



SHORT TAKES

Man kills self at Metro station

New Delhi: A 55-year-old man allegedly committed suicide by jumping in front of a moving train at Chawri Bazar station on the Delhi Metro's Yellow Line on Tuesday, police said. Services were briefly delayed between Rajiv Chowk and Kashmere Gate stations due to the incident, according to the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC). The man, who has been identified as Mohammad Khizar, a resident of Sitaram Bazar, jumped in from of the moving train around 12 PM at Chawri Bazar metro station, a senior police officer said. The body was sent to Lady Hardinge Hospital for a post-mortem examination, the officer said. The DMRC took to Twitter to inform commuters about the delay in services. "Delay in services between Rajiv Chowk and Kashmere Gate due to a passenger on track at Chawri Bazar. Normal services on all other lines," it said in a tweet posted at 12:16 pm.

Constable injured in road accident

New Delhi: A 30-year-old Delhi Police constable was injured after an Emergency Response Vehicle (ERV) was hit allegedly by a tempo in north Delhi's Civil Lines area in the early hours of Tuesday, officials said. The constable, Anil, who is posted at Civil Lines police station, was on duty as a driver with assistant sub inspector (ASI) Devender when the incident took place around 2 am, they said. According to the police, the team was patrolling in the ERV along the dark stretches between Chandigarh Akhara and Majnu Ka Tilla when they stopped the vehicle and stepped down to check the air pressure in one of the tyres. Meanwhile, a tempo allegedly hit the ERV, injuring Anil, and fled from the spot. The ASI immediately shifted the injured constable to Parmanand hospital where is undergoing treatment, a senior police officer said.

Chain snatching gang busted in Ghaziabad

Ghaziabad: Police on Monday busted a Delhi-based gang of chain snatchers and arrested four people, an official said. Indirapuram circle DSP Anshu Jain said the gang was active in Delhi-NCR. Those arrested have been identified as Rizwan, the gang leader, Khalid, Arif, and Asif. The police have recovered nine gold chains, two country-made pistols and two knives from their possession. During interrogation, Rizwan told the police that he used to sell the stolen chains to a goldsmith in Kondli. Later, Sunder Lal, the goldsmith, was also apprehended, the DSP added. — PTI

AT 40.2°C, CITY SEES APRIL'S HOTTEST DAY

New Delhi: Delhi on Tuesday recorded a maximum temperature of 40.2 degrees Celsius, the highest so far this month, the India meteorological department (IMD) said. The minimum temperature settled at 19.4 degrees Celsius, a notch below normal, it said. The mercury is expected to hover around 40 degrees Celsius for the next two days. Thereafter, cloudy skies are likely to bring it down by two to three notches. India meteorological department officials said a heatwave is not predicted in Delhi for another week. A heatwave is declared in plains when the maximum temperature is more than 40 degrees Celsius and at least 4.5 notches above normal. A severe heatwave is declared if the departure from normal temperature is more than 6.5 degrees Celsius, according to the India meteorological department. — PTI

Kejriwal urges Centre to cancel Class 10, 12 exams

Delhi sees highest daily spike of 13,468 Covid cases

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

Reeling under the fourth wave of Covid, the national capital Tuesday recorded the highest-ever spike of 13,468 cases and 81 deaths due to the infection, giving it the dubious distinction of being the worst affected city in the country.

The highest single-day spike in Mumbai stands at 9,986 cases till date, followed by Bengaluru (6,387 cases), Chennai (2,105) and Kolkata (1,271 cases).

In the wake of an exponential rise in coronavirus cases in Delhi, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal appealed to the Centre to cancel the Class 10 and 12 board exams and explore alternative methods, including online exams. Warning that conducting the exams may contribute to a large-scale spread of the virus, he said the centres could emerge as major hotspots.

"Six lakh children in Delhi are going to write the CBSE exams. Nearly one lakh teachers will be a part of it. These (centres) can become major hotspots leading to large-scale spread of corona. Children's lives and health are very important to us. I request the Centre to cancel the CBSE exams," he said at a press conference on Tuesday afternoon.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) can explore other

HC refuses to entertain plea to relax age criterion for corona vaccination

New Delhi, April 13: The Delhi High Court Tuesday refused to entertain a plea seeking direction to the Centre and AAP government to relax the age criterion for Covid vaccination and to allow more private sector participation in the drive.

A bench of justices Rajiv Sahai Endlaw and Amit Bansal said it appeared that the public interest litigation (PIL) has been filed for publicity rather than doing any good to the society.

"We are prima facie of the view that the court does not have the wherewithal to deal with such matters which require

methods, including online exams and promoting students on the basis of internal assessments, he said.

"Several countries have done it; some states in India are doing it too. Some alternative methods could be thought of. Children can be promoted this time on the basis of either online exam or internal assessment. But the exams should be cancelled," he added. The CBSE Class 10 and 12 exams are scheduled to begin on May 4. With the exponential increase in coronavirus cases, the chorus for cancellation or postponing the board exams is growing.

empirical data...," the high court said.

It said since the petitioner is withdrawing the plea and has understood the consequences and in future will not indulge in such litigation, it was refraining from imposing costs. The high court was hearing a petition, filed by a final year law student of Delhi University, seeking direction to the authorities to formulate a policy to provide the benefits of vaccination drive to senior citizens, differently-abled persons and poor sections of the society by initiating door-to-door vaccination services in Delhi. — PTI

Meanwhile, Mr Kejriwal said very less plasma is available in stock for treating Covid patients and he appealed to those who have recovered from the virus to actively donate it.

"During the previous waves, people actively donated plasma. When the situation improved, there was less demand for plasma and subsequently the donations went down. Now, the cases have again risen and there is very less plasma available in stock. I appeal to those who have recovered from the virus to actively donate plasma and aid the fight against the virus," he added.

Anil Shukla returns to Delhi Police after 6 years in NIA

New Delhi, April 13: Senior IPS officer Anil Shukla returned to his parent cadre Delhi Police after successfully completing his tenure of six years in the NIA, during which he led investigations into terror funding in Jammu and Kashmir, Pulwama attack and the recent Sachin Waze case. Shukla, a 1996-batch officer from Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT) cadre, completed his six years on central deputation on Monday and was expected to join Delhi Police soon in the rank of joint commissioner, officials said.

During his tenure in the National Investigation Agency (NIA), Shukla was entrusted with the important case of unravelling the funding of terror and separatist groups in Jammu and

Kashmir, where stone pelting had become an order of the day in 2016 post the killing of Burhan Wani, poster boy of the banned Hizbul Mujahideen terror group.

Shukla and his team camped continuously in Kashmir and started probing the role of certain politicians and business persons till he finally laid his hand on Zahoor Watali, a prominent citizen of the Valley and well connected within the political circles of the erstwhile state.

After registering a case in May 2007, the NIA carried out searches at the residences of well-known separatists, including Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, and started cracking the whip on separatist groups' cadres who acted as overground workers of terror groups. — PTI



Artists sing religious songs at Jhandewalan Temple during the first day of Navratri festival in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI



Medics attend to a Covid patient at Shehnai Banquet Hall, temporarily converted into an isolation ward, as coronavirus cases surge across the country near Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Hospital in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

Kejri appeals Delhiites for plasma donation

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal Tuesday said very less plasma is available in stock for treating Covid patients and appealed to those who have recovered from the disease to actively donate it.

A day after 14 hospitals in the national capital were converted into Covid-only facilities, the

chief minister said planned surgeries like knee replacement can be delayed for 2-3 months though he stressed that there is enough capacity for emergency surgeries.

"I would like to appeal to the youth to step out of the house only when it is necessary and follow all Covid protocols," Aam Aadmi Party supreme told a press conference.

Noida records highest deaths in 4 months

Noida, April 13: Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddh Nagar recorded four coronavirus deaths on Tuesday, taking the district's toll to 97, official data showed. This is the first time in over four months that the district witnessed more than a single death due to Covid in a day. On November 24, it had recorded three deaths. There were 229

new cases and the tally rose to 27,957. The number of active cases climbed to 1,602, the health department said.

Fifty-five more patients recuperated, taking the recoveries to 26,258, it said.

Gautam Buddh Nagar has a toll of 97 with a mortality rate of 0.34 per cent. The recovery rate reached 93.92 per cent, the statistics showed. — PTI

Courts can't thwart investigation into cognisable offences, says SC

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

The Supreme Court, on Tuesday, said that the police has the "statutory right and duty" to investigate into a cognisable offence and the courts would not interfere in any investigation into such offences as they are barred from usurping the jurisdiction of the police.

"The police has the statutory right and duty under the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) to investigate into a cognisable offence and the courts would not thwart any investigation into the cognisable offences," said a bench comprising Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, Justice M. R. Shah, and Justice Sanjay Khanna in a judgment pronounced on Tuesday. Speaking for the bench,

THE COURT said that it is only in cases where no cognisable offence or offence of any kind is disclosed in the FIR that the court will not permit an investigation to go on

Justice Shah said, "Ordinarily, the courts are barred from usurping the jurisdiction of the police since the two organs of the state operate in two specific spheres of activities and one ought not to tread over the other sphere. The functions of the judiciary and the police are complementary, not overlapping."

It further said that excluding exceptional cases where non-interference would result in miscarriage of justice, the court and the judicial process should not interfere at the stage of investigation of offences. The court said that it is

only in cases where no cognisable offence or offence of any kind is disclosed in the FIR that the court will not permit an investigation to go on.

However, in a rider, the court said that the power of quashing FIR should be exercised "sparingly with circumspection" in rarest of rare cases. The court clarified that rarest of rare cases may not be confused with the doctrine of rarest of rare cases in the award of capital punishment.

The court said this in a slew of 18 directions issued by it while quashing and setting aside a Bombay high court's interim order protecting three accused from any coercive action in a case involving forgery and fabrication of Board Resolution and the fraudulent sale of a valuable property, Naziribagh Palace, measuring 111,882 sq.ft.

'Angry with God', man defiles 3 Hanuman idols

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

Upset and "angry with God" over rising temperature and lack of rain, a man defiled three idols of Lord Hanuman in southwest Delhi's Kakrola village which landed him in jail on Tuesday. The accused, Mahesh (50) of Bharat Vihar J.J. colony, is a cobbler, police said.

The matter was reported by a priest on Tuesday morning who first spotted the damaged Hanuman idols at three adjacent spots in Kakrola, a senior police officer said.

"We received a call at 7.45 am regarding defiling of statue at three spots in Kakrola area," the officer added.

According to the police, the accused told them during interrogation that he

was upset and angry with God as there has been no rain this year and that it is getting hotter with every passing day.

Following the incident, a group of people, including residents, local leaders and those associated with the Bajrang Dal, gathered at Dwarka Mor and stopped traffic movement.

Efforts to calm them down were successful, and traffic movement was regulated, the police said.

"We have registered a case under section 295 (injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class) and 295 A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs) of the IPC. The accused, Mahesh, has also been arrested.

Govt to health facilities: Strictly follow protocol for admission

New Delhi, April 13: With an exponential rise in Covid cases in the city, the Delhi government has directed health facilities to strictly follow admission protocol while admitting coronavirus patients and said mild or asymptomatic cases can be considered for home isolation. The DGHS said that severe cases involving respiratory distress requiring mechanical ventilation should be admitted to a dedicated Covid hospital.

The government has warned of action for failure in adherence to laid down admission protocol. In an order issued last week, the directorate general of health services said that it has been observed that hospitals are admitting mild and moderate cases of Covid which are not in line with the prescribed admission protocol.

On Monday, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had appealed to people to avoid rushing to hospitals. He had also said the AAP government did not want to impose lockdown in Delhi but such a situation may arise if there is a rush to the hospitals and beds are unavailable for the serious patients. — PTI

HC to hear Hegde's plea on July 8

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

The Delhi high court, on Tuesday, said that it will hear advocate Sanjay Hegde's plea challenging the suspension of his Twitter account on July 8. A single-judge bench of Justice Prathiba M. Singh listed his plea for hearing on July 8.

The court was hearing an application filed by Mr Hegde seeking an early hearing in his plea. The plea was filed by advocate Pranjal Kishore. In his early plea, the advocate has sought a direction to Twitter to restore his account, which was permanently suspended on November 5, 2019.

The petitioner has said that the suspension of his Twitter account is contrary to the 'Twitter Rules' and its terms of use, illegal and arbitrary. It is a violation of his right to free speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) and a violation of his right to assembly and right to form association guaranteed by Articles 19(1)(b) and 19(1)(c) of the Constitution.

3 arrested for killing man, injuring friend

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

Three people were arrested for allegedly stabbing a 22-year-old man to death and injuring his friend in east Delhi's Kalyanpuri area in the early hours of Tuesday, police said.

According to police, they received information regarding a quarrel from the area around 2 am.

On reaching the spot, they found Abhimanyu of Khichdiupur and Abhishek with stab wounds. They were attacked with knives by a group of men, a senior police officer said.

They were rushed to the Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital, where Abhimanyu succumbed to injuries, the officer added.

A case under sections 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code has been registered at the Kalyanpuri police station, and an investigation is being carried out, the police said.

SHORT TAKES

'Didi's plight is that of defeated player'

Kolkata: BJP president J.P. Nadda, taking a dig at the Trinamul Congress' "khele hobe" slogan, said on Tuesday that West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee's plight is that of a "defeated player". Alleging that a culture of violence has crept in West Bengal during different regimes, Mr Nadda said that the state now needs a new alternative in its political landscape, which can re-establish the rule of law. "Mamata's condition is like that of a defeated player in a game. She has done injustice to the people of the state for many years. The BJP, however, will usher in development, stop atrocities on women and create jobs for youth, if voted to power," the BJP leader said. Mr Nadda also said that the TMC supremo seems to have forgotten that she has not done anything creditworthy for the people of the state. — PTI

C'garh armed force officer kills himself

Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh: A 59-year-old Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) officer allegedly committed suicide by shooting himself with his service weapon in Bastar district on Tuesday, the police said. Kuber Singh, company commander of CAF's 19th "Pokhran" battalion, shot himself with his Insas rifle this evening at his unit's camp in Karanpur village under Nagarnar police station limits, a senior official said. "When his colleagues heard the gunshot from his barrack, they rushed there and found him lying in a pool of blood. Singh was declared dead on arrival by doctors. Why he took this step is being probed," he said. He was a native of Chhatrapur in MP but his family was currently staying in Chhattisgarh's Durg district, the official said. — PTI

Cong's 'INC TV' to be launched today

New Delhi: The Congress will launch its digital media platform "INC TV" on Wednesday aimed at conveying the party's message directly to the people, sources said. The details about the online platform will be spelt out at a press conference at 11:30 am at the party's headquarters in New Delhi. Leader of the the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala, Mahila Congress chief Sushmita Dev and Youth Congress president Srinivas B.V. will be present at the launch press conference. Sources said the platform was aimed at helping the party convey its message to the people directly and raise issues of importance. The details will be revealed at the press conference, they said. — PTI

ED SET TO GRILL 3 BENGAL COPS OVER COAL SCAM

Age Correspondent
New Delhi, April 13

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) is all set to question three senior officials of the West Bengal police in connection with its money laundering probe into the alleged coal scam in the state. According to sources decision to question three senior cops has been taken following the custodial interrogation of the recently arrested West Bengal police officer Ashok Mishra. Mishra, the inspector-in-charge of the Bankura police station, was arrested by the Central probe agency from Delhi. He is alleged to have links with Anup Majee, alias Lala, who is considered to be the kingpin of the scam. This is the second arrest in the case. Sources further said, "Apart from these three senior cops, role of several other officials of the West Bengal Police is also under the scanner of the ED". It is suspected that several other officials of the West Bengal police were in regular touch with Majee, sources said adding the agency will soon call three senior cops for questioning in connection with the case. The ED recently attached immovable assets, worth ₹165.86 crore, owned by Anup Majee, as part of its investigation into the case. These assets included land, factory premises, plant and machinery, and other assets of two companies.

■ Minister makes it clear Centre has no plan to implement NRC

Shah: Gorkha problem to be fixed if BJP is voted to power in Bengal

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, APRIL 13

In a desperate bid to woo the Gorkhas on their separate statehood demand of Gorkhaland amid the Assembly elections in West Bengal, Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday assured them in Darjeeling that "two governments of the the BJP" — one at the Centre and the other in West Bengal, if the saffron party comes to power in the state — would work out a "permanent political solution" under the ambit of the Constitution.

He also made it clear that the Centre does not have any plan to implement the National Register of Citizens.

"I know you are worried about the permanent political solution for the Gorkhas. But our Constitution is also vast. There is a solution for every problem in our Constitution. I promise you today that a permanent political solution for the Gorkhas will be worked out by two governments of the BJP, one at the Centre and the other in state. You do not need any movement for this," Mr Shah told a rally in the hills.

Though Mr Shah did not spell out the word "Gorkhaland" in his speech, this was perhaps the first time when any senior BJP leader in the Narendra Modi government gave a reference to the use of constitutional provisions to sort out the issue which has slipped under the saffron party's hands.

Not impressed by the Union home minister's assurance during the poll season, Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) president Binay Tamang, however, wondered what



MP and actress Jaya Bachchan during an election rally for Trinamul Congress candidate in Krishnaganj, Nadia, on Tuesday. — PTI

could a "permanent political solution" mean to the Gorkhas other than "Gorkhaland".

He alleged, "Mr Shah might have remained silent on the particular word but we understand that a 'permanent political solution' means Gorkhaland. Such false promise from the BJP is not new to us. The saffron party starts to feel for us on the eve of every elections. In 2014, they got our support when Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister. After a gap of five years they remembered us and got our support after Mr Shah made a lot of assurances. But we got nothing from the BJP."

Announcing sops for the hills, Mr Shah also tried to reach out to the GJM faction led by the outfit's founder and erstwhile chief Bimal Gurung, talking of a BJP government's withdrawal of all cases, slapped by the Mamata Banerjee government, on him.

'BJP, TMC playing politics of violence'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BERHAMPUR, APRIL 13

AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi on Tuesday accused the BJP and Trinamul Congress of trying to grab power in West Bengal by playing a "dirty game" of violence and blood.

At a party rally in Sagardighi, he alleged, "Both the BJP and TMC want to grab power over the bodies of our slain youth and an 18-year-old Rajbanshi youth in Cooch Behar. It is a dirty game they are playing. They are dividing the people on the basis of caste, creed and religion to trigger communal disharmony and hatred. The TMC even branded us as 'outsiders' here."

Rejecting the TMC's slogan, the AIMIM chief told the crowd, "How could the BJP bag 18 seats here in 2019? The reason is that the Congress is weak while the TMC is corrupt and it failed to bring development here. We are not outsiders or guests here. We are here to stay to fight the panchayat as well as Parliament polls for the betterment of poor Muslims."



"Murshidabad has been ruled by the Congress, TMC, CPI(M). Then why are people not getting pure drinking water and education? Why are the poor villagers compelled to go Kashmir and get slain by terrorists?" he argued.

WB firing: Forces told to exercise 'restraint'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

All Central paramilitary forces deployed in West Bengal which include the CRPF, BSF, CISF and SSB have been strictly told by the Union home ministry to "show maximum restraint and avoid using firing at all cost unless grave provocation" in managing crowds during the ongoing election process in the state. The advisory comes in wake of the Cooch Behar firing incident in which four people were killed and triggered a major war of words between the BJP and Trinamul Congress.

The CISF had to resort to firing last Saturday in Cooch Behar's Sitalkuchi area when a mob of almost 400 people attacked a QRT unit of the CISF. The incident became entirely political and the Election Commission had to announce that no political person would be allowed to visit Cooch Behar.

Following the incident, the entire situation was reviewed by the Election Commission along with security experts from the home ministry.

Cong allies all set to face off in Adhir's stronghold

Ties between ISF chief, Chowdhury not good: Sources

PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI
BERHAMPUR, APRIL 13

The fate of the triangular alliance in West Bengal has come under the hammer in state Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury's stronghold as four more key seats in Murshidabad are seeing a contest among the three Sanjukta Morcha partners.

On April 8, the last date of filing nominations, it emerged that the Indian Secular Front had fielded candidates in three seats against its Congress ally.

Mohammad Meraj Sharif is contesting against five-time Congress MLA Moinul Hoque at Farakka, Masum Reja is fighting two-time Congress MLA Firoza Begum at Raninagar with Habib Sheikh against Congress greenhorn Riazuddin Ahmed in Murshidabad.

The Congress also faces a challenge from another ally in Nowda, where a CPI(M)-backed Independent, Shamik Mondal, is fighting against its candidate Mosharraf Hussain.



West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury during a rally at Kumarganj in South Dinajpur district on Tuesday. — PTI

This comes after the Congress, defying the seat-sharing formula, fielded its candidate Rejaul Biswas at Shamshegunj, where CPI(M)'s Modassar Hussain is the alliance's candidate.

Mr Sharif, the ISF candidate of Farakka, alleged that Mr Hoque did not do anything for the people of Farakka.

ISF spokesman Samsul Ali Mullik, however, called the party's fight against the Congress in three seats a "friendly contest" while denying of any rift within the alliance in the remaining seats.

Murshidabad district Congress spokesperson Jayanta Das, however, claimed, "It will not affect our poll prospect because Farakka, Raninagar and Murshidabad are our stronghold. It is the ISF which, defying alliance formula, fielded its candidate."

But sources claimed that despite an alliance, relations between Peerzada Abbas Siddiqui, the influential Muslim cleric of Furfura Sharif who is the founder of ISF, and Mr Chowdhury are not good.

Mr Chowdhury said, "I have no knowledge about ISF candidates in Murshidabad. So I can not say anything about it. Our alliance with CPI(M) is getting stronger everyday I am personally campaigning for the CPI(M) candidates in many seats. The CPI(M) rank and file are also fighting for the Congress wholeheartedly."

Indicted by Lokayukta, Kerala minister resigns

Move hours before HC was to hear his plea challenging report

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 13

Kerala higher education minister K.T. Jaleel, who was indicted by the Lokayukta of nepotism, abuse of power and breach of oath of office, resigned on Tuesday.

Mr Jaleel sent his resignation to chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan and the latter forwarded it to governor Arif Mohammad Khan. In an emotional Facebook post, Mr Jaleel said that those who were baying for his blood could find some relief now. The minister's resignation came hours before the Kerala high court was scheduled to hear his plea challenging the Lokayukta damning report.

In his petition, Mr Jaleel had contended that the Lokayukta findings were not based on evidence or proper investigations, hence the ruling should be set aside by the high court. The Lokayukta had indicted him of appointing his close relative K.T. Adeeb by altering the educational qualifications needed for the post of general manager at the state minorities development finance corporation.



K.T. Jaleel

► IN HIS petition, the minister had contended that the Lokayukta findings were not based on evidence or proper investigations, hence the ruling should be set aside by the high court

► THE LOKAYUKTA had indicted him of appointing his close relative by altering the educational qualifications needed for the post of general manager

The division bench of Lokayukta had ruled that the charge of abuse of power, favouritism and nepotism against Mr Jaleel had been proved.

It was the Muslim Youth League leadership which had first alleged that Mr Jaleel's cousin Adeeb was appointed general manager in the Kerala State Minorities Development Finance Corporation, flouting rules. At the time of appointment, Mr Adeeb was working as manager of a private bank.

"This forum is satisfied that the allegation of abuse of power, favouritism, nepotism and violation of oath of office is substantiated against Dr K.T. Jaleel, minister for higher education and minority welfare," the Lokayukta had observed.

Mr Jaleel had written to

secretary public administration (minority welfare) demanding an alternation in the educational qualifications required for the post of general manager, in July 28, 2016. The secretary objected and made a note saying that the change could be done with the approval of the Cabinet.

Mr Jaleel came out with a clarification that the Cabinet nod was not required as only an addition would be made in education qualification and it could be done by the chief minister.

Mr Vijayan approved Mr Jaleel's suggestion on August 9, 2016.

But the probe by the Lokayukta revealed that the norms regarding educational qualification had been tweaked without the approval of the Cabinet or finance department.

Sarma takes a dig at Cong front for flying MLAs out of Assam

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, APRIL 13

Assam minister and top BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma, who is confident about his party returning to power second time in the state, on Tuesday said that the Congress led grand alliance has shifted its candidate outside the state, ignoring the safety of strongrooms where EVMs are stored.

Pointing out that most of the candidates are keeping a close watch and joint surveillance on strongrooms, Mr Sarma told reporters that the Congress-AIUDF which have shifted their candidates should not blame him for defeat.

"If they lose elections in the counting of votes they will have a new refrain that in their absence something was done with EVMs. Hope they will not blame me for doing something wrong with EVMs," said Mr Sarma while taking a dig at Congress-AIUDF alliance for shifting at least 20 candidates in the Assam assembly polls to a hotel in Jaipur.

They were flown to Jaipur in a chartered flight and taken to a hotel on the Delhi highway on the outskirts of Jaipur. Most of them are AIUDF candidates.



Himanta Biswa Sarma

the candidates should keep a close watch on strongrooms where EVMs are stored but surprisingly the Congress-AIUDF have shifted their candidates outside the state."

He said that these political parties should clarify their stand that they have left the strongrooms at their own risk and would not blame him for defeat in counting of votes on May 2.

It is significant that at least 20 candidates of the Congress-AIUDF alliance in the Assam Assembly polls have been shifted to a hotel in Jaipur.

They were flown to Jaipur in a chartered flight and taken to a hotel on the Delhi highway on the outskirts of Jaipur. Most of them are AIUDF candidates.

Chandra assumes charge as new CEC

New Delhi, April 13: Sushil Chandra assumed charge as the 24th Chief Election Commissioner on Tuesday.

Mr Chandra was appointed as the CEC on Monday, the day Sunil Arora demitted office.

Mr Chandra was appointed as an election commissioner on February 14, 2019, ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. He would demit office on May 14, 2022.

Under him, the Election Commission (EC) will hold assembly polls in Goa, Manipur, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.

The term of the assemblies of Goa, Manipur, Uttarakhand and Punjab ends on various dates in March next year.

The term of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly ends on May 14 next year. — PTI

France aims at having 20K students from India by 2025

New Delhi, April 13:

French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian on Tuesday said that the country has set a target of having 20,000 Indian students in France by 2025. There were 10,000 Indian students studying in the European nation in 2019, according to officials at the French embassy.

"We have set a target — it is to have 20,000 Indian students in France by 2025, and we will make it. We want to bring French and Indian youth even closer," minister Le Drian said.

"We will support the students during their stay in France... Living in France is quite something," he said.

The minister was speaking at an event at the French embassy where he appointed 15 alumni ambassadors to boost student mobility between the two countries.

The minister mentioned that he got late in reaching the embassy for the event as he "had so many things to discuss" with his counterpart Union minister S. Jaishankar. — PTI

India, France talk trade, Indo-Pacific

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday held bilateral discussions with visiting French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian during which "they explored ways to strengthen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, including the India-France-Australia Trilateral mechanism" and "recognised the immense opportunities for greater collaboration in diverse sectors such as trade and investments, defence and security, health, education, research and inno-

► INDIA, FRANCE also discussed 'a number of regional and global issues of mutual interest reiterating their shared commitment to a multipolar world and faith in multilateralism'

vation, energy and climate change". India also "welcomed France's decision to take up the "Maritime Resources" pillar of India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)". Also, "to tap the full potential of bilateral trade and economic relations, both sides recognised the importance of

fast tracking the discussions on an India-EU trade and investment agreement".

The two foreign ministers also discussed "a number of regional and global issues of mutual interest reiterating their shared commitment to a multipolar world and faith in multilateralism", while "addressing emerging challenges in the maritime and space domains and working together in the area of climate action and biodiversity protection".

India is a major strategic partner of France and has close defence ties

with it. India is also currently in the midst of the process of acquiring 36 state-of-the-art Rafale fighter aircraft from France, with several of these aircraft already inducted into the Indian Air Force.

In a statement, the MEA said, "Mr Jean-Yves Le Drian, minister for Europe and foreign affairs of France, is on an official visit to India from April 13-15, 2021. External affairs minister S. Jaishankar hosted the visiting foreign minister for bilateral talks at Hyderabad House on April 13."

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
E-TENDER NOTICE	
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction Distribution, DRMs's Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi for & on behalf of President of India, invites open e-tender under single packet system for the under noted work:	
1 Name of Work with its location	Balance work of Design, Supply, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of 25 KV AC OHE Inconnection with Electrification of stabiling line no. 8 & 9 at NDLS and Washing line at DLI.
2 Approx. Cost of work	Rs. 78,95,480.05/-
3 Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 0/-
4 E-Tender Bid Online Submission Period	26.04.2021 (00.00 Hrs.) to 10.05.2021 (15.00 Hrs.)
5 E-Tender Bid Submission End Date & E-Tender Open Date & Time	10.05.2021 (15.00 hrs.)
6 Fund Allocation	43164103
7 Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in
E-Tender No.: 03-TRD-NDLS-2021-22 Dated 13.04.2021 848/2021	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

SEARCH FOR MISSING	
	General Public is hereby informed that a boy namely Mangal Singh, S/o Hamam Singh, R/o H.No. 72, Sandeep Ka Makaan, Gali No.3, Vijay Colony, Bawana, Delhi, Permanent Address: Village Bari, P.S. Arwal, Distt. Haridol, (U.P.) Age: 21 years, Height: 5'3", Complexion: Sallow, Face: Long, Built: Thin, Identification Mark: Scar mark on forehead, Wearing: Sky Colour Jeans Pant and White Colour Shirt and Sleeper in his feet has been missing from his home since 23.03.2021 at 5.00 am. In this regard vide DD No. 108A, dated 25.03.2021 has been registered at PS. Bawana, Delhi.
	Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing boy but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about this boy please inform undersigned.
E-mail : cbc@cbi.gov.nic.in Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641 Fax : 011-24368639 DP/939/ON/2021	
SHO P.S. Bawana, Delhi Ph. : 011-27752534 / 7065036321	

SHORT TAKES

Yogi self-isolates
as officials test +ve

Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath said on Tuesday he has isolated himself after some officers in his office tested positive for Covid-19. "Some officers in my office have been infected with Corona. These officers have been in contact with me, so I have isolated myself as a precaution and am starting all the work virtually," Adityanath said in a tweet in Hindi. Mr Adityanath, however, did not identify the officials who tested positive. The development comes shortly after Adityanath wrapped up his extensive campaign for the West Bengal assembly elections, where he was one of the star campaigners for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Some officials, including his OSD Abhishek Kaushik, tested positive for the coronavirus disease, reported news agency.

NCB finds LSD in
Hitler's biography

Mumbai: The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) seized commercial quantity of LSD concealed inside a copy of German dictator Adolf Hitler's biography at a post office in suburban Vile Parle here, an official said on Tuesday. Based on a tip-off, a zonal team of the NCB seized a parcel from the post office in Vile Parle (East) on Monday, the official said. On examining the contents, the team from 80 dots of LSD concealed in a copy of Hitler's biography, he said. Investigations revealed that some youngsters had allegedly procured the contraband through darknet from Europe and had paid for it using Bitcoin or crypto currency, the official said, adding that further probe is underway.

Cop fined ₹2,000 for
not wearing mask

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha police on Tuesday imposed a fine of ₹2,000 on an on-duty traffic constable posted in the pilgrim city Puri for violating Covid-19 guidelines by not wearing a face mask. Puri superintendent of police (SP) Samarth Verma took to Twitter and shared the news. "We have fined our own Traffic constable of ₹2000 for not wearing a mask. And he, as a responsible citizen has paid," the SP tweeted. In his post, the SP cautioned the public to always wear a mask, else pay the penalty. On April 9, the Odisha government doubled the fine amount for violation of the mask-wearing norm. Accordingly, violators will have to pay ₹2,000 for the first two violations and ₹5,000 for subsequent offences.

Maha imposes
strict curbs
across state

■ Continued from Page 1

assistance in the supply of oxygen for medical use from nearby states. Petrol pumps, financial institutions associated with Sebi, ATMs and construction work will be allowed to continue. Hotel and restaurants would remain closed for dine-in, and only takeaway/home deliveries would be allowed.

Mr Thackeray also appealed to retired nurses, doctors and other health workers to extend their help during the Covid-19 crisis in the state.

All banking and financial services, the RBI and its affiliated offices, insurance offices and pre-monsoon works will remain operational, he said.

However, there will be a complete ban on religious, social, cultural and political functions in the state till May 1, the CM said.

For political rallies during elections, not more than 200 people can attend an event or 50 per cent of the seating capacity of the hall, Mr Thackeray said.

The number of participants at marriage and funeral was capped at 25 and 20, respectively.

Saloons, spas, schools, colleges, private coaching classes, beaches, clubs, swimming pools, gyms, drama theatres and cinema halls will remain closed during the next 15 days, the chief minister said.

Though roadside eateries are allowed to operate, buyers can not consume food on the street and only take away will be available, said Thackeray.

He announced a package of ₹5,476 crore for the poor whose earnings will be impacted.

Pandemic an opportunity to
reshape the world order: PM

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented us an opportunity to reshape the world order and we must think of the entire humanity and not merely of those who are on our side of the borders, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday.

Speaking at the inaugural session of Raisina Dialogue 2021, he said: "We must create systems that addresses the problems of today and challenges of tomorrow. And we must think of the entire humanity and not merely of those who are on our side of the borders. Humanity as a whole must be at the centre of our thinking and action."

PM Modi promised that India would continue to share its "experiences, expertise and resources with the entire humanity

in the fight against the pandemic", adding that the "mistakes and misdeeds of the past seven decades need not constrain our thinking for the future".

PM Modi further pointed out that "while humanity has not faced the Third World War, the threat of violence has not reduced in people's lives" and that "with a number of proxy wars and unending terror attacks, the prospect of violence is ever-present".

He called for collective response to defeat the pandemic.

Calling upon the participants "to emerge as a powerful voice for a human-centric approach", he reminded them that "while we may be used to having Plan A and plan B, there is no Planet B, only planet Earth" and that "we must remember that we hold this planet merely as trustees for our future generations".

The Raisina Dialogue is



Narendra Modi

"India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics, held annually since 2016" and is "jointly organised by the ministry of external affairs (MEA) and the (thinktank) Observer Research Foundation."

PM Modi said, "... Is it perhaps because in the race of economic development the concern for the welfare of humanity has been left behind. ...Is it perhaps because in the age of competition, the spirit of cooperation has been forgotten. ... After the end of

the second world war, over the next few decades many structures and institutions were created but under the shadow of the two wars, they were aimed at answering only one question, how to prevent the Third World War? Today, I submit to you that this was the wrong question, as a result, all the steps taken were like treating a patient symptoms without addressing the underlying causes. Or to put it differently, all the steps taken were to prevent the last war, not the next one."

Talking about the Indian experience, PM Modi pointed out, "During this pandemic, in our own humble way, within our own limited resources, we in India have tried to walk the talk. We have tried to protect our own 1.3 billion citizens from the pandemic. At the same time, we have also tried to support the pandemic response efforts of others."

Mumbai
police starts
process to
sack Waze

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, APRIL 13

The Mumbai police have begun the process of dismissing the suspended police officer Sachin Waze following his arrest by the National Investigation Agency (NIA). Waze is accused of planting a vehicle loaded with explosives near the home of industrialist Mukesh Ambani in Mumbai and the murder of businessman Mansukh Hiran.

According to a police officer, the city's special service branch (SSB) had recently written to the state anti-terrorism squad and the NIA and sought documents pertaining to the case, including the copy of the FIR registered in connection with the murder of Mansukh Hiran and statement of his widow who raised suspicion over Waze's role in his death.

After receiving documents from the concerned agencies, the SSB initiated the process of dismissing Waze from service under Article 311 of the Constitution of India. The SSB is now expected to send Waze's dismissal proposal to the government.

The NIA has so far arrested Sachin Waze, Riyazuddin Kazi, former policeman Vinayak Shinde and cricket bookie Naresh Gor in connection with Ambani bomb scare and Mansukh Hiran murder case.

Afghanistan

■ Continued from Page 1

May 2021. Over the past year, US military commanders and defence officials have said that attacks on US troops have largely paused, but they say the Taliban have increased attacks on the Afghans. Commanders have argued that the Taliban have failed to meet the conditions of the peace pact by continuing attacks on Afghans and failing to totally cut ties with Al Qaeda and other extremist groups.

When Mr Biden entered the White House in January, he was keenly aware of the looming deadline and had time to meet it if he had chosen to do so. He began a review of the February 2020 agreement shortly after taking office and has been consulting at length with his defence and military advisers as well as allies.

In recent weeks, it became increasingly clear that he was leaning toward defying the deadline. "It's going to be hard to meet the May 1 deadline," Mr Biden said in late March. "Just in terms of tactical reasons, it's hard to get those troops out." Tellingly, he added: "And if we leave, we're going to do so in a safe and orderly way." —AP

11 die in 2 Maha hospitals,
kin blame oxygen shortage

Officials say patients died due critical condition

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, APRIL 13

Eleven Covid deaths were reported at two hospitals at Nalasopara in Maharashtra's Palghar district on Tuesday. While angry relatives of the deceased blamed it on the oxygen shortage, the government officials denied the allegations, saying both the hospitals have ample oxygen stock. The deaths occurred as the patients were critical, they said.

According to Vasai-Virar Municipal Corporation (VVMC) officials, seven Covid deaths were reported from the Vinayak hospital, four patients died at the Riddhi Vinayak hospital. Both the hospitals are treating Covid patients.

The relatives of the deceased stormed the hospitals as the rumour spread that the deaths were caused due to the shortage of the oxygen. Police personnel were deployed in large numbers to prevent any untoward incident.

VVMC former mayor Rajiv Patil, in an audio message that went viral on social media, said the oxygen cylinders are in short supply and enough to last only for three hours. If oxygen is unavailable, Covid patients may suffer and even die, he said.

However, the VVMC official said that both the hospitals had adequate oxygen stock. "Vinayak



Devotees gather to offer prayers during Ganga aarti at Kumbh Mela in Haridwar. Haridwar reported 594 new cases of coronavirus on Tuesday, taking the active case-load of the city to 2,812, as thousands gathered to take dips in the Gana for the 13th day of Mahakumbh. — PTI

Jaishankar
backs India's
vaccine
diplomacy

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday defended and justified India's decision to supply Covid-19 vaccines to other countries and said that there is a need for ensuring equitable access to it across the world and the country's ability to make vaccines is a result of international cooperation which is not a "one-way street".

He, however, accepted that "if any country is under stress, if the numbers are going up, which by the way they are for us right now, I think it's completely legitimate that we apply, and repurpose our production to where the immediate challenge is".

The EAM also batted for "additional capabilities" in India for producing vaccines, arguing that "unless you have greater production, (global) distributive justice by itself will not be adequate". He also said that "to the extent that you have margins and the ability and the obligation to help others, I think it's the decent thing to do, as I said, doing good is also doing smart".

Mr Jaishankar was participating in a "panel discussion at the Raisina Dialogue-2021 on 'The Health Central: India, SDGs, Vaccines & Global Expectations'".

The EAM said, "For those who actually question international cooperation, I want people to also understand this, that our ability to make vaccines... is itself a result of international cooperation. So international cooperation is not a one-way street where we are giving things to other people and somewhere short-changing ourselves, I think people need to understand that."

On Monday, the mortuary had 40 bodies, mostly those of Covid-19 victims, which is more than its capacity", he added.

"The situation is concerning. The district administration and the municipal corporation have been asked to ensure that last rites of the bodies are performed at the earliest," Chhattisgarh health minister T.S. Singhdeo told the media.

The situation in the neighbouring district of Durg was equally grim.

C'garh: Morgues overflow
with Covid victims' bodies

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, APRIL 13

The Raipur district administration on Tuesday took over all the 18 crematoriums and burial grounds falling under city civic limits in the wake of opposition to cremation of bodies of Covid-19 victims by the locals in some areas.

Raipur district collector S. Bharathidasan took stock of the situation in a video conference with officers concerned and ordered the use of all 18 crematoriums and burial grounds falling under Raipur Municipal Corporation for performing funeral rites of the Covid-19 victims.

Earlier, two crematoriums were used for the cremation of the bodies of the Covid-19 victims.

However, the two crematoriums have failed to dispose of the bodies of the victims who succumbed to the coronavirus in Dr B.R. Ambedkar Memorial Hospital (BRMH) in Raipur, the biggest medical

facility in Chhattisgarh.

Bodies of Covid-19 victims have been piling up in mortuaries and crematoriums in Raipur with the state administration finding it a challenging task to cope up with the sudden spurt in cases of viral infections and fatalities in the last fortnight.

Some videos in social media captured the horrific sight of bodies lining up on stretchers outside the mortuary of BRMH. "Due to sudden rise in Covid-19 fatalities, the bodies piled up in mortuary," a civic officer said.

"On Monday, the mortuary had 40 bodies, mostly those of Covid-19 victims, which is more than its capacity", he added.

"The situation is concerning. The district administration and the municipal corporation have been asked to ensure that last rites of the bodies are performed at the earliest," Chhattisgarh health minister T.S. Singhdeo told the media.

The situation in the neighbouring district of Durg was equally grim.

Didi holds silent dharna

■ Continued from Page 1

BJP candidate Rahul Sinha for his inflammatory remarks on the killings of four persons by the Central paramilitary forces at Shitalkuchi in Cooch Behar during the fourth phase of the polls.

"Not four, eight people should have been shot dead by the Central forces there! The Central forces should be issued a show-cause notice asking why they killed only four and not eight. Goons are trying to deprive people of their democratic rights.

Central forces responded appropriately. If it happens again, they will answer again," the former state BJP president had claimed at a campaign rally on Monday.

After the order, he how-

ever said: "I hold the EC in high respect. But it is a severe punishment to me."

The EC also served a show-cause notice to Mr Ghosh directing him to explain his recent threat to "repeat the Shitalkuchi-style killings at many places" during the polls by 10 am on Wednesday.

The poll panel also warned and advised Mr Adhikari, after getting his reply to its notice on his "begum" remark, in a veiled reference to Ms Banerjee, and his assertion that voting for his political opponent would imply voting for a "mini-Pakistan", "to desist from using such statements while making public utterances during the

period when the Model Code of Conduct is in force".

Five hours before the end of the ban on her campaign, Ms Banerjee cut short her dharna at around 3 pm and headed for home at Harish Chatterjee Street in Kalighat.

Resuming her campaign on Tuesday evening, Ms Banerjee said: "On one hand the BJP leaders will keep campaigning while on the other hand I cannot campaign. You be the judge... I will leave it to the masses to judge... I fail to understand why there has been an all-round attempt to stop me from campaigning," the chief minister said at Barasat in North 24 Parganas.

NGT cannot quash laws

■ Continued from Page 1

any items, including biological resources normally traded as commodities."

Appearing for the NGO Environment Support Group, senior lawyer Nikhil Nayyar told the court that earlier the Supreme Court had in the Sterlite case said that the

green tribunal cannot strike down rules or regulations.

The court had in its February 18, 2019, order said: "It is clear, therefore, that under the NGT Act, the tribunal exercising appellate jurisdiction cannot strike down rules or regulations ... Therefore, it would be fallacious to

state that the tribunal has powers of judicial review akin to that of a high court exercising constitutional powers under Article 226 of the Constitution of India ... We must never forget the distinction between a superior court of record and courts of limited jurisdiction..."

THE ASIAN AGE

14 APRIL 2021

Vaccine crisis intensifies, scale up production now

The decision of the subject expert committee of the Central Drugs and Standards Control Organisation (CDSCO), the country's drugs regulatory agency, to recommend Russia's Covid vaccine Sputnik V for emergency use authorisation is a welcome, if not belated, step. The CDSCO cleared the Sputnik V for use, making it the third such product available in the country. The vaccine, developed by Russia-based Gamaleya National Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology, is based on the human adenoviral vector platform and has a proven efficacy rate of 91.6 per cent in the interim analysis of phase 3 clinical trial. It may be remembered that the CDSCO panel had in February deferred its decision on the emergency licence seeking additional data on immunogenicity from the Indian company that was conducting the bridge study in the country.

The Russian vaccine is expected to join India's fight against the virus at a time when the country is facing two crises — one, an unprecedented spike in the daily caseload of Covid-19, and two, short supply of the two vaccines manufactured locally. Data on every single parameter, from the number of new infections to total active cases to test positivity rate and fatality rate, show a new high, putting the nation on the edge. There are reports from several states including Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh of the healthcare infrastructure coming under extreme strain as we had witnessed in the United States and Italy last year when the first wave of the pandemic hit the world. On top of it, India is facing a shortage of vaccines with several states complaining about being compelled to close down many vaccination centres. The Union government and the Prime Minister had lost no opportunity in going to town with the

story of the two made-in India vaccines going to help the world contain the pandemic but the reality at home is starkly different from the claims.

It must not go unsaid that the government did little planning on both upgrading the healthcare infrastructure and on rolling out an inoculation programme despite it getting almost a year since the pandemic arrived here. Several state governments relaxed the restrictions imposed during the lockdown even on social, political and religious gatherings without recognising the fact that the virus had not gone. And the nation now is made to pay a price for it. There was little planning on the manufacturing and distribution of the vaccines either. Both the companies that manufacture the vaccines in India are finding it difficult to meet their targets due to a variety of reasons, which include shortage of funds and even raw materials. The government's lackadaisical approach has landed them in a vicious circle. The Serum Institute of India (SII), which manufactures Covishield, has been served a notice by its foreign partner AstraZeneca for reneging on its obligation of exports, which hit the company's cash flow. SII and Bharat Biotech, which manufactures Covaxin, have both reportedly approached the Centre for funds. The government must immediately consider their request and facilitate ramping up production. Plucking the low-hanging fruits is easy, but going for the ones at the top is tough. The government must realise it.

Winners and losers

In what must rate as one of the finest IPL innings seen in a big run chase came the lesson that sometimes even the most valorous must bow to the dictates of Lady Fortune. Success and failure are not the same as victory and defeat as there will always be valiant sportsmen who shine as winners like Sanju Samson even if he did end up on the losing side. A gifted cricket writer used to describe the limited-overs game as "a perfumed harlot" who bestowed her favours one minute and dashed your hopes the next. Samson must have felt the weight of such an allegory as he took it upon himself to keep the strike and aim for that one more lofted drive for victory on a night of inspired stroke play and keen reading of the cricket compass.

As it transpired, a yard or so made all the difference between victory and defeat as Rajasthan Royals' skipper Samson was caught on the line to leave the Punjab Kings the victors. It was clear enough though who the star gladiator of the night was. It was a similar story but one with the happiest ending for another sportsman at the other end of the world as Hideki Matsuyama of Japan held on to his lead to earn the right to wear the coveted Green Jacket at the Masters in Augusta, Georgia.

Golf must seem even more of a perfumed harlot in the bestowing of favours as there can be many a slip between the ball and the lip of the cup that makes the hole. No victory could have been more dramatic and more inspiring than that of a Japanese journeyman golfer scaling Olympian heights. Eyebrows may rise at the sight of international sportsmen minting millions while billions cower in fear of the virus. But IPL has the money to create a safe bio-bubble for players while viewers are entertained in these grim times. It is Japan's wish then that Matsuyama headline the Olympics while the Games go on to show the world that humanity can emerge from the life-and-death fight against the virus.

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Subhani



India's isolation likely to grow in the entire region



K.C. Singh

Some recent diplomatic events, many of them flowing from shifting global power equations, hold much significance for India. The overlapping visits by Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and US special presidential climate envoy John Kerry raised eyebrows. India frets over the growing Russian proximity to the China-Pakistan axis. Mr Kerry met Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss India's Paris Agreement commitments. But Mr Lavrov could not, either due to Mr Modi's preoccupation with the Assembly elections or India conveying a subtle snub as Mr Lavrov, unmindful of Indian sentiments, combined his Indian trip with one to Pakistan. Also, when Russia hosted an intra-Afghan meeting, India was not invited. To shape events in post-transition Afghanistan, Russia has now repositioned.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's India visit later this year will be against this background. India wants to retain Russian goodwill while enhancing America's role as arms supplier and strategic partner. Thus, India retains its order for Russia's S-400 air defence system, despite US warnings about the inevitable US sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). External affairs minister S. Jaishankar termed India-Russia ties as time-tested and warm. Mr Lavrov listed areas of cooperation ranging from combating the Covid-19 pandemic, to nuclear energy, peaceful uses of space and infrastructure projects, in the Far East and the Arctic. Afghanistan, Syria, Iran and the Gulf were also discussed.

Russia strongly supported the Russia-India-China grouping (RIC), besides the East Asia Summit. A Russian role in the Sino-Indian de-escalation in

Ladakh has been speculated about. Russia realises that India-Russia ties will get impacted if Russia's burgeoning engagement with China is accompanied by China-India tensions. Both ministers emphasised the centrality of Asean in developing cooperative ventures in East Asia. This addressed Russian concerns, which China shares, about the "Quad", of which India is a member alongside Australia, Japan and the United States.

During his media interaction, Mr Lavrov spoke on many issues. Asked about a possible military alliance between Russia and China, he said though their relations have "reached the best level ever", such an alliance was not envisaged. In turn, he asked if a Middle Eastern or Asian Nato was possible, thus indirectly raising India's membership of the Quad. Russia's primary preoccupation is with the European theatre and Nato, with Ukraine as the friction point. China's focus is on the Indo-Pacific, including South and East China Seas, Taiwan and the shoals and islands that its neighbours control or claim. In Central Asia, their interests diverge, as Russia will resent any Chinese consolidation of its influence via Belt and Road Initiative projects. India cannot veto Russia's outreach to Pakistan but must have warned it against defence cooperation. On Afghanistan, Mr Lavrov argued that he "Taliban members are a part of Afghan society", and thus any settlement must include all groups. This mirrors the Pakistan-China approach. India views the Taliban with suspicion, if not hostility.

Then news broke about USS John Paul Jones sailing 130 nautical miles west of India's Lakshadweep Islands, without New Delhi's permission. Being within 200 nautical miles of the island baseline, it fell in India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The US is not a signatory to the

UN Convention on Laws of the Seas (UNCLOS) and asserts its freedom of navigation through such zones, unilaterally declared by some nations, under customary international law. UNCLOS Articles 55-75 outline EEZs and the rights and obligations of coastal states. But Article 51 allows "other legitimate activities" of non-coastal states in the EEZ. Indian law prescribes prior approval for military exercises and manoeuvres in its zone. It's not clear why the US publicised the issue at this stage, but it also underscores the contradiction in India joining its Quad partners in asserting that right in the Indo-Pacific while, like two score other nations, restricting it in its own EEZ. The US objects to any unilateral delimitation of the high seas as it impacts its naval operations. For India, the interpretation is important as otherwise the naval vessels of China and Pakistan can manoeuvre near India's mainland and islands, the territorial waters, where UNCLOS allows full sovereignty, extending to just 12 nautical miles.

Two other important developments are underway in India's western neighbourhood. The intra-Afghan dialogue to be hosted by Turkey, tentatively on April 16, faces uncertainty. The Taliban demands issues like the withdrawal of American troops by May 1 be settled before they name their delegation. The Kabul government's vision, as spelt out by President Ashraf Ghani at the Heart of Asia conference in Tajikistan, calls for a negotiated political settlement and ceasefire before a presidential election and establishment of a "government of peace".

Simultaneously Iran and P-5+1 prepared to meet in Vienna to restore Iranian

conformity with the nuclear deal, called the Joint Comprehensive Programme of Action. Negotiated during Barack Obama's presidency, it was abandoned by the Trump administration. Israel, stumbling through more post-election uncertainty, took credit for a cyber-attack on Iran's nuclear enrichment facility at Natanz, causing a power failure. It may have set back the plant by a year. It was intended to undermine the Vienna talks and may do so as the Iranians favouring talks are isolated by such attacks.

In both these developments, India is just a spectator. On March 26, the China-Iran 20-year \$400-600 billion "comprehensive partnership" was announced. Typical of Iranian tactics, a foreign ministry official later called it a "non-binding agreement". Iran was using the China deal to lure the US and European interlocutors to the dialogue table, preferably with sanctions relief in hand. Iran realises that an India unwilling to defy Washington is of marginal use to its strategy of retaining its strategic gains in West Asia and advancements in its nuclear programme while normalising relations with Europe, if not also the US.

Similarly, in Afghanistan, India can't help Ghani government retain power or even negotiating influence when the Taliban are gaining on the ground and the US keen to cut and run. Iran and Russia, India's steadfast allies during the 1990s to counter the Taliban's rise, are now positioned differently, with one leg in Taliban camp. India is perceived to be in the Saudi-Emirati-US corner, with marginal gains like calibrated de-escalation with Pakistan. The fragility of that and the trio's ineffectiveness in restoring even partial trade between India and Pakistan indicates that Pakistan is recovering its mojo as the master of serial diplomatic blackmail. If India cannot quickly get on top of the pandemic respite, its diplomatic isolation in the neighbourhood will only grow.

Iran and Russia, India's steadfast allies during the 1990s to counter the Taliban's rise, are now positioned differently, with one leg in Taliban camp. India is perceived to be in the Saudi-Emirati-US corner.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

LETTERS

BAN GATHERINGS

On one hand, the country is witnessing large political rallies and religious gatherings under the watch of the government while, on the other, it is preaching about observing Covid-appropriate behaviour. The return of the virulent virus was very much in the offing. Rather than drawing lessons, all the gains were frittered away by tacitly declaring the end of the pandemic. Even now many Cabinet ministers are predicting that the second wave will be short-lived. But inoculating our humongous population is a tall order. The Centre in no uncertain terms has to ensure Covid-appropriate behaviour for at least the next one year.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

CAUSE FOR ALARM

THE SHARP SPIKE in Covid cases is a matter of grave concern. India reported 1,69,899 new cases and 904 deaths on Sunday. This was the second day on the trot when the country registered over 1.5 lakh new cases. Maharashtra topped the charts with around 63,294 infections, followed by Uttar Pradesh and Delhi in that order. While the government has banned the export of Remdesivir and plans are under way to import Sputnik V, the Russian vaccine, we would do well not to take the virus lightly anymore.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

MISPLACED PRIORITIES

THIS REFERS TO the article "Despite Modi's push, BJP yet to reach tipping point" (April 12). The BJP must have expected West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee to buckle under the onslaught of the propaganda unleashed by it. But Ms Banerjee is standing strong. Obviously, the stretched schedule of the polls suits the BJP better as they have better resources. It is the right of the Prime Minister to campaign for his party in the Assembly polls, but the extent on his campaigns when the second wave of Covid-19 is peaking, speaks a lot about his priorities.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

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Bandaru
Dattatreya



Ambedkar's way:
It was education
that helped him
make a difference

Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar is the greatest exemplar of the belief that education enables a man to overcome all obstacles in life, be they social, cultural or economic in nature.

Born on April 14, 1891, Ambedkar, whose 130th birth anniversary we are celebrating today, was the 14th and last child of soldier Subedar Ramji Maloji Sakpal and Bhimabai Sakpal, daughter of Laxman Murbadkar. Born into the Mahar (dalit) caste, he experienced caste discrimination and humiliations early in life. But his life is an inspiration to everyone, especially the subaltern wishing to rise in life. With 26 degrees and titles, including PhDs, associated with his name, Ambedkar believed education can alone pave the way for change in society. "Cultivation of the mind should be the ultimate aim of human existence," Ambedkar said.

Ambedkar holds the distinction of being the first Indian to pursue a doctoral degree in economics abroad. He was the first PhD in economics and the

first double doctorate holder in economics in South Asia.

Ambedkar experienced discrimination since he was a child. Two incidents had a huge impact on him. Once, while returning home with a cousin after school, they alighted at the railway station in scorching heat and found no one had come to receive them from their village. They managed to hire a bullock cart to travel to their village but on learning the boys were Mahars, the driver forced them to get down from the cart. Babasaheb offered to double the price and even offered to drive the cart himself but the owner refused. On the way, no one allowed them even to drink water. In another incident, Ambedkar went to drink water from a roadside tap. He was beaten up.

Despite the Bole Resolution passed by the Bombay legislature in 1923 called for opening of public places and public water reservoirs to untouchables, there was no change in the plight of the dalits. Ambedkar conceived the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927

to highlight the issue of untouchability and caste discrimination. Surendranath Tipnis, president of Mahad municipality declared public spaces open to dalits and invited Ambedkar to hold a meeting in 1927. After the meeting, they proceeded to Chavadar tank. A riot broke out following a rumour that Ambedkar and his followers were planning to enter a Hindu temple in town. In December 1937, the Bombay high court ruled that untouchables have the right to drink and use water from the tank.

With the Kalam temple entry movement, Ambedkar led a protest outside the temple on March 2, 1930, asserting the right of dalits to enter temples. It was a nonviolent movement attended by over 15,000 people, who squatted before the temple and sang bhajans.

Throughout his life, Ambedkar fought for securing human rights for the downtrodden and the oppressed. He was the first labour minister of India and also our first law minister. On August 29, 1947, he was appointed

chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution. He studied the salient features of constitutions of over 60 countries and distilled the best features that suited the Indian context. He is recognised worldwide as the maker of the Indian Constitution.

The Constitution drafted by Ambedkar ensures justice and equality to each and every citizen of India. Civil liberties, freedom of religion, abolition of untouchability, reservation and prohibition of all forms of discrimination are the gifts of Ambedkar to Indians. Ambedkar championed economic and social rights for women and advocated affirmative action for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Not many people are aware that Ambedkar refused to draft Article 370 that gave special status to Jammu & Kashmir on grounds that it was discriminatory and against the principles of unity and integrity of the nation. The article was finally drafted by Gopalswamy Ayyangar, former Diwan to Maharaja Hari Singh.

Ambedkar's commitment to equality and justice is best established by his resignation as law minister when the Hindu Code Bill was dropped by Parliament. He had introduced the bill to elevate the social status of Hindu women. Most labour laws protecting the interests of workers are his contribution. He made provisions for maternity benefits for working women.

In 1990, he was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour. His birth anniversary is celebrated as a day to reflect upon the progress made in achieving social equity and ending oppression.

As a nation, we are going to celebrate the 75th anniversary of our Independence in 2022. But even today, all evils against which Ambedkar fought have not been eradicated. The worst of these is communal hatred. The real tribute to Babasaheb would be to establish social and economic justice.

The writer is the governor of Himachal Pradesh

IN BRIEF

Egypt releases activist: Lawyer

Cairo, April 13: Egyptian authorities on Tuesday released an activist known for his outspoken criticism of the government after he spent more than a year and a half in pre-trial detention, his lawyer Gamal Eid said. Khaled Dawoud, an opposition leader and former head of the liberal Dostour, or Constitution party, arrived at his home in Cairo after his release. Dawoud, a journalist, was set free pending an investigation into whether he disseminated false news.

Biden dog goes back to school

Washington, April 12: The Bidens' rambunctious young dog Major is leaving the White House again, this time for extra schooling in how to behave more like a presidential canine. Michael LaRosa, a spokesman for First Lady Jill Biden, said Major would "undergo some additional training to help him adjust to life in the White House."

"The off-site, private training will take place in the Washington, DC area, and it is expected to last a few weeks," LaRosa said.

Tennessee school shooting: 1 dead

Washington, April 13: One person was killed and a police officer wounded in a shooting at a high school in the US state of Tennessee on Monday, police said. Knoxville city police said on Twitter "multiple gunshot victims" had been reported at Austin-East Magnet High School, before adding in a statement read out on local television that one of the injured had died.

Officers had responded to reports of a "male subject" who was possibly armed in the school, the Knoxville Police Department said.

"Upon approach of the subject, shots were fired."

Vatican probe: U.S. Bishop quits

Rome, April 13: A Minnesota bishop who was investigated by the Vatican for allegedly interfering with past investigations into clergy sexual abuse has resigned.

The Vatican said Tuesday that Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Bishop Michael Hoeppner and named a temporary replacement to run the Crookston diocese. Hoeppner is 71, four years shy of the normal retirement age for bishops. The Vatican did not say why Francis accepted the resignation, but the Vatican in 2019 authorised an investigation into claims that Hoeppner had engaged in "acts or omissions intended to interfere with or avoid civil or canonical investigations of clerical sexual misconduct."

The Vatican tasked St Paul-Minneapolis Archbishop Bernard Hebda with conducting the investigation. Hoeppner is accused of stating that a priest was fit for ministry despite allegedly knowing the priest had abused a 16-year-old boy.

HK's LEGISLATIVE POLL TO TAKE PLACE IN DEC.

Hong Kong, April 13: Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said Tuesday that the semi-autonomous Chinese territory's legislative elections will take place in December, more than a year after they were postponed by authorities citing public health risks from the coronavirus pandemic.

Lam also said that laws will be amended so that inciting voters not to vote or to cast blank or invalid votes will be made illegal, although voters themselves are free to boycott voting or cast votes as they wish. "When a person willfully obstructs or prevents any person from voting at an election, we will consider it corrupt conduct," said Lam.

Lam said that the elections will take place on Dec. 19. The elections were initially slated to be held last September. Lam was speaking a day ahead of the first reading of draft amendments to various laws in the city's legislature, to accommodate Beijing's planned changes to the city's electoral system. Beijing in March announced changes to Hong Kong's electoral system, expanding the number of seats in the legislature while reducing the number of directly-elected seats from 35 to 20.

The move is part of a two-phase effort to rein in political protest and opposition in Hong Kong, which is part of China but has had a more liberal political system.

Iran to enrich uranium to highest level

Dubai, April 13: Iran will begin enriching uranium to 60 per cent purity, higher than the programme ever has before though still short of weapons grade, after an attack on its Natanz nuclear facility, an Iranian negotiator said Tuesday. The announcement marks a significant escalation after the sabotage, suspected to have been carried out by Israel. It could result in further action by Israel, whose Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed never to allow Tehran to obtain a nuclear weapon, and further raise tensions across the Mideast. Nuclear negotiator Abbas Araghchi's comment, quoted by the state-run IRNA news agency, came after Iran's foreign minister warned that the weekend assault could hurt ongoing negotiations over its tattered atomic deal with world powers.

Those talks are aimed at finding a way for the United States to re-enter the agreement, the goal of which is to limit Iran's enrichment of uranium in exchange for relief on sanctions. Iran had been enriching up to 20 per cent. That is a short technical step to weapons-grade levels of 90 per cent.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said it was aware of the media reports but had no comment at the time. *Press TV*, the Iranian state television's English-language

JAPAN'S MOVE TO RELEASE N-PLANT WATER: CHINA OBJECTS

Beijing, April 13: China on Tuesday objected to Japan's move to release treated radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant into the sea, warning Tokyo that "it reserves the right to make further reactions". Japan decided on Tuesday to release treated radioactive water from crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant into the sea, having assessed there will be no negative impact on human health or the environment despite concerns from local fishermen and neighbouring countries, *Japan Times* reported. Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga met with members of his Cabinet to formalise the decision.

— PTI

arm, separately said that the IAEA had been informed of the move. It said the enrichment would begin as of Wednesday. The broadcaster also quoted the negotiator as saying Iran would introduce another 1,000 centrifuges at Natanz, without elaborating.

— AP

500 troops to be added by US in Germany: Austin

Berlin, April 13: Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin announced on Tuesday that he is expanding the US military presence in Germany by 500 troops, suggesting he will not carry out a Trump administration order to withdraw thousands of them.

"This planned increase in US personnel underscores our commitment to Germany and the entire NATO alliance," Austin said in a notable counterpoint to the Trump administration's repeated complaints that Germany is a weak partner on defence and security.

Austin made the announcement after talks with German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer on his first tour of Europe since becoming Pentagon chief in January. Kramp-Karrenbauer welcomed the announcement as a "strong signal" of a healthy US-German relationship. They also discussed a pending decision by President Joe Biden on whether to withdraw completely from Afghanistan by May 1, a deadline the Trump administration pledged to the Taliban militants.

Germany is a key part of the US-led coalition in Afghanistan. Austin said at a joint news conference with Kramp-Karrenbauer that the extra 500 US troops will be stationed permanently in Germany's Wiesbaden area as early as this fall.

"These forces will strengthen deterrence and defence in Europe. They

will augment our existing abilities to prevent conflict, and, if necessary, fight and win," Austin said in prepared remarks. "This move will also create more space, more cyber, and more electronic warfare capabilities in Europe," he added, and he said it will "greatly improve our ability to surge forces at a moment's notice to defend our allies."

Last year, President Donald Trump ordered the withdrawal of 12,000 troops from Germany as retribution for what he considered Germany's refusal to spend more on its own defence. Austin suspended that move shortly after taking office. He said decisions on troop levels would be made as part of a comprehensive review of the US military presence around the world, including in Europe.

Austin's announcement on Tuesday is the first concrete indication that he may not carry out the Trump decision, which included moving US European Command headquarters from Germany to Belgium.

The US currently has about 35,000 troops in Germany. Asked by a reporter whether the decision to add 500 troops means Washington will not carry out Trump's move, Austin said the Pentagon has "ceased planning" for troop reductions. The German minister said she had Biden's word that "there will be no troop reduction as was previously planned."

— AP

US suggests 'pause' in use of J&J vax over blood clot fears

Recommendations by health authorities is blow to immunisation campaign

Washington, April 13: US health authorities recommended a "pause" Tuesday in the use of the Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine "out of an abundance of caution" over potential links to a rare type of blood clot, in a blow to the country's immunisation campaign.

The disorder appears similar to that observed in rare cases of people who received the AstraZeneca vaccine in Europe — and the shots by both companies are based on adenovirus vector technology.

The US Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control are assessing the "potential significance" of six reported cases of a type of clot in the brain called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST) in combination with low levels of blood platelets (thrombocytopenia).

All the cases involved women between the ages of 18 and 48, and symptoms occurred six to 14 days after vaccination.

As of Monday more than 6.8 million doses of the single-shot J&J vaccine had been administered in the US — meaning that the rare effect appears to have been detected in around one in a million cases.

"People who have received the J&J vaccine who develop severe headache, abdominal pain, leg pain, or shortness of breath within three weeks after vaccination should contact their health care provider," the FDA said.

The CDC will convene a meeting of a top expert committee on Wednesday to further assess these cases and their significance, and the FDA will also carry out its own investigation. "Until that process is complete, we are recommending this pause out of



Demonstrators argue with police in riot gear during a protest against restriction measures to curb the spread of Covid-19, at the Circus Maximus in Rome, on Tuesday.

— AP

an abundance of caution," it said, to ensure the medical community was aware of the development and could develop appropriate treatment plans.

The pause deals a hit to the United States' Covid vaccination campaign, which has so far administered 45 percent of the adult population at least one dose — among the most rapid rates in the world.

The J&J vaccine was celebrated for the fact it can be stored at fridge temperature and requires just one dose — unlike Pfizer and Moderna that need two and require freezing.

But even before the pause, the company was affected by supply problems after a contractor spoiled 15 million doses that never

J&J delays Europe vax rollout

Berlin, April 13: Johnson & Johnson said Tuesday it is delaying the rollout of its Coronavirus vaccine in Europe amid a US probe into reports of rare blood clots in some recipients.

The announcement came after regulators in the United States said they were recommending a "pause" in administration of the

single-dose shot to investigate reports of potentially dangerous blood clots. "We have been reviewing these cases with European health authorities," Johnson & Johnson said.

"We have made the decision to proactively delay the rollout of our vaccine in Europe." The delay is a further blow to vaccinati-

on drives in European nations, plagued by supply shortages, logistical problems and concerns over unusual blood clots in a small number of people who received the AstraZeneca vaccine. The blood clot reports prompted several countries to limit the vaccine to older age groups.

— AP

ended up shipping.

Nonetheless, with Pfizer and Moderna continuing to deliver their hundreds of millions of promised doses on time, the US is likely to maintain a high vaccination pace.

The FDA said that normally, an anticoagulant drug called heparin is used to treat these blood clots, but in this case administering heparin might be dangerous.

That might be because

— AFP

US, Nato turning Ukraine into 'powder keg', accuses Russia

Moscow, April 13: Moscow on Tuesday accused the United States and other Nato countries of turning Ukraine into a "powder keg," after the West sounded the alarm over Russian soldiers massing on the border.

"The United States and other Nato countries are deliberately turning Ukraine into a powder keg," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies, adding that countries were increasing their arms supplies to Ukraine.

Clashes between Ukrainian forces and Moscow-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine have escalated in recent weeks, upending a ceasefire brokered last year. Following an uptick in violence, Russia has built up troops along the border, raising fears of a major escalation in the long-running conflict in Ukraine's mainly Russian-speaking east.

"If there is any aggravation, we of course will do everything to ensure our security and the safety of our citizens, wherever they are," Ryabkov said. "But Kiev and its allies in the West will be entirely responsible for the consequences of a hypothetical

Withholding Quran: Navalny to sue jail

Moscow, April 13: Imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said Tuesday he was suing his prison for withholding the Quran, which he intended to study while serving time in a prison outside Moscow. Navalny has been on a hunger strike for two weeks, protesting prison officials' refusal to let his physician examine him behind bars after he developed severe back and leg pain.

But he said Tuesday in an Instagram post that his first lawsuit against prison officials had to do with the Muslim holy book.

"The thing is, they're not giving my Quran. And it pisses me off," Navalny said, adding that "deeply studying" the Quran was one of several "self-improvement" goals he set for himself while in prison. The politician said he hasn't been given access to any of the books he brought or ordered over the past month, because they all need to be "inspected for extremism," which officials say takes three months.

"So I wrote one more petition to the (prison) chief and filed a lawsuit," Navalny said.

— AP

exacerbation," he added.

On Tuesday morning, a Ukrainian soldier was killed and two more injured near the village of Mayor-ske some 35 kilometres (21 miles) north of the separatist stronghold Donetsk when a drone dropped grenades on the positions of Kiev's troops, the military said. The latest casualty brought the number

of Ukrainian troops killed since the start of the year to 29, compared to 50 in all of 2020. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba was in Brussels on Tuesday, where he met with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg. Kuleba was also set to meet with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Brussels later Tuesday.

— AFP

US TO LEAVE TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN BEYOND MAY

Washington, April 13: President Joe Biden has decided to leave American troops in Afghanistan beyond the May 1 deadline negotiated with the Taliban by the Trump administration, and has set the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks as the new goal, US officials said Tuesday.

Biden has been hinting for weeks that he was going to let the deadline lapse, and as the days went by it became clear that an orderly withdrawal of the remaining 2,500 troops would be difficult and was unlikely. US officials provided details on Biden's decision on condition of anonymity, speaking ahead of the announcement. His decision risks retaliation by the Taliban on US and Afghan forces, possibly escalating the 20-year war. And it will reignite political division over America's involvement in what many have called the endless war.

— AP

Protest after chief says cop meant to use Taser

Brooklyn Centre (US), April 13: Police clashed with protesters for a second night in the Minneapolis suburb where an officer who authorities say apparently intended to fire a Taser, not a handgun, fatally shot a PoC man during a traffic stop.

Brooklyn Centre Police Chief Tim Gannon described Sunday's shooting death of 20-year-old Daunte Wright as "an accidental discharge." The shooting sparked protests and unrest in an area already on edge because of the trial of the first of four police offi-

cers charged in George Floyd's death.

Hundreds of protesters faced off against police in Brooklyn Centre after nightfall Monday, and hours after a dusk-to-dawn curfew was announced by the governor. When the protesters wouldn't disperse, police began firing gas canisters and flash-bang grenades, sending clouds wafting over the crowd and chasing some protesters away.

A long line of police in riot gear began slowly forcing back the remaining crowds.

— AP

TRIBAL | TRADITION

Kingdom undergoing dramatic economic, social reforms**Saudis keep 'Taasheer' war dance alive**

Taif, Saudi Arabia, April 13: In Saudi Arabia's west, classic muzzle-loading rifles are carefully prepared for the traditional "Taasheer" war dance, a striking display of leaping and gunpowder blasts.

Men and boys take weapons laid out in the bed of a truck and fill the barrels with gunpowder before, one by one, they take centre stage to showcase their skills in what is also known as the fire dance.

Dozens of onlookers, including women and chil-

dren, stand on the sidelines of a grassy clearing lined with gazebo tents. In a collision of the ancient and the modern, some hold up mobile phones to film the spectacle.

Barefoot and in their traditional thobe and ghutra headdress, the performers dance to traditional music against the backdrop of mountains in the western province of Taif.

They bounce up and down with their knees pressed close together, as they wave the gun and finally reach for the sky

and fire at the ground, resulting in a blast of sparks and smoke under their feet.

A tribal tradition believed to date back hundreds of years, the dance is now performed at weddings, festivals and on other special occasions.

In a rapidly modernising kingdom, which is undergoing dramatic economic and social reforms spearheaded by the de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudis are seeking to maintain some long-held

traditions.

"Taasheer dance is the popular heritage of the people of Taif. It is considered an essential event at all occasions," Salman al-Tuwairgi, owner of a coffee shop in Taif, said.

He said that the dance, originally performed before battle to motivate fighters and intimidate opponents, has been passed down from generation to generation.

"It is an ancient war dance, and we are preserving it in this way," said Tuwairi.

— AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,544.06	1.38
Nifty 50	14,504.80	1.36
S&P 500*	4,133.82	0.14
Dollar (₹)	75.06	-0.40
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.11	-0.69
Euro (₹)	89.33	-0.50
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,093	130 0.28
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	63.99	1.12
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.011	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.661	-0.015

* As of 8:30 PM IST

China's March exports rise 30.6% as demand revives

China's exports rose 30.6 per cent over a year ago in March as global consumer demand strengthened and traders watched for signs of what President Joe Biden might do about reviving tariff war talks with Beijing. Exports rose to 241.1 billion, decelerating from the dramatic 60.6 per cent rebound in the first two months of 2021, customs data showed. Imports rose 38.1 per cent over a year ago to 227.3 billion in a sign of reviving Chinese activity.

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■ Dues to Centre, states, staff extinguish with plan passage SC: Dues not payable if not part of IBC resolution plan

New Delhi, April 13: In an important judgement, the Supreme Court on Tuesday held that all dues, including statutory ones, payable by ailing companies to the Centre, states and their tax authorities shall stand extinguished if they are not part of approved resolution plan to revive firms under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

The apex court said the principal objects of IBC is to provide for revival of the Corporate Debtor and to make it a going concern and remedied the mischief by which tax and other authorities used to keep pursuing such companies to pay their dues leading to a situation which made resolution plans for their revival unworkable.

A bench comprising justices R. F. Nariman, B. R. Gavi and Hrishikesh Roy, deciding a batch of pleas against several orders of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, held that the 2019 amendment



made to a provision of the IBC is clarificatory and declaratory in nature and so will be effective from the date on which IBC has come into effect in 2016.

As per the amendment made in 2019 in section 31 of IBC, any debt in respect of the payment of dues arising under any law for the time being in force, including the ones owed to the Central Government, any State Government or any local authority, which does not form a part of the approved resolution plan, shall stand extinguished.

Once a resolution plan is duly approved by the adjudicating authority, the

claims as provided in the resolution plan shall stand frozen and will be binding on the Corporate Debtor and its employees, members, creditors, including the Central Government, any State Government or any local authority, guarantors and other stakeholders, Justice Gavi, who wrote the 139-page judgment, said.

It said on the date of approval of the resolution plan, all claims, which are not a part of the resolution plan, shall stand extinguished and no person will be entitled to initiate or continue any proceedings in respect to a claim which

is not part of the revival package.

Consequently all the dues, including the statutory dues owed to the Central Government, any State Government or any local authority, if not part of the resolution plan, shall stand extinguished and no proceedings in respect of such dues for the period prior to the date on which the Adjudicating Authority grants its approval under Section 31 could be continued, the bench held.

The top court was faced with the question whether any creditor, including central or state governments, was bound by the Resolution Plan once it is approved by an adjudicating authority under IBC.

The other issue was as to whether after approval of the resolution plan a creditor is entitled to initiate any proceedings for recovery of any of the dues from the corporate debtor, which are not a part of the Resolution Plan. — PTI

FB, Instagram users can now appeal to Oversight Board

New Delhi, April 13: An independent board set up by Facebook to look into hate speech and other undesirable content on the platform on Tuesday said it will now accept cases from Facebook and Instagram users who believe the company wrongfully allowed such content to remain on these

social media platforms.

Facebook, which has faced flak in many parts of the world over various issues, including data breaches and handling of hate speech, had set up the Oversight Board last year.

The board includes former judges, journalists and human rights activists, who review

appeals from users on material that has been taken down from Facebook and Instagram, and make binding content decisions for the social networking platforms.

"Enabling users to appeal content they want to see removed from Facebook is a significant expansion of the Oversight Board's

capabilities," Thomas Hughes, director of the Oversight Board Administration, said in a statement.

The Oversight Board said this new capability represents an important step toward delivering a more principled and transparent model of content moderation. — PTI

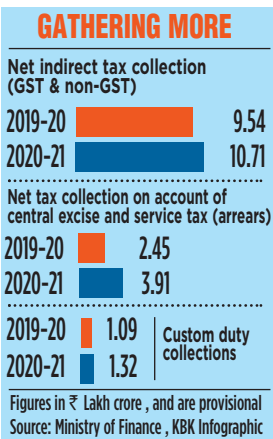
Indirect taxes up 12% in FY21

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 13

Helped by a 59 per cent increase in excise duties, the country's indirect tax collections went up 12.3 per cent in the pandemic-hit FY21.

Indirect tax collections--which include GST, customs, central excise and service tax arrears--for FY21 stood at Rs 10.71 lakh crore against the actual collections of Rs 9.54 lakh crore in FY20, as per the provisional figures published by the Ministry of Finance. The collections are 8.29 per cent higher than the revised estimates of Rs 9.89 lakh crore.

Central excise and service tax arrears in FY21 grew 59 per cent to Rs 3.91 lakh crore compared to Rs 2.45 lakh crore in the previous fiscal. Diesel and petrol



are the biggest contributors to excise duties and the multiple hikes in petrol and diesel prices throughout the fiscal supported the increase in excise duties despite lower consumption.

Net customs duty collec-

tions too registered a growth of 21 per cent to Rs 1.32 lakh crore compared to Rs 1.09 lakh crore in the previous fiscal.

However, net tax collection on account of GST of the Centre, which includes CGST, IGST and compensation cess, was down 8 per cent to Rs 5.48 lakh crore against Rs 5.99 lakh crore in the previous financial year. Considering the subdued economy, the revised estimates of net GST collection was kept at Rs 5.15 lakh crore.

The GST collections were severely affected in the first half of the financial year on account of the Covid-led disruptions. However, in the second half, the GST collections registered a good growth and collections exceeded Rs 1 lakh crore in each of the last six months.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

NON-LIFE GROSS DIRECT PREMIUM UP 5% IN FY21

New Delhi, April 13: The gross direct premium written by the non-life insurance companies saw a 5.2 per cent rise in 2020-21 to Rs 1,98,734.68 crore, Irdai data showed. All the non-life insurance companies had written gross direct premium of Rs 1,88,916.61 crore in 2019-20. In March 2021, the total premium by all the players stood at Rs 19,298.85 crore, up by over 17 per cent from Rs 15,635.42 crore a year ago. Among the 25 general insurers, the total premium in FY21 rose by 3.35 per cent to Rs 1,69,840.05 crore. — PTI

BIS LICENCE FEE CUT FOR STARTUPS

New Delhi, April 13: The Centre slashed the annual marking fee to get a new BIS licence and certification by 50 per cent for micro-industry, startups and women entrepreneurs. It also said the services of BIS are now made available free of cost

to everyone and can be downloaded from e-BIS port. The Bureau of Indian Standards issues licences with a standard mark to help identify the unit which has made the product at a specific location. "The government has given 50 per cent rebate on (new) BIS certification of products for start-up, micro, industry and women entrepreneurs," minister Piyush Goyal tweeted. — PTI

INDIA-EU TRADE TALKS TO RESUME



Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said resumption of formal negotiations on India-EU trade deal during the leadership summit next month in Porto, Portugal, would help further strengthen ties with the European Union. The negotiations between India and the European Union on a free trade agreement have been stalled since May 2013, when both sides failed to bridge substantial gaps on crucial issues, including data security status for the IT sector. The negotiations with the 27-nation grouping were launched in June 2007. — PTI

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Bhuvneshwar is Player of Month

Dubai: Experienced India seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar on Tuesday won the ICC Player of the Month award for his superlative show in the limited overs series against England in March.

The 31-year-old Indian took six wickets at an economy rate of 4.65 in the three ODIs, while capturing four wickets at a fantastic economy rate of 6.38 in the five T20Is to emerge as the standout bowler on either side in the white ball series.

Bhuvneshwar became the third successive Indian recipient of the award since its inception early this year. — PTI

Kane wins Hadlee medal for 4th time

Wellington: New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson won his fourth Sir Richard Hadlee medal for excelling across formats and was also adjudged the 'Test Player of the Year' in the country's annual cricket awards on Tuesday. Devon Conway won the men's ODI and T20 Player of the Year during the 2020-21 awards season which was conducted digitally for a second year running because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Williamson's incredible home Test summer helped him clinch the two awards alongside the Redpath Cup for first-class batting, after he amassed a whopping 639 runs in just four innings at an average of 159. — PTI

Wizards snap Jazz winning home run

Los Angeles: Bradley Beal scored 34 points and Russell Westbrook bagged a triple double as the Washington Wizards ended the Utah Jazz's 24-game home winning streak with a 125-121 victory in Salt Lake City on Monday. Donovan Mitchell delivered a 42-point gem for Utah but could not prevent the under-strength Western Conference leaders from sliding to a surprise defeat against a Wizards team struggling near the foot of the East. Utah, with Mike Conley and Jordan Clarkson absent from the line-up, looked to be racing towards a 25th straight home victory after a dazzling opening quarter saw them put up 42 points. — AFP

Star-studded field for India Open Marin, Momota among top entries as badminton action returns to India

New Delhi, April 13: Olympic champion Carolina Marin and World No. 1 Kento Momota will headline a star-studded field of international shuttlers when the India Open Super 500 event is held here from May 11 to 16, albeit behind closed doors due to the raging Covid-19 pandemic.

The \$400,000 tournament, one of the last few qualification events for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, has attracted 228 (114 men and 114 women) entries from 33 different national associations, including China.

However, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) said "due to the rapidly rising Covid-19 cases in the country, the tournament will be contested in a bio-secure bubble without spectators and media while implementing strict Covid-19 safety protocols." "All the players and officials coming from South Africa, Brazil, Middle East and European countries including UK will be serving a 7-day quarantine period and have to report in the capital city



on May 3," BAI said in a release.

"... Players and officials from rest of the world can arrive on May 6 and undergo a 4-day quarantine period."

On the court, three-time world champion Marin will lead the women's singles category along with other Top-10 shuttlers such as Akane Yamaguchi, 2019 world

champion P.V. Sindhu, Korea's An Se-Young and Thailand's Pornpawee Chochuwong.

India boasts of the largest contingent with 48 players (27 women and 21

men), while Malaysia has fielded the second biggest squad with 26 shuttlers, which includes 10 women and 16 men.

A total of 10 shuttlers (4 women and 6 men) from China are also part of the participants list.

Among the men, two-time world champion Momota, defending champion Viktor Axelsen, Anders Antonsen and reigning All England Open champion Zii Jia Lee will be in the fray.

Srikanth Kidambi will lead the Indian charge along with B. Sai Praneeth, H.S. Prannoy and Parupalli Kashyap.

The last date for withdrawal of entry is April 19 while the draw will be announced on April 20.

The governing body said "Delhi Government will conduct RT-PCR test on arrival on May 3 and 6 as well as on May 9 and 14."

"We are really happy to finally be able resume badminton action. But with the recent spike in cases, we have to be more cautious," BAI general secretary Ajay Singhania said. — PTI

SA WOMEN CRICKETERS STUCK IN BANGLADESH AFTER POSITIVE TEST

Dhaka, April 13: Five members of a South African women's cricket team have become stranded in Bangladesh after testing positive for Covid-19, officials said Tuesday.

Seventeen other members of the South Africa Emerging team left Bangladesh late Monday, before the country imposed a ban on international flights over a surge in new cases there.

The five remaining have been put into isolation in Dhaka, said Shaiful Alam Nadel of the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

"All members of the South African team gave Covid-19 test samples before their departure from Sylhet. Five of them tested positive," said Himangshu Lal Roy, deputy director of the

Osmani Medical College in the northeastern city.

The team's fifth match was due to start on Tuesday in Sylhet.

But they cut short the tour because of the flight ban, which will last from Wednesday until April 14, as part of efforts to combat the new spread of infections in the South Asian nation.

The five in isolation will be tested again and if the results are negative "we will send them back home at the earliest possible time," said Nadel.

Documents sent by AFP indicated that team manager Matshipi Marcia Letsolo and players Sinalo Jafta, Leah Jones, Nobulumko Baneti and Robyn Searle had been left behind.

— AFP

Indian women to tour England in June-July

London, April 13: The Indian women's cricket team will play a historic one-off Test against England in Bristol as part of a multi-format series that will also feature three ODIs and as many T20 Internationals across June-July.

The Test will be played at the Bristol County Ground from June 16-19, kicking off the England team's summer. The match was first confirmed by BCCI secretary Jay Shah earlier this year but the exact date and venue were unveiled by the host board on Tuesday.

While the Indian women's team will take part in a Test for the first time since 2014, England

THE FIXTURES

- June 16-19: Test match - Bristol County Ground
- June 27: 1st ODI - Bristol County Ground
- June 30: 2nd ODI - The Cooper Associates County Ground, Taunton
- July 3: 3rd ODI - New Road, Worcester
- July 9: 1st T20I - County Ground, Northampton
- July 11: 2nd T20I - Central County Ground, Hove
- July 15: 3rd T20I - The Cloudfm County Ground, Chelmsford.

last played a red-ball game during the 2019 Ashes.

The one-off Test will be followed by three ODIs and T20Is each with the tour concluding on July 15

in Chelmsford.

After announcing its home fixtures, England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chief executive officer Tom Harrison, said: "We're really looking forward to a busy summer in what is a huge year for our England Women's team, and we're very excited about hosting India and New Zealand."

"The two international series will sit either side of The Hundred, and with the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy and the new Regional Twenty20 competition running throughout the summer, it's a fixture list that offers a lot for both our players and our fans," Harrison added. — PTI

TOKYO | OLYMPICS

No fans at torch relay in Osaka

Tokyo, April 13: The torch relay for the Tokyo Olympics ran through a mostly empty Osaka city park on Tuesday, showing the risks of trying to hold the postponed games during a pandemic.

It came on the same day that the government said new coronavirus cases in Osaka hit 1,099, a single-day record for Japan's second largest metropolitan area.

The torch relay began three weeks ago in northeastern Japan, attempting to navigate around the pandemic with a total of 10,000 runners crisscrossing the country and bound for the opening ceremony on July 23 in Tokyo.

Osaka, which announced plans last week to take the relay off city streets and bar the public, became the first detour since the relay began. Organizers warned beforehand there may be more.

Wednesday's second leg in Osaka — the day the Tokyo countdown clock hits 100 day to go — will be in the same park under the same closed-doors conditions.

New Covid-19 cases are rising across Japan, where fewer than 1% of

● Osaka, which announced plans last week to take the relay off city streets and bar the public, became the first detour since the relay began.

residents have been vaccinated in very slow rollout. Japan has attributed about 9,500 deaths to Covid-19, far fewer than many countries but higher than most neighbours in Asia.

Osaka, Tokyo and other parts of Japan have declared "quasi-emergency" conditions until early May with bars and restaurants being asked to close by 8 pm.

Many runners arrived in Osaka's Expo '70 Commemorative Park by bus and ran short legs carrying the torch alongside metal barriers or in empty park space.

They were accompanied by security officials who jogged or walked alongside, and followed by an "escort" or "promotional" vehicle festooned with logos of major Olympic sponsors Coca-Cola and Toyota. — AP

EX-INDIA HOCKEY PLAYER BALBIR SINGH JR NO MORE

Chandigarh, April 13: Balbir Singh Junior, who was a member of the silver medal-winning 1958 Asian Games Indian hockey team, died here at the age of 88, his daughter Mandeep Samra said on Tuesday. He is survived by his wife, daughter and son. "My father passed away in sleep on Sunday morning due to heart failure," his daughter said.

His son is settled in Canada and could not attend the last rites of his father because of the pandemic.

Born on May 2, 1932, at Sansarpur in Jalandhar, also known as the nursery of Indian hockey, Balbir Singh Junior had played alongside legends like Balbir Singh Senior, Leslie Claudius, Prithipal Singh, Balkishan and Charles Stephen among others.

Singh took to hockey when he was six years old. He studied at Lyallpur Khalsa College in Jalandhar and was first selected to play for the Indian hockey team in 1951 during the tour of Afghanistan.

He was part of the Punjab state hockey team and also captained Panjab University team. — PTI

Much as the IPL fast tracks careers in the Indian context, it can finish them off as quickly as players are forewarned.