and use deterrence to create an environment where Taiwan and China can find a peaceful solution,” Suga said on a television talk show Sunday. China claims Taiwan as its own territory, to be brought under Beijing's control by force if necessary, and it has worked to internationally isolate the island.

Japan considers China's growing activity to be a security threat and opposes Beijing's claim to the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands, called Diaoyu in China, in the East China Sea and its increased activity in the disputed area. China also claims ownership over virtually the entire South China Sea and has built military installations on reefs and atolls by covering them with sand and concrete.

China has denied it is expansionist and has said it is only defending its territorial rights. Suga also hopes to advance a vision of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” to promote rules-based order in the region and discuss ways to cooperate on policy toward North Korea.

— AP

MALICIOUS PLOT
UNCOVERED,
SAYS JORDAN FM

Jerusalem, April 4: A senior Jordanian official on Sunday accused the country's former crown prince of conspiring with foreign elements in a “malicious plot” that threatened national security.

Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi told reporters that the plot had been foiled at the “zero hour.”

“Then it was clear they moved from design and planning into action,” Safadi said. He said some 14-16 people are under arrest, in addition to two senior officials close to Prince Hamzah.

Safadi spoke a day after Hamzah, a half brother of King Abdullah II, was placed under house arrest, in a rare public clash between top members of the long-ruling family.

The unprecedented incident has raised concerns about stability in a country seen as a key Western ally in a volatile region and drawn an outpouring of support for Abdullah.

In a videotaped statement from house arrest, Hamzah accused the country's leadership of corruption and incompetence.

— AP

Indonesia rains trigger
landslide, floods; 44 dead

Jakarta, April 4: Landslides and flash floods from torrential rains in eastern Indonesia killed at least 44 people and displaced thousands, a disaster relief agency said Sunday. Several others were still missing.

Mud tumbled down onto dozens of house in Lame-nie village from the surrounding hills shortly after midnight on Flores Island in East Nusa Tenggara province. Rescuers recovered 38 bodies and five injured, said Lenny Ola, who heads the local disaster agency.

The bodies of three people were found after being swept away by flash floods in Oyang Bayang village as 40 houses were destroyed, she said. Hundreds of people fled submerged homes, some of which were carried off by the floodwaters. Seasonal downpours cause frequent landslides and floods and kill dozens each year in Indonesia, a

red, said Lenny Ola, who heads the local disaster agency.

The bodies of three people were found after being swept away by flash floods in Oyang Bayang village as 40 houses were destroyed, she said. Hundreds of people fled submerged homes, some of which were carried off by the floodwaters. Seasonal downpours cause frequent landslides and floods and kill dozens each year in Indonesia, a

chain of 17,000 islands where millions of people live in mountainous areas or near fertile flood plains.

In another village, Wai-burak, three people were killed and seven remained missing when overnight rains caused rivers to burst their banks, sending muddy water into large areas of East Flores district, Ola said. Four injured people were being treated at a local health clinic.

— AP

EFFECTIVE | TREATMENT

NHS providers were told they could begin offering the treatment in Feb.

England rolls out 5-min. breast cancer treatment

London, April 4: An injection that cuts the amount of time breast cancer patients spend in hospital from two and a half hours to as little as five minutes is being rolled out as a new, more effective treatment, National Health Service (NHS) England said on Sunday. Breast cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy will be offered a new combined treatment called PHESGO, which is injected and takes as little as five minutes to prepare and administer, compared with

two infusions that can take up to two and a half hours. More than 3,600 new patients each year are expected to benefit from the faster treatment, as well as others who will switch from the treatment they are on to the single injection, following an NHS deal with the manufacturer.

“This new injection, which can substantially cut treatment time for people with breast cancer, is the latest in a series of changes which have meant the NHS has been able to deliver

vital cancer treatment while keeping patients safe from Covid,” said Peter Johnson, NHS national clinical director for cancer. “I am delighted that this is now available to people having breast cancer treatment, limiting the time they need to spend in hospital and giving the NHS another way to continue treating as many cancer patients as possible, as we have done throughout the pandemic,” he said.

PHESGO is a fixed-dose combination of pertuzum-

ab with trastuzumab that previously would have been given as separate IV infusions. The injection will be offered to eligible people with HER2-positive breast cancer, which accounts for 15 per cent of all breast cancers in England, and can be given alongside chemotherapy or on its own. The five-minute jab significantly cuts the Covid infection risk for cancer patients by reducing the amount of time spent in hospital and frees up time for clinicians in chemotherapy units.

Baroness Delyth Morgan, Chief Executive at Breast Cancer Now, said: “Reducing the time patients need to spend in hospital, this more efficient treatment method also promises to free up precious time for healthcare professionals when the NHS is already under unprecedented strain due to Covid-19. “Today's announcement reflects the latest of continued advances in breast cancer treatment, and now we hope to see Roche and NHS decision-makers work-

ing together to ensure Phegso is rapidly made available across all of the UK so that even more patients and healthcare professionals alike can reap its benefits.”

NHS providers were told they could begin offering the treatment in February and the agreement between the health service, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and manufacturer Roche means it comes at no extra cost to the NHS.

— PTI

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50029.83	1.05
Nifty 50	14867.40	1.20
S&P 500*	4,019.87	1.18
Dollar (₹)	73.11	0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.03	-0.26
Euro (₹)	85.99	-0.25
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,865.228	0.51
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.86	0.00
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.177	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.714	0.035

* As of 9:30 PM IST

SBI Card sees 50% transaction from online payments

SBI Cards and Payment Services MD and CEO Rama Mohan Rao Amara said his company has been seeing over 50 per cent of its transactions via online payments such as on groceries, utility bills, insurance premium, and hopes the trend to go up further as point of sale purchases are yet to pick up. However, he said it would be too early to say whether it will have any bearing on people's purchasing behaviour.

Reliance-BP seeks buyers for its gas from KG-D6 well



Reliance Industries Ltd and its partner BP Plc of UK have sought bids for sale of 5.5 million standard cubic meters per day of additional natural gas that will be available for sale from their eastern offshore KG-D6 block. The e-auction is slated for April 23 and the gas supply will start from late April or early May, according to the tender document. Bidders will have to quote a price linked to Platts JKM for spot cargoes.

India's crude steel output is 19 MT in January, February

India's crude steel output fell by 1 per cent to 19.1 million tonnes (MT) during the first two months of 2021, according to worldsteel. The country had produced 18.9 MT crude steel during the same period last year. The production for the 64 countries reporting to the worldsteel was 313.1 MT in January-February 2021, registering a 5 per cent increase compared to 297.7 MT in the year ago period.

Trai plans survey to assess utility of tariff plans

Telecom regulator TRAI is planning to conduct a consumer-facing survey to assess if tariff plans offered by operators are meeting actual requirements of varied categories of users, a top official said. Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) may rope in an agency to conduct the survey for it. The survey is expected to start soon, said an official with Trai, who is privy to the development.

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Brokerages bullish on IT firms

Expect double-digit guidance for current fiscal due to strong revenue growth

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 4

Brokerages expect IT companies to report healthy fourth quarter (Q4FY21) revenues and strongest fourth quarter performance in the last five years, thanks to acceleration in digital technologies, improved demand post Covid-19, ramp up of previous deal wins and migration to cloud (delivery of IT services over the internet).

At the same time wage hikes to employees may impact Q4FY21 profit margins for IT companies, according to analysts.

"We expect bigger IT companies (tier I) to report revenue growth between 2.5 per cent and 3.4 per cent quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) on constant currency term, their strongest Q4FY21 performance in the last five years. Mid-sized (tier II) IT companies should deliver 3.3-5.2 per cent QoQ revenue growth," said

Market Cap			
As on April 3, 2021		₹ crore	
Rank	Company	Market Cap	Gain/Loss over March 26, 2021
1	RIL	12,81,644.97	▲ 17,401.77
2	TCS	11,71,082.67	▲ 36,158.22
3	HDFC Bank	8,19,474.22	▼ -3,142.29
4	Infosys	5,90,229.35	▲ 20,877.24
5	Hind Unilever	5,63,767.05	▲ 19,842.83
6	HDFC	4,56,569.82	▼ -171.38
7	ICICI Bank	4,10,775.37	▲ 10,681.76
8	Kotak Bank	3,57,573.74	▲ 6,301.56
9	SBI	3,30,701.48	▲ 12,003.60
10	Bajaj Finance	3,17,563.53	▲ 5,236.49

Motilal Oswal in its fourth quarter preview.

ICICI Securities expects the IT companies to report healthy Q4FY21 revenues also due to improved traction in BFSI, retail, manu-

facturing, hi tech and life-science that will drive revenues in the quarter.

"This, coupled with cross currency tailwind, will further boost revenue growth in the quarter,"

ICICI Securities said. Infosys and Wipro are expected to register decline in profit margins due to wage hike, lower utilisation, higher travel and facility cost.

HCL Technologies is expected to report around 375 basis points decline due to partial wage hike and one-time bonus of ₹700 crore.

However, TCS is expected to report higher profit margins due to absence of wage hikes in the previous quarter as it announced wage hike during the third quarter.

The managements of IT companies may provide double-digit growth outlook in their guidance for FY22 based on strong topline growth in Q2/Q3FY21 as well as Q4FY21 and highlight plans to add to their workforce as higher demand and elevated utilisation should lead to the strongest employee addition in the recent past, the brokerages said.

Centre to demand more money from Cairn

New Delhi, April 4: The Union oil ministry will seek tens of millions of dollars from Vedanta's Cairn Oil & Gas after the Delhi High Court held that the firm was liable to pay higher profit share to the government in lieu of its Rajasthan oil and gas block license being extended beyond initial term, a top official said.

In the interim, the firm's Barmer basin block licence, whose initial 25-year term ended on May 15, 2020, has been given an eighth interim extension, the official, who wished not to be identified, said.

"Now that the Delhi High Court has upheld the government policy, we will issue recovery notices seeking higher profit



petroleum since May 15, 2020," he said. "The exact amount is being calculated but it will be in tens of millions of dollars."

When contacted, a company spokesperson said, "We are in the process of reviewing the court's order, and will assess any next course of action" after that.

The Union Cabinet headed by Prime Minister

JC-Hitachi eyes 20% growth in fiscal 2022

New Delhi, April 4: Cooling products maker Johnson Controls-Hitachi Air Conditioning India is looking for around 20 per cent growth in the current financial year, in comparison to the 2019-20 level, said a top company official.

The company expects factors such as pent-up demand and work-from-home, which will create a demand for additional room AC along with exchange requirements of old units, for the growth of the segment.

Besides, Johnson Controls-Hitachi Air Conditioning is also working on reducing its dependence on imports for components by half as part of its commitment towards localisation. "We had clocked ₹2,200 crore in the last year (FY 2019-20), in which a big chunk of sales from March was lost. So, we are just about similar to last year. If we would

have been okay then we should have clocked at least ₹2,500 crore.

"For the next fiscal year (FY 2021-22), I am sure that we should be reaching at least 20 per cent growth (by value) from FY 2019-20," said Johnson Controls-Hitachi Air Conditioning India chairman and managing director Gurmeet Singh.

Like other players, Johnson Controls-Hitachi Air Conditioning has also gone for a price increase of 3-5 per cent to ward off the inflationary pressure on raw materials, including copper, aluminium, steel and plastics, and expects another price hike coming soon.

"The price of copper is almost 50 per cent higher than at the start of the year. Aluminium and steel have both increased" and diesel prices are going up. All combined have put tremendous pressure on the entire ecosystem." — PTI

TikTok's owner calls freeze on bank A/Cs a harassment

Mumbai, April 4: China's ByteDance has told an Indian court that a government freeze on its bank accounts in a probe of possible tax evasion amounts to harassment and was done illegally, according to a filing seen by Reuters.

ByteDance in January reduced its Indian workforce after New Delhi maintained a ban on its popular video app TikTok, imposed last year after a border clash between India and China. Beijing has repeatedly criticised India over that ban and those of other Chinese apps.

An Indian tax intelligence unit in mid-March ordered HSBC and Citibank in Mumbai to freeze bank accounts of ByteDance India as it probed some of the unit's financial dealings. ByteDance has challenged the freeze on the four

FPIs TURN NET BUYERS FOR 3RD MONTH IN LINE

New Delhi, April 4: Continuing the buying spree for the third consecutive month, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have invested ₹17,304 crore in Indian markets so far in March.

According to depositors data, FPIs invested ₹10,482 crore into equities and ₹6,822 crore in the debt segment during March 1 and March 31.

The total net investment stood at ₹17,304 crore during the period under review. Previously, overseas investors had invested ₹23,663 crore in Indian markets in February and ₹14,649 crore in January, on a net basis. Groww COO Harsh Jain said markets have been relatively stable despite growth in Covid cases. — PTI

M&A deals in hospitality to hit \$1b in 2021

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, APRIL 4

Hotel transaction volumes are expected to touch \$1-billion in 2021 with the merger and acquisition activity accelerating in the hospitality sector due to financial stress.

Hotel conversions, particularly standalone hotels joining larger brands, will gain considerable momentum in the next couple of years as both hotel owners and brands consider this proposition to tide over the current downturn.

Hotel transaction volumes stood at \$332 million in 2020, almost half of \$690 million in 2019. But it was way higher than \$78 million in 2018. Transaction volumes will see a substantial rise to \$1 billion in 2021, finds HVS Anarock.

"We expect M&A activity in the industry to accelerate in the second half of 2021 as several assets and asset owners come under financial stress and look for exit or ways of reducing debt. As per our research, the organised sector, which includes only hotels with 80 or more keys across nine major cities, is suffering from a collective outstanding debt exceeding ₹50,000 crore," said the report.

Further, hotel assets and companies going for liquidation under NCLT are expected to contribute significantly along with large ticket hotel transactions and portfolio transactions.

Hotel rebranding or conversion has been a growing trend in the Indian hotels sector over the last few years. As a result, over the past five years more than 230 hotels have been converted either



● Hotel assets and companies going for liquidation under NCLT are expected to contribute significantly along with large ticket hotel transactions and portfolio transactions.

● Hotel rebranding or conversion has been a growing trend in the Indian hotels sector over the last few years.

● As a result, over the past five years more than 230 hotels have been converted either from a standalone property to a brand or migrated from one brand to another.

from a standalone property to a brand or migrated from one brand to another. However, the rate of conversions has not increased much during this period. Brand conversions still constitute only 20-25 per cent of the total signings in the country. But, conversions could see a jump in 2021.

Around 60 hotels with 6,000 keys are scheduled to be opened in 2021 against 49 hotels with 4537 keys in 2020. However, it will be still lower than 9,316 keys in 2019 and 7,215 keys in 2018.

The Hyatt Group has announced to add over 3,600 keys By 2023 to its existing portfolio of 32 hotels with over 20 executed managed and franchised agreements.

GST on gift cards during redemption

New Delhi, April 4: Clearing the air over taxability of gift cards or vouchers, the Tamil Nadu bench of the AAAR has ruled that GST would be levied on the underlying goods/services at the time of redemption of such pre-paid instruments.

Kalyan Jewellers India has approached the Appellate Authority for Advance Ruling against the ruling by the TN state Authority for Advance Ruling, which had said that GST at 12 per cent or 18 per cent would be levied depending on whether on such pre-paid instruments was paper based or magnetic strip based respectively.

The AAAR has clarified that GST will be levied not on the supply of vouchers. — PTI

TALENT | FILTER

Police verification requests jump from 3% in 2018 to 19% in 2020

Staff background check worst in IT sector

New Delhi, April 4: Eight out of 100 candidates misled or misinformed on job applications in 2020 with the IT sector witnessing the highest discrepancy in employee background verification at 16.60 per cent, according to identity management and business intelligence firm AuthBridge.

Despite a drop in the overall discrepancy in the last three years, AuthBridge said in its sixth annual trend report that the healthcare sector had the second-highest discrepancy at 12 per cent, followed by retail at 10.22 per cent and BFSI (banking, financial services and insurance) and pharma with discrepancy of 9.76 per cent and 9.65

per cent, respectively.

The travel and hospitality sector with 9.58 per cent also featured in the list of sectors with the highest discrepancy ratios, the report said.

"Eight out of 100 candidates lie or misinform during job application," the report said.

Candidates between the age of 35 to 39 years have the highest discrepancy rate at 9.09 per cent, indicating bigger incentives for candidates in this age-bracket to fudge their credentials for better job opportunities, it added.

"Candidates within the age of 35-39 had the highest share of discrepancy and the same age bracket has been scoring high since the last three

● Candidates between the age of 35 to 39 years have the highest discrepancy rate at 9.09 per cent, indicating bigger incentives for candidates in this age-bracket to fudge their credentials for better job opportunities, it added.

years... Therefore, it is important to be careful when hiring in that age group," AuthBridge Founder and CEO Ajay Trehan said. On the findings of the report, he said, "The overall top-level trend shows discrepancy has seen a drop in the last three years — and it's understandable. As awareness

and adoption for background screening protocols tightens up in corporate India, it filters dubious candidates who either won't begin the process or will have a strong reason to be truthful."

"Interestingly, in gig economy space, there's hardly a drop and discrepancy has remained between 4 per cent to 5 per cent," he said.

AuthBridge said the top for discrepant checks are address, employment, identity and education verifications. "Employment verification still tops as the biggest culprit — the check with most discrepancies across industries. This is a must for all white collar hiring and companies must

screen at least past three employments," he said.

For the on-demand sector, police verification has seen a whopping jump from 3 per cent to 19 per cent between 2018 to 2020, he added. The report had found that two out of 100 applicants in the on-demand and blue-collar space had a criminal or civil litigation record against them.

Trehan said address check discrepancy has fallen to 6 per cent in 2020 from 10 per cent in 2018, mostly due to better mechanism of address verification and the eastern part of India still sees the highest discrepancy due to tough terrain and dropouts.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Proteas down Pak despite Zaman 193

Johannesburg: South Africa levelled the series with a 17-run win in the second one-day international against Pakistan at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg on Sunday despite a spectacular innings by Pakistan opening batsman Fakhar Zaman. Fakhar hit 193 off 155 balls with 10 sixes and 18 fours but he lacked support as Pakistan made 324 for nine in reply to South Africa's 341 for six. Quinton de Kock, captain Temba Bavuma, Rassie van der Dussen and David Miller hit half-centuries for South Africa, who were sent in. Pakistan's chances seemed to be minimal when fast bowler Anrich Nortje dismissed captain Babar Azam for 31 in his first over and followed up with two more quick wickets to reduce the tourists to 85 for four. — *AFP*

Brief scores: South Africa 341/6 in 50 overs (Q. de Kock 80, T. Bavuma 92; H. Rauf 3/54) bt Pakistan 324/9 in 50 overs (Fakhar Zaman 193; A. Nortje 3/63).

Mithali's Railways win national title

Rajkot: The formidable Indian Railways once again annexed the National One Day Championships title with a crushing seven-wicket victory over Jharkhand in the final here on Sunday. Out of 14 editions of National One Dayers, Railways women have won 12 titles, which is a testimony to their dominance in women's cricket. Such was Railways' control on the proceedings that they chased the paltry target of 168 in only 37 overs. India international Punam Raut's patient 59 off 94 balls laid the platform for Sneha Rana to finish the game in a jiffy, smashing 34 not out off 22 balls. Rana was also the most successful Railways bowler taking 3 for 34. — *PTI*

Brief scores: Jharkhand 167 in 50 overs (Indrani Roy 49; Sneha Rana 3/33) lost to Railways 169/3 in 37 overs (Sabbhineni Meghana 53, Punam Raut 59).

Repsol Honda seek improved show

Doha: Conditions were again the talk of the day in the Doha MotoGP as the Repsol Honda Team worked towards race day with Stefan Bradl lining up his machine 11th on the grid. There was no escaping the dust and wind in Free Practice 3 as the entire Losail International Circuit was engulfed in a fierce windstorm. While the wind was manageable, huge amounts of dust and sand were blown across the track and meant there was little information to find in the first session of the day and certainly no chance of improving on FP2 times. Bradl's Pol Espargaro will line up 15th on the grid for Sunday's race.

An improved performance on Sunday remains the focus for the Repsol Honda Team, both Bradl and Espargaro showed impressive pace on the previous Sunday. The racing is again guaranteed to be close but the pair of RC213V riders are prepared to fight.

Manu to represent India in Olympics

New Delhi: World number one Elaveni Valarivan was on Sunday included in a 15-member Indian shooting contingent for the Tokyo Olympics where the highly accomplished Manu Bhaker will represent the country in three events.

However, Olympic quota winner Chinki Yadav could not make the main team despite winning a gold medal in the Delhi World Cup last month.

It was decided by the national selection committee that the quota won by Chinki in the women's 25m pistol would be swapped in favour of Anjum Moudgil, to enable her to compete in the women's 50m rifle 3 positions event as India's second entry alongside former world champion Tejaswini Sawant. — *PTI*

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Everton vs Crystal Palace from 10.30 pm; Wolverhampton Wanderers vs West Ham United from 12.45 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1

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Show will go on

BCCI is confident that IPL will go ahead as scheduled

New Delhi, April 4: Despite a rise in Coronavirus cases, the vice-president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India Rajeev Shukla is confident that the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League will go ahead "without any problem".

"That's the concern that coronavirus cases are rising. That's why BCCI has already taken all the precautions. That's why only six venues have been kept and bio-bubble has been created. The number of members of the squad has also been increased, keeping in mind that in the future if the coronavirus case rises then all the precautions can be taken," Shukla said.

"So, keeping in mind all the precautions, the tournament will go on without any problem. Bio-bubble has been created, those who are in bio-bubble, they are getting tested now and then and I think the tournament will take place without spectators," he added.

Maharashtra is witnessing a rise in Coronavirus cases but Shukla said that so far, no decision has been taken regarding the shifting of Mumbai matches to some other venues for the upcoming IPL, set to begin on April 9.

"So far, no decision has been taken to shift Mumbai venue. It will take place in Mumbai because all the arrangements have been done. In the future, as you know there are standby venues also if there is any problem then we will think but currently, there is no such decision which has been taken. The first stand-by stadium is in Lucknow then Hyderabad and Indore are there and some others also. Nothing has been decided and it will take place as per the earlier decision," he said.

Wankhede is set to host 10 IPL games this season from April 10-25. The first match at the Mumbai stadium is slated to be played on April 10 between Delhi Capitals and Chennai Super Kings. Four franchises — Delhi Capitals, Chennai Super Kings, Punjab Kings and Rajasthan Royals — have set up their base in Mumbai as of now. Moreover, the Delhi-based franchise suffered a huge blow on Saturday as all-rounder Axar Patel tested



KKR's Sunil Narine (left) and his teammate Varun Chakravarthy during a practice session on Sunday.

positive for Covid-19. Shukla said the BCCI will get in touch with Health ministry for players' vaccination. "In order to cope with this coronavirus rise, I think the only solution is to get vaccinated. BCCI is also

thinking on those lines that players should be vaccinated. Nobody knows when the virus will end and you can't give a deadline, it will not be there so players can play easily. So, I think now will have to think over that. Vaccination should be done for the players also,"

VACCINES FOR PLAYERS

Shukla said the BCCI will get in touch with Health ministry for players' vaccination. "In order to cope with this coronavirus rise, I think the only solution is to get vaccinated. BCCI is also thinking on those lines that players should be vaccinated. Nobody knows when the virus will end and you can't give a deadline, it will not be there so players can play easily. So, I think now will have to think over that. Vaccination should be done for the players also,"

— *PTI*

Shukla said. When asked if BCCI has written to the Health Ministry regarding players' vaccination, Shukla said the BCCI is mulling over the idea and they will definitely get in touch with the ministry that players should be vaccinated. — *Agencies*

CSK REMOVE ALCOHOL BRAND FROM ALL JERSEY

AGE CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 4

Chennai Super Kings have agreed to a request by England all-rounder Moeen Ali to not wear SNJ 10000 logo, a surrogate product brand of Chennai-based SNJ Distilleries, on his match jersey because of his faith's ban on alcohol.

Moeen who was bought by CSK for a whopping ₹7 crore doesn't promote logos of alcohol brands, be it for his country England or any other leagues. He has often been spotted stepping away from the podium whenever England celebrated spraying the champagne.

"The request from a player is nothing new in IPL though. In the past, a few players decided not to display logos which hurt their religious sentiments and teams didn't have any issues," said a team official. In fact, Royal Challengers Bangalore, Moeen's last season team, had accepted the England all-rounder's request.



Moeen Ali

It's time to Barty at the Hard Rock

Miami, April 4: World No.1 Ashleigh Barty retained her Miami Open title Saturday as Bianca Andreescu's injury curse struck again. Australia's Barty completed a 6-3, 4-0 victory after Andreescu was forced to retire in tears with an injury to her right ankle in the second set at the Hard Rock Stadium.

Barty had dominated the Canadian world number nine throughout the contest behind a powerful service game and accurate forehand.

The end came soon after the third game of the second set, when Andreescu collapsed to the court after rolling her right ankle during her service game.

Barty broke for a 3-0 lead as Andreescu, clearly struggling to move properly, battled on. Despite being heavily strapped on her ankle, Andreescu retired soon afterwards, unable to continue. It was a bitterly disappointing end for Andreescu, the 2019 US Open champion who missed the first few months of the 2020 season with a knee injury before last year's pandemic shutdown.

Barty, meanwhile, was left to reflect on a clinical victory in what was her first overseas appearance since the WTA Tour resumed after the shutdown. "It's been the perfect start for us," said Barty, who arrived in Florida last month after a gruelling 50-hour journey from Australia.

"I did say to my coach when we got here 'It can only get better from here.' The fact that we've had a really successful couple of weeks, I felt like with each match I got better and better. And to have a title at the end of it is a bonus. "Hopefully, it's going to be a long and successful season. It's a brilliant start," added Barty, who now heads to next week's Charleston event as she prepares for the clay court season.

The 24-year-old controlled the game from the outset, moving Andreescu around the court relentlessly with accurate first serves and heavy groundstrokes. — *AFP*



Ashleigh Barty of Australia poses with the winner's trophy after defeating Bianca Andreescu of Canada in the final of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida on Saturday.

— *AFP*

City win again as Reds punch big

London, April 4: Manchester City moved closer to the Premier League title as the run-away leaders won 2-0 at Leicester, while Liverpool took full advantage of Chelsea's shock collapse to close within two points of the top four with a 3-0 win at Arsenal.

City are 17 points clear of second-placed Manchester United after a remarkable 15th successive away win in all competitions.

United can close the gap with a win against Brighton on Sunday in the first of two games in hand, but it is only a matter of time before Pep Guardiola's men celebrate their third title in four seasons. Goals from Benjamin Mendy and Gabriel Jesus killed off third-placed Leicester in the second half at the King Power.

City, chasing an unprece-

dent quadruple, will go into their Champions League quarterfinal first leg against Borussia Dortmund on Tuesday in confident mood after avenging the 5-2 thrashing they suffered against Leicester in September.

City's win meant Liverpool can now not mathematically retain their title, but they are back in the race for Champions League football next season.

Reds looked more like their old selves in a dominant display that got its reward thanks to three goals in 18 second-half minutes. Substitute Diogo Jota powered home Trent Alexander-Arnold's cross to break the deadlock before Mohamed Salah cleverly prodded the ball between the legs of Bernd Leno to clinch the issue 3-0 against Arsenal. — *AFP*

Will Kedar be 'x' factor in SRH middle-order?

New Delhi, April 4: One of the most consistent teams in the Indian Premier League over the last five years, Sunrisers Hyderabad would look to improve upon their middle-order batting during this edition of the tournament.

The main strength of SRH is the balance they possess, especially a fantastic top order.

With the likes of David Warner, Jonny Bairstow, Jason Roy, Kane Williamson, Manish Pandey and Wriddhiman Saha up their ranks, SRH have one of the most destructive batting line-ups.

Warner and Bairstow forms one of the most feared opening pairs in

the IPL. The duo has no qualms in taking the opposition attack from ball one and if they get going, no target is unachievable and is a treat to watch for spectators.

SRH's bowling too looks impressive with fit-again Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Rashid leading the pack. The presence of Afghan star Mujeeb-ur Rahman and yorker king T Natarajan adds the much-needed impetus to their attack.

The major weakness of SRH is the absence of a finisher in their line-up. The middle-order too looked shaky in the last IPL in the UAE and that is where SRH would be banking on Williamson's

vast experience.

Even though SRH has roped in Kedar Jadhav this year, it remains to be seen whether the Maharashtra all-rounder can prove his worth considering the fact that he is very much short of practice.

Wriddhiman Saha if given a promotion in the batting order would look at it as an opportunity to show his range of strokes.

SRH is heavily reliant on its top-order to provide a good start and God forbids if the likes of Warner, Bairstow, Pandey and Williamson fails for long, the pressure would shift to the team's middle and lower order. — *PTI*

IPL franchises need to be wary of players' bubble fatigue



Hemant Kenkre Silly Point

Lights, camera and action! It's the moment that cricket fans have been waiting for. The blockbuster of the year is about to start with the Indian Premier League (IPL) set for a kick-off a few days from now. The last edition of the tournament ended in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in November last year, the successful phase giving a big boost to the sagging spirits affected by the global pandemic.

The decision of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to

host the fourteenth act of IPL at home was welcomed by fans and many who believed that a domestic tournament (what the IPL is) has to be played at home. The tourney that showcases Indian cricket (with International flavours) has undoubtedly played a big role in developing raw youngsters, who spend quality time with reputed international cricketers getting the education of a lifetime.

As what happens in most scripts that depict tales on silver screens, loosely translated as cricket's version of pulp fiction, the drama element of the IPL has already begun. The villain in terms of the 'black empire' trying to play spoilsport in the story came in guise of a few cricketers — Axar Patel and Devdutt Padikkal — and ground staff of Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium testing positive to the dreaded virus.

With Mumbai hosting a big chunk of the games that are slated for the tournament, the early entry by the villainous virus has caused a furrow on the brow of the organisers.

Within ten matches (of the scheduled 52) to be played in Mumbai, India's commercial capital and the home of cricket, BCCI's plans may see changes with the alarming number of virus cases rising in the maximum city. Sources

within the BCCI say that they have their eyes on each venue and have kept two back-up centres — Hyderabad and Indore — on standby in case the situation gets out of hand, keeping in mind the safety of players and all involved in the tournament.

While the BCCI's wait and watch policy is what one would expect from the organisation, it still leaves many questions open.

For instance what if their Plan B, of shifting the venues, fails with virus cases increasing in the marked cities too? The organisation has put in various checks in place to ensure that the tournament is held as per their agenda. BCCI officials have moved from their office to a five star facility and have watchdogs designated as Bubble Integrity

Managers who are to report any breach in the bio security protocol to BCCI's Chief Medical Officer. While it is too late for the BCCI to take any extreme decision vis-a-vis the holding the IPL, the tournament will go on irrespective of any more vile henchmen making appearances in the script, there is another element which will bother team franchisees as the tournament progress — bubble fatigue. The players (the major ones) have been moving from one bio-bubble to another from the 13th edition of the IPL.

The next two months, till the final scheduled in Ahmedabad on May 30, is going to be a big test for them as they have had no time for any kind of proper rest and recreation. Breaking the 'brain fog'

caused by transiting from one secure environment to another is something the cricketers will be wary of. The major job for all teams, therefore, will be to keep their players fresh and eager to take on new challenges day after day, match after match.

The pressures of performing in the IPL are manifold and keeping players on their toes is going to be a big ask for all teams going forward to ensure that key players do not get jaded and perform by rote.

The past thirteen editions of the IPL have given Indian cricket and those of other countries many breakthroughs in terms of strengthening upcoming talent. In a recent interview, former England player, David Gower acknowledged IPL's role in the development of new talent

in his country. Calling it an extraordinary experience that offered players education, he gave the tournament a big thumbs up in helping players like Jos Buttler to emerge.

Considering the new challenges faced by modern cricketers while flitting from one secure bubble to another, it does look like the 2021 version is going to be one which will further boost local and newer talent. For starters, they will be raring to go, determined to make their mark in world cricket and maybe find a place in the Indian squad for the impending World T20 championship.

Their fresh, eager beaver approach may well coerce the senior pros to shake off their fatigue and provide entertaining cricket once more.